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MAX WEBER'S THEORY OF ACTION:
AN EXAMINATION OF ITS INTERPRETATION AND EXTENSION BY
PARSONS AND SCHUTZ

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ABSTRACT

Weber's contribution to the study of social action has been a major influence upon the development of modern sociology but aspects of his approach have been obscured by the process of translation, commentary and evaluation - and in this respect the work of Parsons and to a lesser extent Schutz has been significant. Hence this study aims (a) to clarify the nature of Weber's Theory of Action and (b) to determine its contemporary value in comparison with the extension of his ideas by Parsons and Schutz.

We examine the interpretation, advanced particularly by Parsons, that Weber's approach to the study of action changed as he became increasingly concerned with the nature of sociological inquiry, and, thereby, moved beyond the problems of historical method. On the basis of a detailed examination of Weber's theoretical and methodological arguments we reject the idea of a break in his thinking about historical and sociological research and this has important implications for some accepted views on Weber's conception of objectivity, ideal type concepts and understanding.

Parsons set out to extend Weber from the perspective of a natural science of society, but his claim to identify a convergence between Durkheim, Pareto and Weber into the Voluntaristic Theory of Action is rejected and the criticisms, which his development of some aspects of Weber's approach have experienced, are sufficient to cast

doubts upon the validity of his General Theory. Schutz formulated a phenomenological critique of Weber's categories of interpretive sociology and sought to establish a philosophically more secure basis for the study of action but, we suggest, his assumptions about the everyday world, allied to his evaluation of Weber's approach, led him to propose an impracticable methodology.

Finally, we argue that the contemporary relevance of Weber's Theory of Action can be seen from the way many of the problems involved in the study of action, some of which were identified by the development of the phenomenological perspective, can be solved by recourse to his approach.

INTRODUCTION

Weber is, arguably, sociology's greatest exponent: yet in the period since his death in 1920 up to the present day, there have been serious and persistent misunderstandings of elements of his conception of sociology. His ideas on the character of the discipline have, at best, been only partially incorporated into conventional sociological wisdom, with the result that the discipline was not as well prepared as it might have been to face the "crisis", the doubts and uncertainties of direction and purpose which become so prominent in the 1960's and 1970's.

In the last decade there has been an unprecedented revival of interest in Weber's work and especially in his conception of sociology which has led to the clarification of previously obscure, or misunderstood features of his approach. This study attempts to build upon these inquiries and, in the attempt to clarify the distinctiveness of Weber's work, takes its direction from the fact that two logically distinct though historically inter-connected issues are involved: first the nature of Weber's Theory of Action - a concept used here to denote the theoretical and methodological elements of his sociology¹ - and second, the changing character of sociology which has provided the themes, problems and standards used in the interpretation of Weber's work, frequently with the effect of militating against its more accurate understanding.

But before the aim of the study and its methods of procedure can be stated more fully, a brief review is necessary of Weber's Theory of Action and its reception within sociology. With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that at Weber's death the single most important omission in his work was a comprehensive, systematic and detailed statement of his views on the nature of

sociology. Inevitably, therefore, commentators have had to reconstruct Weber's position on this issue by synthesizing a variety of materials, in particular, the brief methodological outline which introduces Economy and Society², the very specific and frequently polemic methodological essays³ written in the years immediately following the recovery of his intellectual powers, the comparative studies of the influence of religious ethics upon economic life⁴ and the formulation of some of the main types of economic, political and social institutions.⁵ However the breadth and diversity of the issues addressed, in the context of a progression in Weber's terminology and problems of analysis, from the epistemological and methodological assumptions of the historico-cultural sciences, to those of economics and finally to sociology left an impression, which quickly gained support, that there was a lack of unity in these analyses:⁶ to be precise, an early stage concerned with the problems of historical inquiry, and a later stage dealing with the character of sociology as a generalizing science of social action.

However, this perspective ceases to be convincing when all the available evidence is taken into account.⁷ The view advanced here is that a remarkable degree of unity and coherence can be identified in Weber's work on the basis of an examination of his theoretical and methodological statements which can be clarified, where necessary, by reference to his research practice. But this is to anticipate our argument. The fact remains that historically the view of stages in Weber's thinking has gained a great deal of support with the result that three areas of Weber's Theory of Action have remained unclear: namely, (1) the nature and role of theoretical

concepts together with the relationship between sociological and historical research, (2) the implications of his theory of value, in particular, the principle of value-relevance for the objectivity of sociological work, and (3) the character of "understanding" as the method of analysis most appropriate to the study of social action.

The process of interpreting and evaluating Weber's ideas within sociology has been both long and complex. Apart from the above mentioned disparate nature of Weber's own analyses, another important problem was the very distinctiveness of the ideas in relation to the main strands of social thought in Germany in the 1920's⁸, which meant that they lacked a hospitable medium in which to grow. For example, his emphasis upon the interpretation of subjective meaning and the role of values in the establishment of the information relevant to a scientific problem, was not consistent with the positivist movement in social science. The stress upon general theoretical categories, the role of economic circumstances, and the methods to be used in understanding social life, found little favour with the idealists, and the importance he attributed to both the separation of facts and values, and the effectiveness of ethical beliefs upon human conduct, were not acceptable to the Marxist traditions.

In addition the rapid changes in the economic, political and social life of Germany in the 1920's were not favourable to the social sciences and with the rise of the Nazi movement the existence of any kind of sociology, let alone one which proclaimed a separation of fact and value, was increasingly curtailed. In its wake followed the emigration of many scholars to other parts

of the western world, the war, and the assumption, by those living and working in North America, of the leadership of the social sciences. In this way the translation of Weber's work into English became the key to its incorporation into a post-war subject which derived most of its character from traditions fundamentally different to the ones constituting Weber's own intellectual milieu.

Whilst the translation of even Weber's most important works proceeded in a sporadic and piecemeal fashion,⁹ Parsons' The Structure of Social Action¹⁰ became the keystone to the assimilation and critique of Weber's Theory of Action. The book constituted the basis of Parsons' reputation, not only as an influential commentator on Weber's sociology in general but in particular as the most authoritative assessor of its methodological and theoretical foundations. His analysis of Weber's work formed part of the argument that convergence could be detected between the various strands of European social thought at the beginning of this century. But this kind of examination is quite different from a study of a person's ideas, which has, as its primary objective, the discovery of their coherence, the relevance of particular background influences, and the importance of their innovatory content in relation to alternative ideas available at the time. Whilst it is inevitable that there would be some overlap between such an inquiry and Parsons own treatment of Weber, the significant difference between the two projects has not been sufficiently recognized. Yet when it is remembered that the methodological framework for Parsons' convergence thesis - the broadly positivistic standards of scientific knowledge and procedure - were decided upon largely before the analysis of the earlier writers' ideas, it becomes

apparent that "convergence" is implicitly a history of sociological thought involving an a priori standard against which the useful and not so useful features of the work of earlier writers are measured.¹¹

Consequently, Parsons' definition of sociology, formulated in terms of his attempted clarification of the discipline's epistemological and methodological assumptions, strategies, and techniques of inquiry, together with the concepts of his theoretical system, appeared to be a direct development of Weberian sociology, amongst others. But in reality, as a result of an intricate process of commentary, emphasis and critique, Parsons has hindered the full realization of Weber's contribution to sociology by popularizing a selective and in some instances inaccurate appreciation of his Theory of Action.

Of equal importance to Parsons' role as a commentator on Weber, was his contribution to shaping the character of the discipline, and thereby, to setting the standards against which Weber's Theory of Action, and in particular its contemporary relevance, was to be judged.

In the last 30 to 40 years, Parsons exerted great influence amongst those for whom the sociological enterprise was rather more than sociography or the manipulation of statistical data in accordance with an operationalist philosophy of science. Even after the recent development of several alternative conceptions of the subject, the general appreciation of the nature of sociology still owes a great deal to Parsons' work. Of course, the impact of his ideas has not been uniform and it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, the more general theoretical and

methodological level where his influence has been pervasive and, on the other, his more specific analytical schemes which have been the subject of much controversy and critical attention. Nevertheless, whatever the long term judgement proves to be on the value of Parsons' sociology as a whole, there can be little doubt that it contains within it the most sophisticated and comprehensive attempt to define the nature and scope of the discipline which has been undertaken for several decades.

The foundation of Parsons' reputation lay in his programme for developing a General Theory of Action which stressed the fundamental continuity of the methods and procedures of science, whether natural or social. In its application to the study of social life this programme led to the development of an abstract and systematic form of theory which took as its main focus of interest the problem of order in the explanation of structures and developments. However, Parsons' very success in establishing this framework within which other sociologists could pursue their more specific and discrete inquiries, is at least partly responsible for the contradictory and ambiguous state of the assessments made of his work. Although Parsons did not advocate a separation of theory from research, his emphasis not just upon the importance of theory but upon the decisive role of a particularly abstract kind of theory undoubtedly furthered the growing separation of these two aspects of sociology. This led to the creation and legitimation of "theoretical" sociology¹² in effect an autonomous realm of inquiry which was able to develop without the restrictions and limitations of empirical reference. Consequently the controversies which surrounded Parsonian Sociology in the 1950's and 1960's over consensus

and conflict, system and action, were never resolved in any decisive manner: after all, there was no pragmatic necessity for a solution because empirical research could continue relatively unaffected by the status of these disputes. Inevitably, with the passage of time interest in these questions waned, to be replaced by new theoretical issues particularly of a phenomenological nature and also, though to a lesser extent, of a neo-Marxist kind.

Nevertheless, these criticisms served to indicate three problematic areas of Parsonian sociology: first, the abstractness of the theory presented problems not only for the idea of testing, but also for finding empirical referents for the theoretical ideas; second, Parsons claimed that his sociology was value free and that it represented objective knowledge of social reality, free from any ideological distortion - but many found this to be inconsistent with the emphasis on order, consensus, and the symbols of legitimation; third, the status of the subjective point of view - although originally a central element in Parsons' work, with the passage of time the suspicion grew that there had been subtle changes in the concept because Parsons' methods of analysis were increasingly addressed to the structural properties of social systems and systems of action and, therefore, appeared to allow little scope for reference to the actions of individuals and groups.

As a result, given Parsons' central position in the sociological tradition and the broad acceptance of his claim to have incorporated and extended Weber's approach, certain principles which had frequently gained wide support in sociology¹³ were seriously undermined: to be precise, the unity of theory and research, the close relationship between historical and sociological

explanation, the potential objectivity of sociological findings, and the importance of subjective reference in sociological explanation.

As dissatisfaction with Parsons' sociology grew, Alfred Schutz's interpretation of Weber became increasingly important and, in fact, played a significant role in the realignment of sociological thought.¹⁴ Schutz's view of Weber has not been as effective as Parsons' in shaping general opinion because its popularity is much more recent, and its scope - again in comparison with that of Parsons' - is very narrow. Starting with the general framework of Weber's approach, Schutz develops a phenomenological analysis of the nature of meaning in social life which provides the basis for a critique of the inadequacies of Weber's basic categories of interpretive sociology. Schutz extended these themes in the essays he wrote after emigrating to the U.S.A. into a critique of the assumptions and strategies utilized by the naturalistically oriented sociology of the late 1940's and early 1950's. The impact of Schutz's analysis was to put the interpretation of the meaning of action into the centre of sociological inquiry. At the same time his examination of the problems involved in an observer attaining a valid grasp of the subjective meaning of someone else's actions, whilst not denying the possibility of objective knowledge of subjective meaning structures, was interpreted by many as the basis of a more radical rejection of the claim that sociology could achieve scientific knowledge of a kind and reliability achieved in the natural sciences.¹⁵ At the end of the day Weber's approach was seen to represent merely a starting point for sociological inquiry.

The confrontation between a more traditional sociology, based largely on Parsons' methodological position and following a structural-functional method of analysis, despite differences over the relative emphasis given to the elements of consensus and conflict, and a phenomenological inspired set of alternatives, helped to produce a "crisis" in sociology; a time of unprecedented debate about the nature and purpose of the discipline.¹⁶ On the one hand, interest in the grounding of sociological statements more closely in the everyday lives of those whose actions constitute society led to a critique of the more established strategies which were seen to impose the sociologists' own relatively arbitrary interpretations upon this reality. And, on the other, the continuing desire to formulate objectively valid propositions of sociological theory went hand in hand with opposition to the relativism, and in some cases solipsism, of more recent developments within the discipline. The "crisis", of course, was the result of many factors, academic, social and political, and to complicate matters even more was perceived to represent quite distinct challenges to traditional opinion within sociology. For example, Gouldner¹⁷ identified the challenge essentially in terms of values and ideologies, as a critique informed by reflexive and Marxist themes, and whilst they were undoubtedly important, they will not be explored here any further. After all our interest in the "crisis" does not concern its origin and development per se, rather the "crisis" serves to emphasise and clarify the limitations of the forms of sociology developed by Parsons and Schutz as extensions, in varying degrees, of Weber's Theory of Action. In particular, to introduce a Marxist critique,¹⁸ based as it is upon rather different

conceptions of objectivity and sociological knowledge, would take the study far beyond its original objectives.

Starting with some common elements of Weber's work, Parsons and Schutz developed their sociologies in almost opposite directions, and this is what makes their comparison particularly interesting: Parsons attempted to develop a form of sociology, based upon a natural scientific approach to knowledge of social phenomena, in which the structure of action occupied the central role; whereas Schutz, who strongly emphasised subjective meaning, rejected the natural scientific method of procedure, but continued to claim scientific status for the results of the study of everyday life. The criticisms to which these sociologies have been subjected have demonstrated the inherent limitations of their theoretical and methodological views and their contradictory positions were clearly unresolvable in the context of the available alternatives. In contrast we argue that if Weber's Theory of Action had been more accurately understood, a wider variety of options would have been available within sociology for solving the "crisis", which might therefore have been rather less painful - and it is on these grounds that our claim to demonstrate the continuing relevance of Weber's theoretical and methodological ideas, is to be judged.

Thus the aim of the study is to clarify Weber's Theory of Action, by distinguishing it from the misleading interpretation of both Parsons and Schutz. Our procedure is not to examine the material in chronological form, namely, to begin with Weber and then to consider the commentaries of Parsons and Schutz, because this is, after all, the sequence which led to the problematic interpretations. Instead the structure of the argument is dictated

by the need to look at the respective extensions of elements of Weber's ideas and the limitations of these formulations which emerged with the passage of time, so that an assessment can be made of the usefulness of Weber's solution to the problems of sociological knowledge vis a vis the historically much more influential views of Parsons and Schutz.

Utilizing this approach, our argument proceeds in the following manner. Chapter 1 is concerned with Parsons' interpretation and evaluation of Weber's sociological work and attempts to demonstrate the importance, for this commentary, of the convergence thesis. This led Parsons to emphasize certain features of Weber's work which were favourable to the development of a general theory but, at the same time, to obscure the concept of value-relevance, the role of ideal types and the nature of understanding. In Chapter 2 the extension of certain elements of the Weberian approach and their incorporation into Parsons' own theoretical synthesis are examined, and the point is emphasized that the original convergence which Parsons identifies is far from explicit in the work of Pareto, Durkheim and Weber and is not related to any significant agreement in their theoretical and methodological views. Chapter 3 follows the subsequent stages in the development of Parsonian Sociology and taking into account the main criticisms raised against this body of work it identifies three major limitations in Parsons' attempt to create a General Theory of Action namely: the problem of the testability of Parsons' work, its objectivity, and the role of the subjective point of view within the structurally oriented concepts and analytic schemes. In contrast to Parsons' attempt to incorporate Weber's ideas within a natural science of

society perspective, Chapter 4 examines Schutz's critique of Weber from a phenomenological point of view. Schutz drew on some of Weber's ideas in the context of emphasizing the unique difficulties of a science of subjectively meaningful actions, in particular, the problems of reconciling common sense and scientific interpretations of action. However, Schutz's extension of Weber led to certain persistent criticisms and these are identified. In Chapter 5 the attempt is made to accurately formulate Weber's Theory of Action on the basis of a wide ranging analysis of his formal statements. This involves the demonstration of the unity of his "early" and "late" work, the emphasis upon the close relationship in Weber's thinking of historical and sociological research and, more generally, the identification of the limitations of the interpretations of Weber by Parsons and Schutz. The conclusion of the study deals with the contemporary relevance of Weber's theoretical and methodological ideas in relation to some of the problems encountered by sociology during the "crisis".

Finally, a comment on the title - Weber's Theory of Action. The wording is quite deliberate because it emphasizes two important features of the study. First, polemically it shows that although the term "Theory of Action" is synonymous with Parsons' Convergence Thesis and the varying analytic schemes which he developed, it need not necessarily be used in this all-inclusive and synthetic form. In particular, this study examines a Weberian version of the "Theory of Action" which is quite different to the one developed by Parsons and has not been incorporated within it. Second, informatively it makes clear that we are not concerned primarily with Weber's sociology as a whole, rather we have a very specific interest in

the formal side of his work, in other words, his conception of the sociological enterprise. Weber's substantive inquiries are relevant only to the extent that they illustrate or clarify methodological or theoretical issues; and it is only in this sense that we are concerned with the contemporary significance of Weber's sociological ideas.

NOTES

1. Whilst this study is concerned largely with theoretical and methodological ideas this does not involve an assumption that such formal issues can be developed independently of empirical research. Rather, the study emphasizes these ideas purely from the point of view of improving the clarity and coherence of the argument.
2. Max Weber, Economy and Society, (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1978), 1-26.
3. Max Weber, Roscher and Knies: The Logical Problems of Historical Economics, (New York: Free Press, 1975); "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy" and "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences" in Methodology of the Social Sciences, (New York: Free Press, 1968); "R. Stammler's 'Surmounting' of the Materialist Conception of History", I, British Journal of Law and Society, 2, (1975), 129-152 and II, British Journal of Law and Society, 3, (1976), 17-43.
4. Max Weber, "The Social-Psychology of the World Religions" and "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions", in H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (Eds.), From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, (London: Routledge, 1964); The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism, (New York: Free Press, 1957); The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism, (New York: Free Press, 1958); Ancient Judaism, (New York: Free Press, 1952).
5. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit.
6. This is the view adopted by both Parsons and Schutz, see Chapters 1 and 4 respectively.
7. The evidence is presented in Chapter 5.
8. See J. Freund, "German Sociology in the Time of Max Weber" in T.B. Bottomore and R. Nisbet (Eds.) A History of Sociological Analysis (London: Heinemann, 1978). C.f., E.W. Muhlmann, "Sociology in Germany" in H. Becker and A. Boskoff (Eds.) Modern Sociological Theory, (New York: Holt, Rinehardt & Winston, 1957).
9. The first complete English translation was not until 1968.
10. Talcott Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, (New York: Free Press, 1937).
11. This argument is developed in Chapter 2.

12. See, for example, Talcott Parsons, The Social System, (New York: Free Press, 1951).
13. The obvious exception is that traditionally Marxist Sociology held rather different views on objectivity.
14. Alfred Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, (Evanston: North western University Press, 1967).
15. D. Silverman, Reading Castaneda (London: Routledge, 1975).
16. See, for example, P. Filmer, et.al., New Directions in Sociological Theory, (London: Collier-MacMillan, 1972) and J.D. Douglas (ed.), Understanding Everyday Life: Toward the Reconstruction of Sociological Knowledge, (London: Routledge, 1971).
17. A.W. Gouldner, The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology, (London: Heinemann, 1971).
18. E.g., J. Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, (London: Heinemann, 1971); Theory and Practice, (London: Heinemann, 1974); and Legitimation Crisis, (London: Heinemann, 1976).

CHAPTER ONE

PARSONS' VERSION OF WEBER

Parsons' first published discussion of Weber appeared in 1929 in an introduction, for English speaking readers, to the way in which the phenomenon of modern capitalism had been analyzed by Sombart and Weber.¹ His most detailed and comprehensive analysis of Weber's work - and for this reason his most authoritative commentary - was published in 1937 and constituted the substance of four chapters in The Structure of Social Action.² Since that time there have been two significant additions to his interpretation of Weber, which were published as introductions to translations of certain aspects of Weber's work: the first appeared in 1947 as the editor's "Introduction" to his selection from Weber's Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft dealing with social relationships and institutions of an economically and politically relevant nature;³ the second introduction was published in 1962 in Fischhoff's translation of another part of the same study, only this time dealing with the sociology of religion.⁴ More recently, Parsons wrote two quite similar general reviews, to coincide with the centenary of Weber's birth, about his contribution to the development of sociology: "Max Weber 1864 - 1964",⁵ and "Evaluation and Objectivity in Social Science: An Interpretation of Max Weber's Contribution".⁶ In addition to these sources there are some other articles and book reviews in which Parsons comments upon various aspects of Weberian sociology.⁷

Given the considerable amount of attention Parsons has devoted to Weber's work during this time, it is necessary to begin

our examination of Parsons' version of Weber by asking: Did Parsons interpretation of Weber undergo any major changes or developments? However, the analysis of the Parsonian commentaries, reveals no major changes in the interpretation of the nature or significance of Weberian Sociology once he had reached what might be called his mature and comprehensive assessment. This viewpoint emerged in the process of developing the convergence thesis and subsequently formed the content of his treatment of Weber in The Structure of Social Action. Since then, there has been remarkable consistency both in terms of detailed analysis of particular concepts, and the persistence of certain themes. Of course, there are some changes of emphasis which are inevitable given the considerable development of Parsons' General Theory of Action throughout this time, for it must be remembered that Parsons' discussion of Weber was always in terms of his own theoretical and methodological problems.⁸ Hence the changing nature of Parsons' problem context led to variations in his comments on Weber; for example, in 1937 Parsons placed little significance upon Weber's opposition to the use by sociology of a functionalist method, and a great deal upon the consistency between Weber's treatment of rational action and his own concept of unit act, whereas, 10 years later when Parsons had abandoned the attempt to create analytic theory after the fashion of classical mechanics and decided that structural-functionalism offered the only way forward, he devoted considerable attention to an examination of the reasons for Weber's opposition to functionalism. Moreover, as Parsons interest had moved from the unit act to system of

action during this period, it was equally inevitable that Weber's discussion of rational action, which had been so important to the concept of unit act, had receded in significance.⁹

Throughout this period, there are certain aspects of Weber's work which have remained of enduring significance to Parsons, in particular those principles and concepts which are relevant to his thesis that a convergence could be detected in the approaches to social scientific study advanced by Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber. For this reason Parsons' support for the following features of Weber's approach has not varied: the strict separation of value-judgements from the realm of science, the need for general theoretical categories in sociology, the abstractness of such concepts which is represented by Weber's principle of value-relevance, the concentration upon the subjective aspect of action, and the use of the comparative method which allows for the causal explanation of social phenomena. In view of this basic continuity, therefore, it is possible with no loss of accuracy and a considerable gain in conciseness, to present a synthesis of Parsons' different discussions of Weber as a means to the formulation of the main features of his version of Weber's work.¹⁰

Given the particular interests of this study in Weber's Theory of Action and an inevitable concentration upon theoretical and methodological issues, Parsons' treatment of Weber's more substantive studies, such as the Protestant Ethic Thesis, the typologies of religious phenomena or political and economic organizations, will not be examined for their own sake, but only in so far as they illustrate or substantiate more formal issues. Also, in constructing this composite picture it is useful to

distinguish between, on the one hand, those features of Weberian Sociology which played an important role in the convergence thesis and, on the other hand, a residual collection of issues on which Parsons took a critical stance because they either led in a different direction to his own theoretical approach, or were explicitly contradictory. And, finally, before beginning to examine those features of Weber's work which Parsons regarded in a very positive manner, it is necessary to comment upon the unusual context in which Weber's Sociology was examined in The Structure of Social Action.

One of the most important features of Parsons treatment of the work of the earlier writers he examines in The Structure of Social Action is the way in which he analyzes their ideas in the context of the intellectual tradition which had formed the starting point for their perspectives. There were two reasons for this strategy. The first concerned the general issue of accuracy of interpretation. Parsons argued that misunderstanding of another writer's work was most easily avoided if it was examined in terms of the traditions, and problems of its particular intellectual milieu.¹¹ The second involves the convergence thesis. One of the grounds of proof for this thesis is that Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber all pursued their studies to the point where they recognized the limitations of their particular traditions, and ultimately went beyond these limits, thereby helping to establish - though not necessarily in an explicit fashion - a new and superior form of social theory based upon a common body of concepts. Parsons does not claim that Weber was ever an idealist in the sense which would fully satisfy this epistemological stance,¹² rather he finds

it convenient to examine the development of Weber's sociological ideas, particularly their methodological basis, in the context of opposition to idealist principles. This helps to clarify Weber's approach given that his ideas on the theoretical and methodological framework of sociology were often stated in critiques of the views of idealist writers,¹³ and with the brief exception of the first section of Chapter 1 in Economy and Society, Weber did not systematically set out his own approach.¹⁴ However, for Parsons, Weber's studies clarifying the weaknesses of idealism constituted a new level of social theory, and represented an indispensable component of the convergence thesis.

I WEBER AND THE CONVERGENCE OF SOCIAL ACTION

(a) Critique of Idealism and the Emergence of Weberian Sociology

For Parsons the basic character of the idealist tradition was derived from Kant's distinction between two kinds of object: on the one hand, physical and material entities; and on the other, man as a spiritual being. With time this led to the separation of the natural and the socio-cultural sciences, having distinct subject matters and methods of study. In particular human action was conceptualized as "free" and not as subject to regularities in the manner of the phenomena of nature. Hence actions could not be studied by the "analytic and generalizing methods" of the natural sciences.¹⁵ Within this perspective two main variations in the study of social life were developed; on the one hand, a philosophy of history, particularly associated with Hegel, in which actions and events were examined in terms of their "significance for the totality of human development",¹⁶ and on the other hand, very detailed descriptive histories.¹⁷ Nevertheless, they remained united in common opposition to positivistic methods associated with the general theoretical schemes of natural science, for the study of human actions and events. The social theorizing which did develop in this unfavourable intellectual milieu centred on the arrangement of concrete details in terms of a concept of the historically unique cultural totality, or Geist.¹⁸ The study of law and of economic life proceeded on the basis of building up an appreciation of how these self-contained cultural systems, such as capitalism or feudalism, worked. As each system was seen to be the result of specific circumstances, little attention was

devoted to more general principles in terms of which the particular cultural entities could be ordered, or to the way in which change occurred from one epoch to the next. Methodologically, the aim was to understand the meaning of a cultural entity, and not, as in the positivistic approach, to discover causal relationships within the phenomenon.¹⁹

Given Parsons' commitment to a particular view of the nature of social science the most serious theoretical and methodological limitation of this tradition was that knowledge was seen to be radically divided between the natural sciences and the sciences dealing with human action and culture

"Though both were conceived as consisting of systematic empirical knowledge subject to canons of accuracy of observation and logical precision and consistency, the tendency in Germany has been to emphasise the depth of the contrast, to hold that the methodological canons most characteristic of the natural sciences were in the nature of the case not applicable to the socio-cultural and vice versa. This is particularly true of the role of general conceptual schemes, of theory, and this is the point at which Weber chose to make his principal attack." 20

Parsons examines the basic features of Weber's sociological approach in the context of their development in opposition to two distinct tendencies of idealism, namely, Objectivism and Intuitionism. The former viewpoint is based upon the assumption that the character of the subject matter of the social sciences makes the generalizing methods of natural science inappropriate and as a result of this, the study of action must adopt different procedures, in particular, detailed factual studies. The latter, the Intuitionist perspective, whilst fully accepting the special nature of the subject matter of social science, is much more concerned with the unique way in which knowledge of actions and events can be gained.²¹

The basis of Objectivism was the view that natural science is able to use general concepts because natural phenomena are determined; they conform to certain regularities which can be stated precisely by means of generalizing concepts. However, human actions are spontaneous and unpredictable because people can choose what to do and they can act rationally or irrationally. Social and cultural phenomena do not conform to regularities and so there is little point in attempting to subsume concrete facts within general concepts: hence, the differences in the nature of the subject matters dealt with in natural and social science constitutes the basis for their distinct methodological procedures.²²

According to Parsons, Weber simply rejected the Objectivist strategy of developing exclusively detailed and particular studies, on the grounds of its inconsistency. Instead Weber argued that

"... every demonstrable judgement of historical explanation rested implicitly if not explicitly on ... general theoretical concepts." 23

His analysis of the Objectivists' opposition to the use of general concepts in the study of human action is complex and involves four distinct issues. First of all, against the view that abstract general concepts cannot include all the factual detail of concrete reality, Weber argues that it has never been the aim of science to gain all potential knowledge which is available about a phenomenon. Rather, the object has been to achieve knowledge adequate for a given purpose. It is inevitable that a scientific concept is abstract in relation to "raw" experience and this is the same in both natural and social science.²⁴

In fact Weber argues that

"... the basis of difference between the two groups of sciences ... must be in the principles according to which, among 'experientable' elements of reality, 'facts' are to be selected which are significant for a given scientific purpose. This lies ... in its logically relevant aspects; not in the objective nature of the 'reality' a science deals with, but in the 'subjective' direction of interest of the scientist." 25

Secondly, in response to the view that whilst natural phenomena are determined social phenomena are "free", Weber considers that the ability of natural science to predict the distribution of fragments from a broken boulder is low and concludes that there is really little difference between the two groups of sciences, although

"Predictability in the natural sciences seems to be high because our interest is predominantly in the aspect of natural events formulable in terms of known abstract laws. Our interest in human affairs is generally on a different level." 26

The third issue also concerns the Objectivists' antithesis between "free" action and "determined" nature: natural phenomena conform to regularities and their character and behaviour is accessible to the scientist, but in the social realm the possibility that people may act irrationally means that their actions always remain inaccessible to scientific comprehension. However, Weber transforms this viewpoint by arguing that whilst the natural scientist can only observe the external uniformities of the phenomena under investigation, the social scientist can not only do this, but in addition, can understand the motives for peoples actions. According to this point of view then, the social sciences offer the possibility of gaining a new and more direct knowledge of reality, and for Weber

"This fact constitutes an objective difference between the subject matters of the two groups of sciences, and one of central importance." 27

Nevertheless,

"... Weber insists that for the questions at issue this difference does not constitute the basis of a logical distinction of the two sets of sciences. In the field of Verstehen as well as of Begreifen, general concepts have a real place, and valid empirical proof is dependent on their use, implicitly or explicitly." 28

The fourth and final element concerns the Objectivists' association of the freedom of action with irrationality. Weber rejects this viewpoint as a total misconception. In fact, he argues, we are most free from the various kinds of determinism when we act deliberately and rationally; Parsons adds

"... the curious thing is that, given the end, rational action is to an eminent degree both predictable and subject to analysis in terms of general concepts." 29

Moreover, Weber's discussion of rational action is particularly significant for Parsons, since in his view,

"... the general concepts involved in the analysis of rational action ... formulate general relations of means and ends. And these concepts are of a logical nature strictly comparable to the general laws of the physical sciences." 30

In contrast, the Intuitionist viewpoint developed around the principle that scientific knowledge could be established without the use of general concepts. Instead such knowledge could be attained through

"... immediate 'intuition' - a direct grasp of meaning without the intervention of concepts in any form." 31

Weber's critical assessment of this perspective focussed on two main issues: first of all, he rejected the possibility of an intuitive kind of knowledge because the conception was based upon a major ambiguity. According to Parsons, the Intuitionists failed

to distinguish the psychological processes involved in the formulation of valid knowledge from the "logical grounds of its validity", and there remained no way in which the validity of a social scientific proposition could be demonstrated without the use of general concepts.³² In addition, although the understanding of the meaningful content of social action implies a special kind of certainty which is absent from the way in which the natural scientist gains knowledge of nature, Weber emphasizes that

"The immediate certainty of perception of meaning is at most only one element in the proof of the validity of knowledge and cannot by itself be trusted. It must be checked by reference to a rationally consistent system of concepts." 33

For Parsons, although the understanding of the subjective point of view of the actor remained central to Weber's approach, he was sharply critical of the methods advocated by the Intuitionists for gaining knowledge of such phenomena.³⁴

Another component of the Intuitionist position concerned the attempt to grasp a cultural totality in terms of its unique individuality. Weber rejected this position because, Parsons argues, it confused knowledge with the data of experience. The cultural totality which is formulated by the investigator cannot reflect the actual complexity of reality, for it is inevitably a simplification based upon selection,

"And this selection and systematization involves relating experience to concepts, including general concepts which serve as the basis of judging what elements of the raw experience are significant to the whole. This is as true of the social as of the natural sciences." 35

The criterion which makes it possible to select coherently and systematically and, thereby, facilitates the construction of precise concepts is called by Weber "relevance to value".³⁶

This is such an important feature of Weber's methodological framework for sociology that it provides Parsons with the key to a more systematic and positive presentation of this new kind of social inquiry which had emerged from an idealist background through a process of criticism and refinement. The introduction of values into the process of scientific conceptualization does not, in Parsons' view, undermine the objectivity of social scientific results because Weber was explicit about the separation of the

"... determination of scientific interest, through value relevance (and thus of the immediate objects of scientific study, the historical individuals) and the exercise of value judgements..." 37

Even though a value element enters into the selection of the material of science, once this material is given it is possible to come to objectively valid conclusions about the causes and consequences of given phenomena free of value-judgements and hence binding on anyone who wishes to attain truth, regardless of what other subjective values he may hold." 38

The separation of value-relevance and value judgement is possible, Parsons adds, because whilst the selection of facts about a phenomenon which are to be included in its scientific conceptualization involves an element of relativity, this is quite different from the problem of the validity of these facts as statements about the phenomenon in question. 39

In addition, Parsons argues,

"... once a phenomenon is descriptively given, the establishment of causal relations between it and either its antecedents or its consequences is possible only through the application, explicitly or implicitly, of a formal schema of proof that is independent of any value system, of scientific truth... this schema involves the use of general concepts transcending the historical individual." 40

Of course, it is necessary to take into account the diversity of ultimate value systems and the way in which such systems change over time, together with the directions of interest they give rise to.⁴¹ But, Parsons argues, the inclusion of a role for values in science does not automatically entail relativism because a change in the values of society cannot undermine the status of knowledge which has been found to be valid in accordance with other values and directions of interest.⁴²

"And however different from each other the conceptual schemes are, in terms of which such knowledge has been formulated they must if valid be 'translatable' into terms of each other or of a wider scheme." 43

Moreover, Parsons argues, for Weber there was a finite number of such value systems, which meant a limited number of historical individuals which could be constructed in accordance with them, and of systems of theoretical concepts based upon them. Thus for Parsons

".... Weber's principle of value relevance, whilst it does introduce an element of relativity into scientific methodology (and a much-needed one by comparison with all empiricist views), does not involve the scepticism that is the inevitable consequence of any really radical relativity." 44

It is perhaps worth noting at this point that in his discussion of value relevance and the problems this raises for objectivity, Parsons, in The Structure of Social Action makes no reference to the concept of value-freedom (Wertfreiheit), although, of course, he does state that value judgements have no legitimate role in science.⁴⁵ However, nearly thirty years later, Parsons says of Weber's methodology that

"The concept of value freedom may be said to be the foundation of his position." 46

And Parsons argues, it plays a particularly significant role in distinguishing Weber's approach from that of the historicists, Marxists and utilitarians. Not surprisingly, then, the concept occupies an important part in Parsons more recent accounts of Weber. It is closely related to the concept of the value system of science, which Parsons describes in this way:

"... in his role as a scientist a particular subvalue system must be paramount for the investigator, one in which conceptual clarity, consistency and generality on the one hand, and empirical accuracy and verifiability on the other, are the valued outputs of the investigation." 47

This establishes the basis for Weber's idea of value freedom, which for Parsons means the

"... freedom to pursue the values of science within the relevant limits, without their being overridden by values either contradictory to or irrelevant to those of scientific investigation." 48

This is not to say that science is confined to the values of one specific culture nor that the scientist can have no value-commitments whatsoever; rather, that the individual should keep his role as a scientist separate from his role as a citizen.⁴⁹

Parsons' analysis of the theoretical and methodological elements which constitute the framework for Weber's Sociology can be summarized as follows: the central importance of general concepts in the scientific study of social life; the inevitably abstract nature of such concepts in relation to the reality which they represent, and the way in which the particular character of the abstraction is related to the scientist's interests; the focus of sociological attention upon the subjective aspect of action, in other words, the understandable motives for peoples' activities; and finally, the special place of the concept of rational action

in social scientific methodology. This last point is particularly important to Parsons because

"Rationality of action and systematic scientific theory are inseparably linked. The development of science is a process of action, and action is in part an application of science." 50

(b) Analysis of the Implicit Structure of Social Action

Having clarified the basic elements of Weber's theoretical and methodological approach Parsons then turns his attention to the way in which they were combined by Weber, as a result of his experience in both historical and comparative research, into a new framework for the study of action. However, for Parsons, this framework contains some serious weaknesses; in particular, Weber's distinction between natural and social science and his use of ideal type concepts. Weber had rejected the idealist claim that there were differences in the logic of the procedures used by the two groups of sciences, insisting rather, that the differences were of a substantive order, and he had maintained that in the study of social reality the generality of the findings could only be increased at the cost of reducing the level of detailed knowledge of reality in its particular forms.⁵¹ Following on from this principle Weber had developed the ideal type concepts, at least one of which was certainly general in nature, but from Parsons point of view, its fictional and unreal epistemological status raised certain problems. Suffice it to say, then, in both cases there was a substantial difference between Weber's position and the kind of scientific method utilized by Parsons.⁵²

The point of interest here is that the features of Weber's sociological approach defined by Parsons in this negative fashion presented the convergence thesis with a major obstacle. To solve this problem Parsons introduces a persuasive argument about how Weber's sociological ideas should be interpreted. Basically the argument is developmental: Weber began his career in economic history and law and gradually concentrated more and more on sociological issues so that it is only in the work written towards the end of his life that we can see a "modern" conception of sociology beginning to emerge. More specifically, his methodological essays and his study of the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism established his independence from idealism. The comparative studies of the world religions marked an additional step along this path and, finally, his systematic typologies in Economy and Society represented Weber's increasing commitment to a thoroughly generalizing method for the study of action. Although in his methodological essays Weber rejects the attempt to formulate a system of theory in sociology, Parsons suggests that there are systematic elements in Weber's thought and that it is those parts of Economy and Society which were included in The Theory of Social and Economic Organization which come the nearest to being "... a comprehensive statement of these elements."⁵³

Unfortunately, this evidence which is crucial to the convergence thesis is in an inconvenient form because Weber's methodological views, containing traces of the idealist tradition, led him to develop an ideal type classification of social relationships rather than the kind of general theory which Parsons went on to formulate. However, Parsons claims that it is possible,

through analysis, to identify the components of this set of classifications which are consistent with a structural outline of an action system - although this system remains largely implicit even in Weber's most mature work. In 1964, Parsons reflecting on Weber's argument, reiterates this point:

"The sense in which Weber did and did not develop a theoretical system pursuant to his methodological commitments is complex. What can fairly be said, I think, is that he presented a most comprehensive outline, illustrated and at many points even verified, by immense masses of historical material treated in an explicit, comprehensive framework. The major orientation from which he set up the outline is very clear indeed; it is a kind of charter for macro-sociological research, still very largely valid today." 54

But in his most detailed analysis of Weber's methodology written nearly 30 years earlier, Parsons is more emphatic and although he indicates that Weber did not consider a "generalized theoretical system" for sociology, either in the form of the structure or of the elements of action he emphasized that

"Weber did, however, attempt to build up a systematic classification of ideal types starting from a conception of action closely similar to that dealt with throughout this study. It is a reasonable hypothesis that in so far as these types are empirically verified and their classification is logically coherent, the general framework of concepts underlying the classification should be closely related to a generalized theoretical system, even though its methodological status as such is not explicitly worked out." 55

Moreover, there is no doubt in Parsons mind that this represented a form of sociological theory: describing the section on the sociology of religion in Economy and Society, he comments:

"This is elementary theory ... Such propositions as that stating the intimate relations between a religious ethic and the phenomenon of prophecy, or with reference to the dispositions of different kinds of social strata to different religious orientations are examples of the propositional content of this scheme... This, essentially, was what Weber meant by sociology as a theoretical discipline." 56

According to Parsons, Weber's attempt to construct this "elementary theory" was based upon the classification of types of social relationship and the distinction between four kinds of action: end-rational, value-rational, traditional and affectual. Weber's stress upon these four types, as the foundation upon which more complex types are constructed, demonstrates his commitment to the understanding of the subjective aspect of peoples' actions. For Parsons the categories of end-rational and value-rational action describe complete types of action, since they include the means-end relationship, and the category of ultimate ends. Also, they state a normative type of action. In the case of end-rational action, a choice between equally valid ultimate ends is involved, whereas, in the case of value-rational action, the action is orientated exclusively to the achievement of one value or end.⁵⁷ According to Parsons these two cases represent the possible extremes of "ultimate end systems" and reveal a theoretical strategy which leads in a different direction to his own main interest in the examination of the structure of systems of action.⁵⁸ Traditional action, Parsons argues, was not for Weber just a case of "habit". He maintains that if it is examined in terms of the concept of traditional authority it becomes clear that there are normative elements involved as well. However, he continues, this is not true in the case of affectual action which remained in Weber's usage very much a residual category.⁵⁹

The next level of Weber's thinking concerns the category of social relationship, this is the unit from which the more complicated types are constructed. However, Parsons argues that it is not logically possible to classify these relationships, let

alone the types of action, without at least the beginning of a general system of action, and whilst Weber did not explicitly formulate an outline of the structure of action it is implied by the criteria he used to develop the classification of social relationships.⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, Parsons concentrates upon the outline which he claims can be found in Weber's classifications.

"... in his treatment of social relationships there is implied the existence of elements of regularity in action itself in order that there may be a significant probability of such kinds of action occurring as to constitute a definable relationship." 61

Parsons examines the nature of these regularities in terms of "modes of orientation" which Weber had subdivided into three distinct forms, namely usage, interest, and legitimate order. Both interest and legitimate order involve a clear normative element. Interest refers to an actor's orientation of the end-rational kind, in other words, the individual chooses to pursue a course of action leading to a particular end or value, selected from a group of values which are subjectively all of equal worth. Legitimate order, by comparison, is

".... the orientation of action to the idea on the part of the actors of the existence of such an order as a norm." 62

The concept of usage raises some difficulties because its definition suggests close links with the psychological mechanism of habit which is the very antithesis of a normative orientation, but Parsons argues, in practice Weber used it in a manner involving conformity to norms. Parsons continues:

"The exact logical status of these three concepts is not very clear in Weber's own treatment ... The most plausible interpretation seems to be that what Weber was really doing was putting forward, as a general framework for his classification of ideal types, an outline of the generalized structure of systems of action." 63

In particular these three modes of orientation of action are not just ideal types describing "hypothetically concrete types of action" because any concrete acts involve, in varying degrees, elements of interests, legitimacy and usage, hence the "modes of orientation" are parts of the structure of action. Although Weber did not pursue this line of inquiry, being content with the formulation of a system of "objectively possible" types of social structures,⁶⁴ Parsons has no doubt about their significance:

"... there is ... a complete account of the structure of action systems identifiable in Weber's own conceptual scheme. And this is true in spite of the fact that his methodology had not clarified the logical nature of a generalized theoretical system." 65

In his demonstration of this Parsons focusses attention upon the three Weberian concepts of legitimacy, charisma, and usage. For Weber the concept of legitimacy is

"... a quality of an order, that is, of a system of norms governing conduct, or at least to which action may (or must) be oriented. This quality is imputed to the order by those acting in relation to it. Doing so involves taking a given type of attitude toward the norms involved which may be characterized as one of disinterested acceptance ... for one who holds an order to be legitimate, living up to its rules becomes a matter of moral obligation." 66

For Parsons the similarity between "legitimacy" and Durkheim's interpretation of constraint as moral authority is overwhelming. Both writers, he argues, see action as taking place in terms of a set of rules which form the conditions of action. Charisma involves an attitude of respect and parallels the ritual attitude examined

by Durkehim, but it is used by Weber as a major element in a theory of social change rather than in relation to the structure of action. Moreover, for Weber there can be no legitimate order without a charismatic element because,

"Legitimacy... is a quality imputed only to the norms of an order, not to persons, things or "imaginary" entities, and its reference is to the regulation of action Legitimacy is thus the institutional application or embodiment of charisma." 67

Usage is examined by Parsons in terms of the concept of taste: beyond the framework established by the norms of legitimate order and of the efficient pursuit of interest there is a further component of action which is governed by its own distinct set of norms, namely, those relating to artistic creations. Of the writers examined by Parsons in The Structure of Social Action only Weber identified this additional structural element of an action system, and all the other elements which Parsons' analysis of Weber's work has made explicit, corroborate the structural accounts of Marshall, Pareto and Durkheim.⁶⁸

Significantly, Parsons' assessment of the implicit structural elements of Weber's classification of types of action and relationship has remained unchanged throughout his career. In 1964 Parsons suggests that the sociology of law is the central part of Weber's substantive studies because, after the initial methodological statement at the beginning of Economy and Society, he

"... begins immediately to outline his classification of the types and components of normative order in society. He comes furthermore very quickly to the concept of legitimate order, which is the nodal point where the concepts of law, of political authority, and of the social role of religious ethics come together." 69

Developing this point further Parsons argues that law provided Weber with a solution to the ideal/material dualism in European social thought because it enabled him to demonstrate that political and economic structures could only be understood in terms of normative order and, in addition, that religious meaning systems only influence action through their consequences for the same set of legitimate norms.⁷⁰ The significance of this for Parsons' own work is quite clear:

"Quite correctly, I think, he viewed the phenomena of normative control of interests and other aspects of overt behaviour ~ thus the conditions of successful control ~ as the appropriate focus of sociology ... Problems of order as distinguished from those of the categories of 'interest' that define the primary subject matter of economics and political science thus constitute the core of sociological concern." 71

Parsons' summarizes his view on the significance of Weber's work for the establishment of a new and much more sophisticated level of theory in the sciences dealing with human action, in relation to two areas; first, the logic of science and second, the character of a theory of action. Weber's methodological position was clearly directed at the understanding of empirical actions, not of natural phenomena, nor of "atemporal complexes of meaning", which had been the object of Intuitionist concern.

"Weber has demonstrated that the conception of objective scientific knowledge in any sense, of any empirical subject matter, is indisolubly bound up with the reality both of the normative aspect of action and of the obstacles to the realization of norms. Science itself cannot be methodologically grounded without reference to the value element in the relation of Wertbeziehung. Without it there can be no determinate selection of relevant data, hence of objective knowledge in distinction from the 'system of consciousness'. The very conception of science itself implies action. Furthermore it is this basic solidarity of science and action which is the ultimate justification of the starting point of this whole study, the role in action of the norm of rationality in the sense of a scientifically verifiable intrinsic means-end relationship." 72

For Parsons, if there is to be a genuinely scientific study of social action it must focus upon the "norm of intrinsic rationality" for only by using this criterion can the dangers of subjectivity be avoided.⁷³

Parsons has no doubt that Weber developed a Voluntaristic theory of action rather than an idealist or positivist version, and he argues that it is only in terms of this conception of Voluntarism that his studies of the effects of religion upon economic life can be fully appreciated.

"The role both of ideas and of the ultimate values associated with them is fundamental to Weber's thought. But equally so is the fact that these elements do not stand alone but in complex interrelations with other independent factors." 74

Weber's conception of action, then, presupposes a complex of values, norms, and ideas, together with an independent role assigned to hereditary and environmental factors. Moreover, Weber's use of normative ideal type concepts of an avowedly fictional nature is crucial to his acceptance of the Voluntaristic approach because it emphasizes that although normative elements are crucial to action, explanations cannot be based exclusively upon them if an idealist position is to be avoided.⁷⁵

II WEBER AND RESIDUAL IDEALIST ELEMENTS

In the second part of this exposition of Parsons' interpretation of Weber's sociology attention is concentrated upon those aspects of Weber's theoretical and methodological approach which stood in a critical or ambivalent relationship to Parsons' own views and strategies. Three closely related issues are examined in detail: Weber's views on the relevance of the methods of natural science for sociology; his development of a theoretical strategy based upon the use of ideal type concepts; and his rejection of a functionalist method for sociology, which Parsons considers in terms of the need to explain the behaviour of total social systems, rather than individual actions.

(a) Natural and Social Science

The concept of value relevance is the starting point for Parsons' examination of what he regards as Weber's somewhat confused methodological distinction between natural and social science.⁷⁶ Weber argued that the scientists' direction of interest provided the basis both for selection and, therefore, conceptualization from the "total flux of raw experience",⁷⁷ but that differences in the nature of this interest in natural and social phenomena were responsible for a radical division between the procedures used by the two groups of sciences. Interest in natural objects focusses upon their abstract and general features, rather than their individual uniquenesses; hence the objective of the natural sciences is to construct a system of general law. In contrast, however, our interest in social phenomena lies in their particularities.

"Since in the social field interest is in the aspect of concrete individuality, general concepts cannot stand in the same relation to this interest; their formulation and verification cannot be an end in itself for the scientist's labour; they are only means to the elucidation and understanding of the particular, unique and individual phenomenon."78

These differences in the aims of conceptualization are explained by Weber in terms of the source of the two kinds of interest in phenomena. The desire to control natural objects for social benefit is the basis of our interest in such phenomena.

"Apart from this interest in control, natural phenomena are, as an object of science, indifferent to human values." 79

The situation is quite different in the social case: here a value attitude is taken toward the phenomena because the objects of study are actions and cultural achievements which embody human ideals and values. Our interest in the phenomena concerns their individuality because they are relevant to values which are actually shared by, or are in some way significant to the scientist. Moreover, in social science, unlike natural science, there is no common direction of interest in the phenomena of study. This follows from the fact that there is a diversity of values within the society, each of which can be used to construct a concept about the phenomenon in question, with the result that as many concepts may be formulated of the object as there are directions of interest to take towards it.

Summarizing Weber's position, Parsons continues,

"It follows, then, that the process will not issue in one ultimately uniform system of general concepts but in as many systems as there are value points of view or others significant to knowledge. There can be no one universally valid system of general theory in the social sciences. This is one of the main routes by which Weber arrives at his view of the 'fictional' nature of social science concepts so important to his doctrine of the ideal type." 80

Parsons concedes that there is some merit in this formulation for it makes explicit the unavoidable degree of relativism in science which follows from the fact that knowledge is always selective, and the basis for this selection is not to be found in the facts, but in the subjective interest of the scientist: in Parsons' terms, observation is always in terms of a conceptual scheme.⁸¹ Moreover, as we have seen above, Weber does not capitulate to relativism because of the distinction he draws between motives of scientific interest and the entirely separate issue of the validity of scientific statements.

But Parsons rejects Weber's position on the methodological relationship between the two groups of sciences, insisting that there are only substantive differences between natural and social science. He argues that Weber is mistaken in drawing a distinction in principle between the subjective directions of the scientists' interests in natural and social phenomena. Accepting that the motive of control is important for natural science he nevertheless argues that it is more significant in social science than Weber believed. Indeed, there is no reason why a value interest rather than a control interest should give rise to a concern with individual rather than general concepts. Consequently, Parsons concludes,

"... there seems to be no basis for a radical distinction in principle between the natural and the social sciences with regard to the roles of individuality and generality. Quantitative differences of degree there may be, but these are not sufficient to justify such a distinction. The principle of value relevance helps to explain the element of relativism, in scientific methodology, but it is applicable to both groups of sciences, not to one alone."⁸²

In order to establish firmly the weaknesses of the Weberian position Parsons advances an entirely different conception of the relationship between individual and general concepts. This classification of the sciences is based upon the distinction between the analytic and the historical. Analytic sciences, such as theoretical physics, economics and sociology, attempt to construct systems of theory valid for a wide range of objects, whereas the historical sciences - history, geology, meteorology and anthropology - are concerned with the understanding of unique historical individuals. In the analytic sciences the formation of general concepts is an end in itself, whereas in the historical group they are only a means to understanding. However, the distinction between the two kinds of sciences does not coincide with the classification of real phenomena because the scope of the analytic sciences necessarily cuts across such a division.⁸³

(b) Ideal Types and the Mosaic Theory of Society

Weber's analysis of the methodological circumstances of social science led him to formulate the ideal type concept which is defined as

"... a construction of elements abstracted from the concrete, and put together to form a unified conceptual pattern. This involves a one-sided exaggeration of certain aspects of the concrete reality, but is not to be found in it, that is, concretely existing, except in a few very special cases, such as purely rational action. It is a utopia," 84

The fictional nature of this concept can best be accounted for, Parsons suggests, in terms of Weber's relationship with idealism. There were several reasons why Weber emphasized their unreality. Firstly, all scientific concepts were based upon a selection of the

material given in reality. Secondly, given Weber's views on the special character of social science in which the aim is to understand particular concrete phenomena, the role of scientific concepts is inevitably restricted to that of being a means to achieving knowledge rather than constituting knowledge in themselves. In addition, given the idealist tendency to explain social action and events exclusively in terms of ideas, and Weber's concentration upon values, ideas, and norms as the subject matter of sociology, he did not wish to give the impression that these were the only components of social reality which could be studied.⁸⁵

Uncertainty about the exact methodological status of a concept which is not a hypothesis, description, average, or statement of the features common to a class of empirical phenomena leads Parsons to seek clarification from the analysis of the ideal type concept presented by von Schelting, who drew a distinction between two types of individual concept.⁸⁶ On the one hand, there is the conceptualization of a concrete historical individual which becomes the object of causal analysis - and in this case the 'idealness' of the concept is merely a function of the selectivity of scientific interest. The other form of the individual ideal type,

"... is very similar in its logical function but different in its content. The first contained at least elements of real phenomena - things and events in time - elements of social fact. The other contains another order of object - ideas. Such are, for example, the Calvinistic theology, the Brahmanic philosophy of Karma and transmigration. These are, of course, relevant to real processes ... but short of Hegelianism they cannot be identified with it... But neither are they the actual concrete contents of the minds of all Calvinists or Brahmins... On the contrary, these two are exaggerations, they are developments into the most clear cut and consistent form of the general tendencies of religious thought to be found in the circles in question."⁸⁷

Significantly Parsons does not attempt to see how this kind of concept could be used in empirical research, or to clarify its methodological status, but quickly moves on to the generalizing ideal type which is of more immediate relevance to his thesis of a convergence in theoretical structures. This concept formulates a hypothetical course of events in order to facilitate causal imputation and for this purpose it has an abstract and general character.

"... it is an ideal construction of a typical course of action, or form of relationship which is applicable to the analysis of an indefinite plurality of concrete cases, and which formulates in pure, logically consistent form certain elements that are relevant to the understanding of the several concrete situations." 88

Parsons notes that Weber gives as an example of the generalizing ideal type, the concepts of economic theory, and for Parsons this is crucial to his demonstration of a major methodological weakness in Weber's thought, namely, the fictional view of scientific concepts. The concepts used in economic theory have a normative character which follows from the importance given to the idea of economic rationality, consequently, they state a course of hypothetically concrete action and formulate an unattainable norm - even though it makes sense as a limiting concept. When the construction of normative concepts is seen as the object of the scientific enterprise it is hard to avoid the belief that such concepts are unreal. However, if a different perspective is adopted, and these concepts are seen to state a relationship between certain analytic elements of a generalized system of action, then the limitations of the fictional view become apparent. In the absence of ideal experimental conditions, if social analysis is confined to

the use of ideal types stating hypothetically concrete action the result is the break up of the organic unity of historical objects and processes, and this may lead to a mosaic theory of society in which social life is conceived of as consisting of "disparate atoms" defined as ideal type units.⁸⁹

Parsons demonstrates the usefulness of analytic theory based upon a generalized system of action by comparing Marshall's concept of free enterprise including the notion of activities, with Weber's category of traditionalism. They both involve the same basic component of the rational maximization of utility and could not be formulated without it. Hence:

"... this element of utility is an independent variable relative to traditionalism and to activities. The two elements simply are not reducible to terms of one another in the sense that maximization of utility logically implies either maximization of traditionalism (in Weber's sense) or of activities (in Marshall's sense)." 90

For Parsons the limitations of Weber's methodological view resulted from the belief that every analytical element of a system of theory must correspond to a different ideal type unit of a concrete system of action, whereas the comparison of the categories of traditionalism and free enterprise shows that the economic element of the structure of a system of action varies independently of the value elements of the same system.⁹¹ The concept of traditionalism involves the maximization of economic rationality and a standard of living fixed by traditional values and the ideal type gains its special character from the relationship between these two properties. Within such a type concept,

"The relations between the values of analytical elements which are important to the formulation of the type are always the same whatever may be their particular values and those of the other elements. Ideal type analysis provides no means of breaking down the rigidity of these fixed relations." 92

Indeed Parsons argues, the diverse and changeable nature of social reality does not support the idea of fixed relationships so much as that of independent variation between elements. Therefore, although

"The formulation of class concepts, including ideal types in Weber's sense, is an indispensable procedure, ... it is not usually possible for scientific analysis to stop there. To do so would result in a type atomism - each type would be a unit of analysis by itself. But in reality these units are systematically related to one another. This is true because they are formulated in terms of combinations of relations between the values of a more limited number of properties, each property being predicable of a number of different type concepts. Above all, the values of the general elements concerned are not always combined in the particular way that any one type concept involves; they are independently variable over a wider range ... To employ only the type concept in analysis is to obscure these possibilities of independent variation." 93

Moreover, it is cumbersome to have a general concept for every possible combination of relations between the values of the relevant elements. In contrast, the analytic programme allows for the derivation of all of these types from a more limited number of element concepts and involves the development of a general theoretical system.

However, Parsons suggests that Weber did not restrict himself to the formulation of unrelated ideal type concepts; indeed,

"The attempt, which constitutes the principal theoretical aspect of his work, to construct a systematic classification of ideal types, really involved him by implication in generalized analytic theory. His sociological theory is neither the one nor the other but a mixture of both." 94

Parsons finds support for this viewpoint in Weber's insistence on the importance of causal explanation to the discovery of knowledge about social phenomena. In order to determine the significance of particular factors or components in the historical process it is necessary to imagine the process without the effects of the components in question; this involves the logic of experiment, and where processes cannot be reproduced it is necessary to perform mental experiments and construct courses of action which are "objectively possible".⁹⁵

"The construction of what would have happened under different circumstances... requires knowledge of how certain elements of the situation would have developed. This involves ... both analysis of the phenomenon into elements, and with respect to each element, ability to predict with more or less accuracy its trends of development. It is as logically necessary prerequisites of this latter prediction of tendencies that general laws become involved".⁹⁶

The elements which are used in the analysis of phenomena may be of two kinds, although Weber only recognized the general ideal type. The other alternative, and the one preferred by Parsons, is the analytical element. An analytical element is a universal category which refers to a general property of an empirical phenomenon and the specific details of this property, in the particular case, constitute the facts describing the phenomenon. Parsons summarizes the differing character of the two kinds of element in this way;

"All concrete phenoman, including the particulars corresponding to ideal types, are capable of description only in terms of a specific combination of the values of analytical elements. The ideal type, being a universal does not involve a combination of specific values, but it does involve a fixed set of relations between the values of the analytical elements."⁹⁷

But for Parsons the danger of an exclusive reliance for general conceptualization upon ideal types," is a degree of rigidity and methodological atomism which, as noted above, is inconsistent with social reality.

The final issue Parsons examines in relation to Weber's theoretical strategy of formulating ideal types concerns his stated opposition to developing a general system of sociological theory. The formulation of increasingly abstract concepts is, for Weber, inconsistent with knowledge of social phenomena in their individuality. Given Weber's use of type concepts, this conclusion was correct because, Parsons argues, whenever these concepts are broadened to include more specific cases they increasingly lack empirical content. However, the use of analytic concepts avoids this problem and if a general theoretical system is developed,

"...there need be no fear of analytical abstraction on the score of its incompatibility with the concept of individuality. For the inherent nature of the frame of reference of a theoretical system sets a limit to the extent of abstraction which is possible or in any other way admissible within the range of any given type of focus of interest. The structure of such systems is most intimately related to Wertbeziehung." 98

(c) Functionalism and the Limits of Ideal Type Theory

Perhaps the most important change in Parsons' own theoretical and methodological views which had consequences for his interpretation and assessment of Weber's work occurred between the publication of The Structure of Social Action and his "Introduction" to The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, published 10 years later. In the former study Parsons was committed to the development of general analytic theory but he found the difficulties in

constructing such a theory to be insuperable, and so by the time of the later work, Parsons had adopted a structural-functionalist approach with the result that certain areas of Weber's methodology took on a new significance.⁹⁹

Parsons remains committed to the view that Weber's classification of types of action and social relationship presupposes an outline of the structure of a system of action. However, Parsons identifies a new weakness in the use of ideal type conceptualization because its emphasis upon extreme or limiting cases diverts attention from the conceptualization of empirical reality in terms of a system of action,

"... as a balance of forces in equilibrium of relative degrees of integration and disorganization." 100

This can be seen particularly clearly from Weber's use of the category of rational action, which was used by him to compare with actual cases in order to see the extent of the deviation of the real course of action from the rational norm. But this very rigid division between the rational and the non-rational hinders the possibility of viewing both kinds of element in terms of a system of action. Moreover, Parsons states that Weber's definitions of end and value rational action are defined inadequately because they do not describe all the components of a concrete act and, therefore, do not state the criteria according to which the actor chooses the appropriate means. In addition Parsons regards it as vital to refer to the external non-social situation, the personality of the actor concerned as well as the values which have been institutionalized in the society;

"They are essential to complete an 'objectively possible' description of a system to which the criteria of rationality apply," 101

For Parsons the cause of these problems is clear and can be explained by,

"... Weber's failure to carry through a systematic functional analysis of a generalized social system of action." 102

It is, of course, of some importance to Parsons' convergence thesis that Weber's stated restriction of the use of functional method in sociology to the role of preliminary analysis, can be placed in a different interpretive context and its impact relativized in the process.¹⁰³ He suggests that the functionalism used in the social sciences in Weber's time had close links with biological thought and produced serious difficulties when, for example, features of a particular society were explained in terms of their need to survive in a particular environment. In contrast, the more modern functionalist view of an organism or society was to examine them as a "going concern", an approach derived much more from physiological, rather than evolutionary thought. Although Weber had sharply contrasted his method of understanding the subjective aspect of action with a functionalist approach, Parsons counters by arguing

"He did not perceive that starting from the frame of reference of subjectively interpreted individual action ... it was possible by functionalist analysis to develop a generalized outline of social systems of action ... such an outline was ... to a large extent implicit in the structure of his own system of ideal types." 104

Parsons makes the point that Weber, in his analysis of individual motivation, makes use of the general categories of the orientation of action and they, by implication, presuppose that

social relationships are integrated within systems of action. Moreover, such a social system has to cope with an external situation and its various structural elements, such as individuals, roles and actions, must be sufficiently integrated for the various parts to function with some degree of harmony.¹⁰⁵ Therefore,

"Systematic investigation of the relations of human activity to the external situation and to other persons would reveal ... a coherent system of such generalized categories. These along with the basic modes of orientation of actions, are fundamental to the conception of a generalized system of action and relationships on the social level. And the systematic ordering of these categories is not possible without the functional point of view; it provides the integrating principles in terms of which such categories constitute a generalized system rather than an ad hoc collection of disconnected concepts." 106

Significantly, Parsons argues, Weber's motivational ideal types involve these situational and relational categories so that descriptions of social structures necessarily involve reference to the subjective point of view in exactly the same way as descriptions of individual actions. For Parsons, it is because Weber's concepts of motivation also involve social structural definitions of the situation, that his analysis of institutions has been so successful, particularly when judged in comparison with psychologically based explanations in terms of drives.¹⁰⁷

In the absence of the kind of dynamic analysis pioneered by classical mechanics, Parsons advocates a structural-functional method because it facilitates an understanding of the behaviour of a social system as a whole, in terms of the contribution of its various structures and processes to the

"maintenance of a level of functional performance by the system ... as a going concern." 108

And this, Parsons suggests, is precisely what Weber did by relating

the dynamic changes of social systems to the motives of individuals, although regrettably he did not pursue this course in a sufficiently systematic manner. Consequently,

"... there is implicit in the organization of his type system the outline of a systematized general theory." 109

According to Parsons although this was largely confined to the level of the structure of systems of action, had it been widened to include social groups and relationships, Weber would have undoubtedly recognized that functional analysis constitutes the most useful form of generalized theory.¹¹⁰

The examination of Parsons' version of Weber can now be brought to a close with a brief summary of its main points. The authoritativeness of his treatment of Weber derives from The Structure of Social Action, and depends both upon the extremely detailed and systematic nature of the analysis of Weber's theoretical, methodological and substantive inquiries,¹¹¹ and the fact that the inquiry takes place in the context of the convergence thesis. Now this theoretical argument had a specific structure, with the result that Parsons' account of Weber was "... not a general secondary interpretation."¹¹² Indeed, in response to some recent criticism Parsons has again emphasized that his "... initial study of Weber was not meant to be and was not a general assessment of evaluation of Weber's sociological theory".¹¹³ It was rather, an account which examined Weber's work purely from the point of view of its contribution to this convergent movement in European social thought into a new scientific form of sociological theory.

Parsons' General Theory of Action became widely accepted in sociology, especially in America and, inevitably, so too was his

view of the history of the discipline and in particular his estimation of Weber's contribution to the founding of systematic theory in sociology. Hence Parsons' interpretation and assessment of Weber came to be seen as definitive, with the result that he could claim, with considerable justification, in 1963 that the four chapters in The Structure of Social Action still contained "... the most comprehensive analytic treatment of Weber's accomplishments in theory."¹¹⁴

In the detailed examination of Parsons' version of Weber the distinction was drawn between the elements of Weber's approach which were favourable to convergence, and those which were not. The former category included Weber's use of general and theoretical concepts, the separation of science from value-judgement, the understanding of subjective meaning through the conceptual scheme of means-ends analysis rather than reliance upon intuition, the classification of types of social action and relationship, the use of the categories of interest, legitimacy and usage as an elementary outline of the structure of social action, and finally, the general significance of the concept of legitimacy which represents a type of social action based upon normative order. The latter group - the elements inconsistent with convergence - involved Weber's logical distinction between natural and social science in terms of the scientist's interest in the objects of study, together with the fictional view of ideal type concepts and the resulting opposition to a general conceptual scheme for the analysis of society.

The division of material helped to clarify the developmental nature of Parsons' interpretation of Weber. According to this viewpoint, Weber had, in his later work, moved away from the formulation of discrete sets of ideal type concepts to a more systematic classification of ideal types which implicitly depended upon a generalized theoretical system. In these terms Parsons was able to account for Weber's rejection of general theory in the field of the historico-cultural sciences, by identifying it as part of his earlier thinking on the problems of historical research. Whereas, towards the end of his life, he became more explicitly concerned with the nature of sociology and the specific problems associated with generalization and gradually moved away from his earlier views, although without full awareness of the steps he had taken.¹¹⁵

Essentially, therefore, Parsons' interpretation of Weber's theoretical, methodological and substantive analyses identifies his work as a transitional stage in the development of the modern discipline, having been successful in overcoming some, but not all, of the problems of idealism. For Parsons the result was an inevitable difficulty in incorporating the work into contemporary sociology because Weber's discrete sets of ideal types raised problems for the analysis of the transition between types which, for Parsons, could only be solved by a general theoretical system. Weber's ad hoc solutions to these problems which were based upon his encyclopaedic knowledge had tended to obscure the difficulties involved, and in a statement with which we shall conclude this

chapter, Parsons argues,

"... that in the hands of a scholar of lesser genius than Weber, it would be difficult to get comparable results through the use of his scheme. This may well be one principal reason for the relatively small cumulative outcome of Weber's work." 116

NOTES

1. Talcott Parsons, "'Capitalism' in Recent German Literature: Sombart and Weber", II Journal of Political Economy, 37 (1929), 31-51.
2. T. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, (New York: Free Press, 1937). All references are to the 1968 paperback edition.
3. T. Parsons, "Introduction" to Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, translated and edited by T. Parsons and A.M. Henderson, (New York: Free Press, 1947).
4. T. Parsons, "Introduction" to Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion, translated by E. Fischoff, (Boston: Beacon, 1962), reprinted in Parsons, Sociological Theory and Modern Society, (New York: Free Press, 1967).
5. T. Parsons, "Max Weber: 1864-1964", American Sociological Review, 30 (1964), 171-175.
6. T. Parsons, "Evaluation and Objectivity in Social Science: An Evaluation of Max Weber's Contribution", in his Sociological Theory and Modern Society, op.cit.
7. T. Parsons, "The Place of Ultimate Values in Sociological Theory", International Journal of Ethics, 45 (1935), 282-316; Review of A. von Schelting "Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre", American Sociological Review, 1 (1936), 675-681; "Unity and Diversity in the Modern Intellectual Disciplines: The Role of the Social Sciences", and "An Approach to the Sociology of Knowledge" both reprinted in Sociological Theory and Modern Society, op.cit.; "On 'De-Parsonizing Weber'", American Sociological Review, 40 (1975), 666-669; and "Reply to Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope", American Sociological Review, 41 (1976), 361-365.
8. Parsons emphasized that The Structure of Social Action was an independent theoretical investigation, not a secondary study. See Parsons op.cit., 15 and "On De-Parsonizing Weber", op.cit., 666 and 669.
9. By the mid-1960's Parsons' comments on Weber had become less critical because by then he had begun to focus exclusively upon what he saw to be the positive features of Weber's work.
10. For a different interpretation see D. Martindale, "Talcott Parsons' Theoretical Metamorphosis from Social Behaviourism to Macro-Functionalism", in H. Turk and R.L. Simpson (eds.), Institutions and Social Exchange, (New York: Bobbs-Merril, 1971), and J.F. Scott "The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme", American Sociological Review, 28 (1963), 716-735.

11. Parsons, "Introduction" to Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, op.cit., 8.
12. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 580.
13. Ibid., 579.
14. Max Weber, Economy and Society, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 1-28.
15. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 475.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 581.
18. Ibid., 478.
19. Ibid., 485. See also Parsons "Evaluation and Objectivity in Social Science: An Interpretation of Max Weber's Contribution", op.cit.; 82. Parsons examines in more detail the philosophical issues involved in German Idealism in his "Unity and Diversity in the Modern Intellectual Disciplines", op.cit., 173-180.
20. Parsons, "Introduction" to Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, op.cit., 9. See also Parsons "Social Interaction" in his Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, (New York: Free Press, 1977), 163.
21. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 579. In his analysis of Weber's critique of Objectivism and Idealism, Parsons closely follows Alexander von Schelting's treatment of these issues in his Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1934). For Parsons' overall estimation of von Schelting's study see his review of Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre, op.cit.
22. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 581.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 582. See also Parsons "Introduction" to Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, op.cit., 9.
25. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 582.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 583.
28. Ibid., 584.
29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 587. Here again Parsons follows von Schelting's analysis in his Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre, op.cit..
33. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 589.
34. Ibid., See also, Parsons, "Max Weber 1864-1964", op.cit., 173-4.
35. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 587, and "Max Weber 1864-1964", op.cit., 174.
36. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 588.
37. Ibid., 594, 638.
38. Ibid. See also "Evaluation and Objectivity in Social Science..." op.cit., 87 and "Introduction" to Max Weber The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, op.cit., 10.
39. Parsons, "Max Weber 1864-1964", op.cit., 173
40. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 594. "Evaluation and Objectivity in Social Science..." op.cit., 87, 91. On the schema of proof see "The University Bundle: A Study of the Balance Between Differentiation and Integration" in T. Parsons Action Theory and the Human Condition, (New York: Free Press, 1978), 142.
41. For a detailed examination of the relationship between the values of society and the selection of scientific problems see "An Approach to the Sociology of Knowledge", in Parsons, Sociological Theory and Modern Society, op.cit., 152.
42. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 600.
43. Ibid., 601. See also Parsons' review of von Schelting's Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre, op.cit., 679.
44. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 601.
45. Ibid., 594. The differences in emphasis between 1937 and 1964 may be explained in terms of Parsons' growing sensitivity to the criticism that his work is ideological.
46. Parsons, "Evaluation and Objectivity in Social Science...", op.cit., 85.
47. Ibid., 86.
48. Ibid.

49. Parsons, "Max Weber 1864-1964", op.cit., 173.
50. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 586.
51. Ibid., 590-1.
52. Parsons' detailed critique of Weber is examined in the second part of the chapter and assessed in Chapter 5, part 4(a).
53. Parsons, "Introduction" to Max Weber The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, op.cit., 3.
c.f. Parsons Action Theory and the Human Condition, op.cit., 355, 404.
54. Parsons, "Max Weber 1864-1964", op.cit., 174.
55. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 640.
56. Parsons, "Evaluation and Objectivity in Social Science...", op.cit., 88-9.
57. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 643-4.
58. Ibid., 645. Parsons argues that the four types of action are a source of ambiguity because they are used in different ways and, therefore, do not have the same theoretical status, see 643, 647. C.f. Parsons "Introduction" to Max Weber The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, op.cit., 14.
59. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 647-8.
60. Parsons, "Introduction" to Max Weber The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, op.cit., 14-15.
61. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 649.
62. Ibid., 650.
63. Ibid., 651.
64. Ibid., 652-3.
65. Ibid., 684-5.
66. Ibid., 661.
67. Ibid., 669.
68. Ibid., 582.
69. Parsons, "Evaluation and Objectivity in Social Science..." op.cit., 92 and "Max Weber 1864-1964", op.cit., 174.

70. Parsons, "Evaluation and Objectivity in Social Science..."
op.cit., 93.
71. Parsons, "Max Weber 1864-1964", op.cit., 174.
72. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 683.
73. Ibid., 684.
74. Ibid., 683.
75. Ibid., 684.
76. Ibid., 591-2.
77. Ibid., 591.
78. Ibid., 592.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid., 593.
81. Ibid., 597.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid., 598-9. C.f. Arun Sahay, Sociological Analysis,
(London: Routledge, 1972), 147.
84. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 603.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid., 604. C.f. his review of von Schelting's
Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre, op.cit.
87. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 605.
88. Ibid., 606.
89. Ibid., 607.
90. Ibid., 608-9.
91. Ibid., 609.
92. Ibid., 617. C.f. his "Introduction" to Max Weber
The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, op.cit., 13.
93. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 618.
94. Ibid., 626.

95. Ibid., 610-12. See also Parsons "Introduction" to Max Weber The Sociology of Religion, op.cit., 38, "Max Weber 1864-1964", op.cit., 175 and "Evaluation and Objectivity in Social Science...", op.cit., 88.
96. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 612-3.
97. Ibid., 621.
98. Ibid., 635.
99. These changes led to the allegation that his work had moved away from a reliance upon Weber to an increasing dependence upon a Durkheimian approach which left the status of voluntarism somewhat obscure. See D. Martindale, "Talcott Parsons' - Theoretical Metamorphosis from Social Behaviourism to Macro-Functionalism", op.cit., and J.F. Scott, "The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme", American Sociological Review, op.cit.
100. Parsons "Introduction" to Max Weber The Sociology of Religion, op.cit., 15.
101. Ibid., 17.
102. Ibid., 18.
103. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 15-16.
104. Parsons "Introduction" to Max Weber The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, op.cit., 20.
105. Ibid., 21.
106. Ibid., 22.
107. Ibid., 23 and "Introduction" to Max Weber The Sociology of Religion, op.cit., 75.
108. Parsons "Introduction" to Max Weber The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, op.cit., 26.
109. Ibid., 28.
110. Ibid.
111. An important element in the authoritativeness of this study can be explained by Parsons' reliance upon von Schelting's analysis of the epistemological and methodological nature of Weber's work. See A. Sahay, Sociological Analysis, op.cit., 18.
112. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 15.

- 113. Parsons, "On 'De-Parsonizing Weber'", op.cit., 669.
- 114. Parsons, "Introduction" to Max Weber The Sociology of Religion, op.cit., 41.
- 115. Parsons, Action Theory and the Human Condition, op.cit., 355.
- 116. Parsons "Introduction" to Max Weber The Sociology of Religion, op.cit., 77.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PARSONIAN THEORY OF ACTION

The term "Theory of Action" is generally understood in contemporary sociology to be synonymous with the work of Talcott Parsons¹ and derives its meaning from the synthesis he constructed from amongst the particular approaches developed by the four social scientists whom he regarded as the most eminent of the generation living and working at the beginning of the 20th Century. It represents a movement towards agreement over certain fundamental principles, concepts and procedures and could be seen most explicitly in the work of Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber, but was by no means exclusively confined to them.² In his original statement of the convergence toward a common set of categories which describe the structure of social action, Parsons examined the sociological contributions of Durkheim and Weber, the perspective developed by Pareto, who was both economist and sociologist, and the work of Marshall which fell more strictly within the discipline of economics. Subsequently Parsons has suggested that the convergence can be seen in a wider context, and that the work of Freud in psychology,³ and the views of the social psychologists Mead and Thomas,⁴ all represent movements towards the same set of assumptions and strategies.⁵

However, the essential point about convergence is that this body of concepts represents the foundations from which Parsons has derived the methodological and theoretical framework of the General Theory of Action together with the more specific schemes for the analysis of social systems. The Structure of Social Action represents only the starting point for the general theory of action

because although the main features of his theoretical strategy are established in the course of his analysis of the structural features of social action, it is not until 1951 with the publication of Toward a General Theory of Action that Parsons specifically attempts to formulate the system of analytic elements which have been his long-term objective. Undoubtedly there have been changes in Parsons' work, but it is a mistake to regard these as anything more than the extension, refinement and application to new levels, of the earlier ideas. In particular, there is little evidence to support the claims made, for instance, by Scott and Martindale, that there have been radical breaks between one form of his General Theory of Action and another.⁶ Parsons has consistently emphasized the continuing importance of his original synthesis and the progressively incremental nature of his career as a theorist: his theoretical work

"... has been characterized by a complicated balance between continuity and developmental change. With respect to certain conceptual fundamentals ... there has been essential continuity over the forty year period since The Structure of Social Action. This continuity has centred above all on the "mining" of the theoretical richness of the works of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, attempting not only to understand them but to use them constructively for further theoretical development." 7

Let us begin, therefore, by situating The Structure of Social Action in the context of Parsons' overall career. In 1968 Parsons referred to three distinct phases in the development of his work since its publication in 1937. The first stage emphasized a structural-functional mode of analysis which was strongly influenced by W.B. Cannon's work in biology and to a lesser extent Radcliffe-Brown's approach to anthropology. It represented a change in the

understanding of the concept of system which had originally been based upon the ideas of Henderson, Pareto and Schumpeter, and the practice of economics and physics. In this period Parsons' work was broadened to take account of psychological theories of the personality and he saw in this some important parallels with Durkheim's examination of the way the individual internalizes social and cultural norms.⁸ This structural-functional form of theory is to be found in Toward a General Theory of Action and, more specifically concerned with the subject matter of sociology, in The Social System.⁹

The publication with Smelser in 1956 of Economy and Society¹⁰ marked the next stage and was based upon developing the implications of a revised version of the pattern-variable scheme formulated in Working Papers in the Theory of Action,¹¹ and applied in Family, Socialization and Interaction Process.¹² This involved moving away from the Paretean conception of economic theory as an analytic scheme within the theory of social systems and the adoption of the view that the economy could be examined as a sub-system of society, a sub-system related in specific ways to other sub-systems, all of which could be analyzed in terms of the four-function paradigm. This led to the identification of the four primary functional sub-systems of society, namely, the economy, the polity, the societal community and the pattern maintenance sub-system, and, in turn, to an interest in the generalized media of exchange.¹³

The third phase was initially documented by the article "Evolutionary Universals in Society"¹⁴ and subsequently amplified in Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives¹⁵ and The Systems of Modern Societies¹⁶; it is based upon an increased

awareness of the importance of social change, which is analyzed in terms of the paradigm of differentiation, inclusion, upgrading and value generalization.¹⁷ At this time Parsons began to reconsider the relationship between the organic world and the human action system through an interest in the processes of biological evolution; in particular he was impressed by the similarities between the concept of society and that of population, as used in biological evolution, and between the processes of natural selection and institutionalization which he regarded as a marked theme of Weber's work.¹⁸ This led to Parsons' final concern, an attempt to go beyond the general system of action and to systematically develop a wider framework, which he called the Human Condition. This constitutes the environment for the action frame of reference and, consequently, the boundary between the action and the organic systems figures prominently.¹⁹ It is represented by his Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory²⁰ and Action Theory and the Human Condition.²¹

The richness, complexity and sheer scale of the Parsonian Theory of Action makes it appropriate at this point to specify the nature of our interest in this body of work. The primary reference point is its relationship to the work of Max Weber, represented in particular by the convergence thesis. According to this complex argument Parsons' claimed to have incorporated the Weberian perspective into a synthesis with other approaches, and thereby to have substantially improved the reliability and generality of the sciences dealing with human action through the establishment of a much more secure methodological and theoretical foundation. Consequently, it is important, first of all, to clarify the nature

of Parsons' theoretical strategy and the epistemological and methodological basis of his categories, and second, the details of the convergence into the Theory of Action, before there can be any discussion of the "incorporation" of Weber's sociological perspective into this wider theoretical approach. Inevitably, then, Parsons' earlier work will figure prominently²² whereas his later work, although relevant to the issue of the theoretical continuity of the various stages of analytic scheme, will be examined more in terms of formal characteristics than substantive details, given the fact that Parsons extended much of his analysis into areas not explicitly covered by Weber.

The analysis of Parsons' Theory of Action is divided into two parts: the first looks at the origin of Parsonian sociology in the convergence of the four theoretical systems, as a preliminary to the second, which deals with the subsequent stages of development of his ideas, together with the main weaknesses which have been identified by his critics. The issues examined in each part are sufficiently extensive and coherent to justify their division into separate chapters and, finally, it is worth noting that largely as a result of the contrasting issues involved, the two chapters have distinctive styles. This chapter is largely expository in nature and seeks to establish both the basic features of Parsons' theoretical and methodological approach and the extent to which Parsons has demonstrated their validity. The following chapter is more critical, and deals with contemporary assessments of Parsons work, its influence, and the various responses to it, and is organized around the three key issues of testability, objectivity and the centrality to Parsonian theory of the subjective

point of view. The aim is to show how the particular characteristics of Parsons' work led directly to the "crisis" in sociology and to demands for radical revisions in the discipline. Indeed, the failure to find an adequate basis for criticism of Parsons' work, allied to dissatisfaction with its ostensible nature - which appeared to many commentators to be inconsistent with their experience of reality - led to the undermining of some of the most basic principles of sociology as it had hitherto been understood.

I EPISTEMOLOGICAL, METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

In The Structure of Social Action Parsons presented systematically for the first time his views on the nature of reality, the role of concepts and the possibilities of human knowledge within a framework which he called Analytic Realism. Prior to this his discussions of social scientific theory had been much more fragmentary and had centred on the status of economic theory in relation to a set of sociological factors.²³ Undoubtedly the single most important influence upon the development of Analytic Realism was the work of the philosopher A.N. Whitehead.²⁴ He emphasized the importance of constructing a system of theory in its own right rather than merely basing theory upon validated statements of fact; he drew attention to the abstract nature of theory vis a vis the empirical reality to which it referred, through his idea of the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness"²⁵; and, in addition, he stressed the continuities between the social and the physical worlds. There have, of course, been other influences upon Parsons' views on scientific cognition, for example, W.B. Cannon, J.B. Conant, L.J. Henderson as well as Max Weber, who Parsons suggests, showed how scientific method could be applied to historical and cultural material. But the main features of Parsons' thinking in this area are derived from Whitehead,²⁶ and this is perhaps nowhere more true than in the case of his reputation as an "incurable theorist".²⁷

In more detail, then, Analytic Realism is based upon the epistemological assumption that there is an external world, and that this world of empirical phenomena has a particular nature which

makes it accessible to human inquiry.

"...its order must be of a character which is in some sense, congruent with the order of human logic. Events in it cannot occur simply at random, in the sense which is the negation of logical order. For a common feature of all scientific theory is the logicity of the relations between its propositions." 28

However, all knowledge of this world of empirical phenomena is abstract when it is considered in relation to the raw data of sense experience although there are certain general concepts in science - Parsons calls them the "analytic elements" - which can adequately represent aspects of this empirical reality for specific purposes. These elements correspond to components of empirical phenomena which can be analytically separated from other components.²⁹

Scientific inquiry is dependent upon observation, and for Parsons, observation of empirical fact is only possible through a conceptual scheme with the result that the very notion of a fact is relative to such a scheme.³⁰ Conceptual schemes which Parsons also calls descriptive frames of reference make possible the description of particular phenomena:

"... of the great mass of possible empirical observations we select those which are at the same time meaningful within such a schema and 'belong together'. They thus serve together to characterize the essential aspects of concrete phenomenon, which then becomes the object of scientific interest." 31

Once a phenomenon has been conceptualized in terms of a descriptive frame of reference, the next step in the scientific process is its analysis into its constituent parts or units. There are various forms of analysis depending upon the nature of the phenomenon under investigation; a machine can be taken apart to reveal its separate components and, in an analogous fashion, the various structural elements of a biological organism can be identified, although this

can lead to rather fictional concepts because organic phenomena cannot be broken up without substantially altering the phenomena themselves. Also a sequence of actions may be analyzed into its different component acts, and the key to this procedure is the ability to imagine a particular act as a pure type, quite distinct from all other kinds of act. However, irrespective of the level of abstraction the methodological purpose of the unit or part concept remains the same:

"It refers to an, actually or hypothetically, existent concrete entity. However much the concept of the 'pure type', especially in the 'organic' case, may differ from anything concretely observable, the test is that thinking of it as concretely existent makes sense, that is does not involve a contradiction in terms." 32

Hence an empirical generalization is formulated on the basis of

"...the possible or probable behaviour of such concrete or hypothetically concrete 'parts' of concrete phenomena, or various combinations of them, under given typical circumstances." 33

The role of the analytic element is, however, quite different.

These concepts represent the general properties which can be identified once phenomena have been analyzed into their actually or hypothetically concrete parts or units because each unit or part constitutes a specific combination of such general properties.

"Thus a physical body is described as having a certain particular mass, velocity, location, etc., in the respects relevant to the theory of mechanics. Similarly an act may be described as having a certain degree of rationality, of disinterestedness, etc." 34

The analytic element is inevitably abstract because

"... it refers to a general property while what we actually observe is only its particular 'value' in the particular case." 35

Parsons sees the relationship between, on the one hand, analytic elements and on the other, the unit and part concepts, to be based upon different kinds of abstraction.

"From the point of view of element analysis every unit or part, concretely or conceptually isolated, constitutes a specific combination of the particular values of one or more analytical elements ... The element, on the other hand, may be the universal (1), of which the particular unit as a whole is a particular, (2) of which one or more facts describing it are particulars, (3) which corresponds to one or more emergent properties of complex combinations of such units." 36

However, the analytic elements are crucial to the development of science because, Parsons argues, once they have been clearly defined it has been a feature of the various sciences that a pattern of uniform relationships has been discovered between them: he calls such relationships analytical laws.³⁷

Consequently, for Parsons, all theoretical systems are made up of these three different kinds of concept: conceptual schemes, units and parts, and analytical elements.

"They are so closely interdependent that there is never a system of analytical elements without a corresponding frame of reference and a conception of the structure of the concrete systems to which it applies as made up of certain kinds of units or parts." 38

II

CONVERGENCE AND THE VOLUNTARISTIC THEORY OF ACTION

In view of the enormity of the material Parsons examines in the course of developing his argument, it will be useful to separate out certain themes from the substantive detail of convergence. This will provide some guidelines for examining the significance of particular factors within the Parsonian thesis.

(a) Preliminary Considerations

The Structure of Social Action is a particularly complex book because Parsons attempts to demonstrate not one but two hypotheses, which are in effect mutually supporting. The rather better known argument concerns a convergence between the different traditions of European social and economic thought toward the Voluntaristic Theory of Action, but the framework of this analysis is provided by the second hypothesis which is a methodological proposition concerning the way scientific knowledge advances. Hence the convergence in social thought becomes corroborating evidence for Parsons' view on the nature of the development of scientific theory and, thereby, a justification for his strategy for the development of Grand Theory³⁹ - namely the exclusive concentration upon theoretical issues. Significantly, little attention has been paid to Parsons' ideas on the process of scientific development by his critics and commentators - indeed this reflects a lack of interest, until quite recently, in the convergence thesis as a whole⁴⁰ - and it is for this reason that we shall begin by considering scientific progress in terms of the relationship between fact and theory.

According to Parsons it is widely believed that scientific knowledge develops on the basis of the accumulation of new discoveries and in this process the role for theory is to formulate propositions based upon this ever increasing body of information.

"Development of theory would consist entirely in the process of modification of these general statements to take account of new discoveries of fact. Above all, the process of discovery of fact is held to be essentially independent of the existing body of 'theory' to be the result of some such impulse as idle curiosity." 41

However, for Parsons the role of scientific theory is much more independent: whilst a theory must be consistent with empirical information, by itself this information does not exclusively determine the shape of the theory. A system of theory has a clear logical structure with the result that a change in one proposition will have implications for some of the others; Parsons continues,

"... any important change in our knowledge of fact in the field in question must of itself change the statement of at least one of the propositions of the theoretical system and, through the logical consequences of this change, that of other propositions to a greater or lesser degree. That is to say, the structure of the theoretical system is changed." 42

It is in the implications which new factual information have for the structure of a theoretical system that its scientific importance lies, and this distinguishes it from other facts which may be equally true but are quite unremarkable because they remain consistent with existing theories. In addition, Parsons argues, the structure of a theory concentrates interest upon certain kinds of fact:

"Theory not only formulates what we know but also tells us what we want to know, that is, the question to which an answer is needed. Moreover, the structure of a theoretical system tells us what alternatives are open in the possible answers to a given question. If observed facts of undoubted accuracy will not fit any of the alternatives it leaves open, the system itself is in need of reconstruction." 43

Thus the aim of the development of a theoretical system is to achieve logical closure; this is realized Parsons argues,

"... when each of the logical implications which can be derived from any one proposition within the system finds its statement within another proposition in the same system." 44

However, as long as the theoretical propositions do not form a closed system in this sense, it is apparent that some implicit assumptions are involved, and for Parsons their discovery is one of the main objectives of theoretical work.

Parsons' views about the advance of scientific knowledge can be summarized as follows: the development of the structure of a theoretical system is the result of combining new factual discoveries with the changing generalizations which are possible about the particular body of information.

Parsons' detailed proof of this argument - his examination of the work of Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber - is concerned, therefore, with possible connections between changes in their empirical interpretations and changes in their respective theoretical systems. He begins by examining the origin of the Voluntaristic Theory of Action in the general positivistic tradition represented by Durkheim and, the utilitarian approach exemplified by Marshall and Pareto and, then argues, that a very similar perspective was developed by Weber in the context of idealism. The rationale for this argument is that the writers who collectively were the most

eminent of their generation each began within a certain tradition or theoretical system, but as a result of their inquiries which they pursued further than their contemporaries they were able to recognize more clearly than anyone else, the limitations of their tradition. Consequently, Parsons argues, they modified their theoretical systems to fit the new facts and generalizations which they had discovered. Although not explicitly aware of it the four writers had moved away from their heterogeneous starting points and arrived at what was to all intents and purposes a single theoretical system, which Parsons was able to codify and elaborate under the rubric of the Voluntaristic Theory of Action.

The final question we must consider before turning to the substantive details of convergence is this: Why did Parsons choose to develop a general theory of action - a theoretical framework broad enough to include within it all of the social sciences - rather than concerning himself specifically with the development of a theoretical system for sociology? There are perhaps two sets of factors here. First, as was observed above, his conception of scientific theory was strongly influenced by Whitehead's work, with the result that his desire to emulate the notable theoretical advances in the study of natural phenomena crystallized around the attempt to formulate a general theory applicable to human action. In addition, and perhaps more revealingly for our purposes, the ambitiousness of his objective can be usefully related to his biographical circumstances, in particular his adoption of a career in sociology after an earlier start in economics.⁴⁵

His doctoral dissertation at Heidelberg had been concerned with the problem of the origin and nature of capitalism, as seen by Sombart and Weber, and this initial study led Parsons to the realization that the interpretation of the economic institutions of the modern world,

"... could not be adequately handled without attempting to make far more explicit than was ordinarily done the extra-economic theoretical framework within which economic theory would have to be made to fit." 46

Given Parsons' distinction between analytic and historical sciences, the interpretation or explanation of any empirical phenomenon required the utilization of concepts derived from several analytic schemes with the result that there was a vital need for a general theory or framework which could facilitate the coordination of particular schemes and ensure the compatibility of both terminology and the logical structure of different theoretical schemes. This is precisely what Parsons attempted to do through his examination of the structure of social action and his formulation of the Action Frame of Reference.

Economic theory played a crucial role in Parsons' deliberations because it was the only form of theory in the area of the social sciences which resembled physical theory in terms of generality, analytic power and systematization.

"Economic theory, broadly at the level achieved by Marshall, was undoubtedly the most highly sophisticated theoretical scheme yet developed for the analysis of any phase of human behaviour..." 47

However, this theory was not without its problems which concerned, in particular, its relationship to reality; the elegant analytic models were based upon limited sets of variables and artificial assumptions about people's actions and it is, Parsons argues, for

this reason that

"... the most important theoretical contribution of The Structure of Social Action was the demonstration of a systematic range of problems on the borderline of this theory, and a convergent body of concepts oriented toward dealing with these problems. The most fundamental of these was ... the problem of order. It included also the problem of "rationality" and the clarification of the two basic meanings of the concept, the "psychological" meaning of motivational components accounting for deviations from rational norms, and, on the other hand, the "cultural" concepts of values, "ultimate ends", and so forth, which were non rational rather than irrational. These were all related to and underlay the conception of a normative order of institutions such as contract, property, authority, and so forth, and some reconstruction of the relation between these institutions and the "self-interest" which was the focus of the motivational conceptions in economic tradition. They included the anchorage of the "moral authority" of normative patterns in religious commitments as analyzed in Durkheim's and Weber's concepts, respectively, of the sacred and of charisma." 48

(b) Substantive Convergence

The central feature of Parsons argument is the recognition of several distinct traditions following their own logical courses of development toward a more scientific or accurate account of social reality. Parsons regarded these developments as preliminary attempts to formulate a general theory of action, although the participants were not necessarily aware of this, nor for that matter would all of them have approved of it. He drew a broad distinction between two main groups, namely positivism and idealism. The positivists attempted to develop a theory of human conduct in the manner of the natural sciences, consequently they looked for explanations in terms of scientific laws which assumed a determinism of social phenomena in terms of cause and effect. In contrast to this the idealists sought to explain social phenomena as manifestations of cultural values. For Parsons each tradition had considerable

insight, but it was insufficient by itself to establish a general theory. In relation to positivism, for example, Parsons argues that,

"... each of the main categories developed has found, subject, of course, to qualifications and refinement, a permanent place in the attack on the problems of human behaviour." 49

The difficulty which remained, however, was to find the right way to combine these various categories into a system of theory which could adequately explain social life: this is the task he set himself in The Structure of Social Action. Writing some 30 years after the publication of the book, Parsons assessment of his interest in the work of Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber remained unchanged; it was,

"... to demonstrate in them the emergence of a single, basically integrated, if fragmentary theoretical movement. This made it necessary to work out independently the main structure of the theoretical scheme in terms of which the unity of the intellectual movement could be demonstrated. The general theory of the 'structure of social action' which constitutes the framework of the book - and the justification for its title - was not simply a 'summary' of the works of the four theorists. It was an independent theoretical contribution..." 50

Parsons took as his point of departure the utilitarian tradition, which had gained a dominant position in European social thought in the 19th Century. Its significance for Parsons lay in the emphasis given to the conception of intrinsically rational action and consequently its incorporation of the subjective point of view into the study of action

"Action is rational in so far as it pursues ends possible within the conditions of the situation, and by the means which, among those available to the actor, are intrinsically best adapted to the end for reasons understandable and verifiable by positive empirical science." 51

The utilitarians conceived of the actor in everyday life as faced with situations requiring a choice between alternative means to achieve ends in an analogous fashion to the scientist's efforts to solve problems through the application of knowledge. This had the advantage that analysis in terms of the means-ends schema fully conformed to the methodological procedures of positive science, but it did mean that categories of empirical actions such as, for example, ritual, were almost entirely ignored. In addition, Parsons suggests that the other main features of the tradition were as follows: atomism ~ a tendency to establish the nature of systems of action solely on the basis of generalization from the properties of conceptually isolated unit acts, together with the assumption that the rationality of the unit act applied to complete empirical systems of action; the randomness of wants ~ the assumption that individuals and their ends were unique meant that little attention was paid to the possibility of the integration into a coherent system of the ends of action for the participants in specific settings; and empiricism ~ the belief that the various conceptual elements of a theory were sufficient in themselves to account for a particular range or class of empirical phenomena.⁵²

The result was a system of theory which concentrated its attention upon the relationship between means and ends, very much to the detriment of the category of ultimate ends which were assumed, both for the individual and the members of society, to be randomly related; although it was often implicitly assumed that in a free and rational society orderly and peaceful social relationships would be inevitable. However, this was an unsatisfactory theoretical position for Parsons who argued that unless some attempt was made to

systematically relate the ultimate ends of action to each other, a general theory was impossible.

Various attempts were made to question the utilitarian assumption concerning the randomness of ends, but the result was the incorporation of the ends of action into the conditions of the situation. This meant that the analytic independence of the category of ends disappeared together with the independence of the actor who was now conceptualized as merely adapting to the social context, in other words, action was seen to be determined by the conditions of the situation.⁵³ Parsons refers to the problem of the status of the ends of action as the utilitarian dilemma.

"That is, either the active agency of the actor in the choice of ends is an independent factor in action, and the end element must be random, or the objectional implication of randomness of ends is denied, but then their independence disappears and they are assimilated to the conditions of the situation, that is to elements analyzable in terms of non-subjective categories, principally heredity and environment." 54

But in this case, Parsons argued, the position could no longer be described in voluntaristic terms.

Another problem was faced by the positivist movement which gained its coherence from the assumption that,

"... positive science constitutes man's sole possible significant cognitive relation to external (nonego) reality." 55

Although individualistic and rationalistic theories could be successfully applied to rational conduct this meant that the non-rational element in social life was either totally forgotten, or all deviations from rational standards were explained in terms of ignorance and error; in particular, then, there could be no satisfactory examination of ritual actions.

Within the broad positivistic framework the work of Hobbes came to occupy an important position and his problem of order has remained an enduring theme in Parsons' work. Hobbes believed that mankind was guided by a variety of passions not all of which could be realized. The desires were regarded as randomly related to each other and the role allocated to the individual's intellect was merely one of serving to achieve what is desired. The members of society pursue different desires which inevitably bring them into conflict with each other in the course of the struggle to achieve their particular objectives. The ability to realize what is desired depends upon the individual's power, and in these circumstances people resort to the use of force and fraud. In order to avoid this kind of chaos, Hobbes argued, the members of society give power to a sovereign who in return gives them security through the establishment of rules governing interaction.⁵⁶ This form of theory was based squarely in the utilitarian tradition; according to Parsons it deduced a concrete situation justifying the role of a monarch directly from the theoretical system, and in particular, from the problem of order. Subsequently, this problem became the main empirical difficulty for the utilitarian tradition because it could only be solved by abandoning the positivistic framework or by accepting a form of radical positivism.

Having clarified this preparatory material it is now possible to see why the nature and role of economic theory - and as a representative of this, the work of Alfred Marshall - is such a key feature of Parsons' theoretical concerns. Given that economic actions are empirically important in social life, Parsons asks,

"How is it possible, still making use of the general action schema, to solve the Hobbesian problem of order and yet not make use of an objectionable metaphysical prop as the doctrine of the natural identity of interests?" 57

The basic instability of the utilitarian theoretical system, vis a vis the problem of order - either increasing reliance upon nonscientific elements or decreasing importance attached to normative elements - provides the organizing thread for Parsons' analysis of the economic theories of Marshall and Pareto in relation to a broader set of sociological factors.

Alfred Marshall made important contributions to economics with his utility theory, an innovation closely associated with the traditional elements of utilitarianism but for Parsons there is another aspect to his work, the attempt to relate economic conditions to the human character. Marshall went beyond the utilitarians in refusing to accept the assumption of independent wants, nor did he see peoples' actions merely as a means to want satisfaction, and developed an additional category, that of activities. Parsons argues that this was a value factor:

"Concrete economic actions are held to be not merely means to the acquisition of purchasing power. They are also carried on for their own sake, they are modes of the immediate expression of ultimate value attitudes in action." 58

This is corroborated by the fact that where Marshall saw the utility elements to be inadequate he did not invoke hedonistic explanations as had frequently been the case in positivist thought, nor did he emphasise heredity and environment. Marshall supported free enterprise because he considered that it provided the opportunity to develop the moral qualities of an individual's character, particularly

those which he valued. And in direct contrast to the utilitarian tradition, individualistic society was not to be understood purely in terms of rational want satisfaction, rather it was seen to be based upon certain values. For Parsons this formulation is in broad agreement with the views of Durkheim and Weber.

According to Parsons, the significance of this point was somewhat obscured by Marshall's empiricist approach, whereby he attempted a complete explanation of the empirical phenomena of business life. The disadvantage of this position is that it rests implicitly upon the need for an encyclopaedic sociology which inevitably submerged the logically distinct body of economic principles.⁵⁹

Parsons summarizes Marshall's contribution to a general theory of action, in this way: first, he showed the importance of common values for the explanation of an individualistic order like free enterprise; second, he made the relationship between the value element and economics a methodological issue; and third, he brought attention to bear upon the fact that the subjective analysis of action in terms of the means-end schema could be the basis for the classification of the social sciences. For Parsons these three issues are the most important methodological problems to be examined in The Structure of Social Action,⁶⁰

Vilfredo Pareto

In contrast to Marshall's views Pareto's methodology was extremely sophisticated, and of the four writers examined, the most consistent with Parsons' own position;

"There is in it nothing essential on either the methodological or theoretical level which from the point of view of this study, must be discarded." 61

Of particular importance to Parsons is the fact that whilst Pareto was guided by his experience of the physical sciences in the formulation of his systematic theory of social life he did not incorporate any of their substantive concepts. Moreover,

"His approach to sociology and the general methodology of social science is throughout determined by the question of the status of the concepts of traditional economic theory in relation both to concrete reality and to other theoretical schemata." 62

Pareto, then, was not an empiricist and for this reason was able to develop a system of economic theory as an abstract discipline; he recognized that theories are selective in relation to empirical reality, that analytic laws are not generalizations about the behaviour of concrete phenomena and that the formulation of such generalizations necessitates the amalgamation of several systems of theory.⁶³

In his consideration of the social element Pareto distinguished between two groups of actions, the logical and the non-logical. Logical action referred closely to the class of empirical actions traditionally dealt with by economic theory, whereas the non-logical covers an area of life which can be added to the abstract analytic scheme of economics. This enabled him to distinguish more clearly than Marshall had been able, between the categories of utility and activities. Pareto's strategy was to develop a system of analytic elements dealing with non-logical actions - broadly the social factor - and then to synthesize them with the economic elements as a basis for explaining concrete social systems. Parsons' aim is, as we have seen, more modest; it is to

develop an outline of the structure of systems of action,

Nevertheless, Parsons says this of Pareto:

"... his own system is not incompatible with this structural analysis, but its absence may be justly regarded as a limitation on the completeness of his work regarded as a treatise on general sociology. 64

In addition

... its very incompleteness is one thing which makes it particularly useful for the purposes of this study, since it provides an excellent medium for verification of the analysis attempted here, in spite of not stating the analysis explicitly." 65

It is for this reason that Parsons utilizes the distinction between logical and non-logical action as a starting point for his own analysis of the structure of systems of action, whereas Pareto had made it the basis for his classification of residues and derivations.

For Pareto an action is logical when the objective end and the subjective end coincide: this characterization makes it clear that the subjective point of view is crucial to his approach as also is the rational norm of action which was such a feature of the positivistic theory.⁶⁶ But in contrast to Pareto who examined action in systems synthetically, Parsons considers them analytically, and in this way it becomes possible to see particular acts as part of a sequence or chain of related acts. On this basis Parsons identifies three sectors of the means-end relationship - the ultimate means and conditions of action, an intermediate sector, and the category of ultimate ends.⁶⁷ Identifying the economic element of the intermediate sector of logical action with the allocation of scarce means to particular ends, Parsons comments;

"... if the concept of logical action be accepted at all the meaning of rationality must be extended from the relations of means to a single given end, to include an element of the choice between alternative ends." 68

In his view to speak of choice logically implies that the ends of action form part of a meaningfully integrated system. Hence, Parsons argues, each individual's actions must be related to his or her system of ultimate ends. When action is examined at a more complex level, involving a variety of actors, the use of coercion in social relationships becomes a real possibility. For Parsons the political aspect of the intermediate sector of the means-end relationship refers to the potential use of coercion over others to facilitate the realization of one individual's ends,⁶⁹ and this, of course, brings our attention back to the problem of order.

The basis for Pareto's solution to this problem lay in the role of the value element in social life; Parsons finds corroboration of his analysis of the intrinsic means-end schema and this applies particularly to his view that the ultimate ends of action form a coherent system in contrast to the utilitarian assumption of a random relationship between the ends of action - in Pareto's examinations of social utility. Pareto developed this concept to correspond to the economists' doctrine that the maximum satisfaction for the individual leads to a society in which there is the greatest possible satisfaction of the wants of all the members of society, and he applied it specifically to non-economic wants or ends. In the formulation of this idea Pareto distinguishes between two abstract types of society, and in one

of the cases refers to the end which the society pursues, For Parsons this point is of enormous significance:

"This is surely considering the collectivity as a unity, a unity in the sense that the society can be thought of as pursuing a single common end (or system or ends) and not merely discrete individuals ends. 70

Whilst human society is clearly not the same as the abstract type, it is clear to Parsons that Pareto regarded the end which the society pursues as an important element in the empirical world. Moreover, if end is to be used as a subjective category, then the "end of the society" must constitute an integrated system of aims and objectives common to all its members in this abstract and extreme case. For Parsons the category of a system of ends held in common is an emergent property of systems of action and does not apply to the consideration of isolated individual acts and this is one of the main reasons why it was ignored within the utilitarian approach. Parsons finds additional corroboration for his interpretation of the role of the value elements in social life in Pareto's cyclical theory of social change which emphasizes the importance of ideology.⁷¹ The contrast between this theory and Marshall's evolutionary approach to social change based upon increasing rationality within society is of special interest to Parsons because it demonstrates his views on the intimate connection between changes in theoretical systems and empirical interpretations.⁷²

The importance of Pareto's analysis of logical and non-logical action to Parsons' argument lies in his transcendence of the individualistic bias of the positivistic tradition of thought, through his stress upon a shared system of ultimate values as an element in action. In addition action is analyzed in terms of the scientific standards inherent in the means-ends schema, and the individual is seen to be integrated with others, to varying degrees, through common ultimate values. For all of these reasons, therefore, Parsons is emphatic that Pareto's work represents a Voluntaristic Theory of Action.

Emile Durkheim

Durkheim, unlike Marshall and Pareto, had no training in economics. His background was instead, in law and philosophy, but despite this he made, in Parsons' view, a major contribution to empirical science:

"... at every critical point, there is the closest possible relationship between his theoretical views even on the most abstrusely methodological plane, and the problems of interpretation of empirical material with which he was struggling at the same time." 73

Although Durkheim was more interested in the structure of social action than Pareto, his work lacked the latter's theoretical and methodological consistency and underwent quite distinct transformations in its development with the result that his contribution to the convergent body of concepts is inherently more complicated to establish because it involves Parsons in considerable analysis to separate out certain metaphysical elements.

Durkheim's importance to Parsons can be traced to his critical examination of the utilitarian interpretation of an individualistic social order, and his view that a free enterprise

society can only be understood in terms of a set of normative rules governing social relationships; a viewpoint which is in broad agreement with that of Marshall.⁷⁴ In opposition to individualistic thought, Durkheim proposed the idea of a society as a reality sui generis, and for Parsons this represents a major step towards the solution of the problem of order:

"... in his criticism of the utilitarian conception of contractual relations he sets over against their view that the stability of a contractual system involves only an ad hoc conciliation of interests his own insistence that a vital part is played by a system of binding rules embodied in the institution of contract; without them, indeed, a stable system of such relations would not be conceivable. Thus the emphasis on the normative rule as an agency controlling individual conduct." 75

According to Parsons, in the examination of anomie in his study of suicide, Durkheim goes further:

"There, not merely contractual relationships but stable social relationships in general and even the personal equilibrium of the members of a social group are seen to be dependent on the existence of a normative structure in relation to conduct, generally accepted as having moral authority by the members of the community, and upon their effective subordination to these norms." 76

This formulation was of particular significance to Parsons because it is couched in terms of the subjective point of view of the actor and the utilitarian dilemma is rejected without resorting to the positivistic view that rules externally regulate peoples' behaviour; instead the rules are seen to be part of the actor's ends and in this way constraint becomes part of the normative orientation of action. Hence what was for Parsons the characteristically Durkheimian view of constraint:

"... moral obligation to obey a rule - the voluntary adherence to it as a duty." 77

Durkheim's solution to the Hobbesian problem of order at the same time provides an answer to the phenomenon of anomie, the state of disorganizations which exists when social norms have ceased to influence individual conduct. According to Parsons the basis of this view is to be found in the idea of respect for the rules in themselves, rather than the individual adopting a calculating attitude towards them.

Durkheim's transcendence of the utilitarian dilemma has major consequences for his system of theory: Parsons comments,

"The 'subjective' can no longer be exhausted by the element of random wants in the utilitarian sense, since the latter cannot become a basis of normative order. The utilitarian conception in turn therefore cannot exhaust the concrete wants of the concrete individual." 78

But, Parsons argues, Durkheim was not able to capitalize on these theoretical developments and draw out their implications in the direction of the Voluntaristic Theory because of his empiricist view of the relationship between concept and reality. In particular, he did not sufficiently free himself from,

"... the interpretation that the social reality of which he speaks is a concrete entity separate from individuals." 79

Whereas if a methodology consistent with analytic realism is adopted these problems can be avoided, in this case Parsons suggests,

"The social is an element or group of elements in the causation of the behaviour of individuals and masses of them. Equally, the individual elements do not constitute the concrete human being, but a theoretical abstraction." 80

As Durkheim's conception of the social element came increasingly to focus upon norms of moral obligation, so a change took place in the meaning of "collective representation". Originally a system of ideas about concrete social reality external to the minds

of the members of society, it became,

"... a body of ideas which themselves form the effective factor in action, that is, the effective factor is itself present 'in the minds of individuals', not merely a representation of it. To be sure the ideas are still conceived as representatives of something. But this something is not a contemporaneously existent observed empirical entity, but is in part a state of affairs which will come into being or be maintained in so far as the normative elements in fact determine the actual course of action. It is not a present, but a future state of affairs in the empirical world to which they refer." 81

Given that one of the elements of "collective representation" is a system of normative rules morally binding upon the members of society Durkheim reaches the position that,

"... a common value system is one of the required conditions for a society to be a stable system in equilibrium." 82

Hence sanctions become merely a secondary level of support for the social control of individuals - a system which derives its principal effectiveness from the moral authority of the normative rules. Parsons continues,

"Thus in every society there is such a body of normative rules of action, the embodiment of ultimate common values. In one main aspect the integration of the society is to be measured in terms of the degrees to which these rules are lived up to from motives of moral obligation. But beside this there is always the motive of 'interest' which, looking upon the rules as essentially conditions of actions, acts in terms of the comparative personal advantage of obedience or disobedience and acceptance of the sanctions which will have to be suffered." 83

According to Parsons, Durkheim's theory of control fits within the action schema and is practically identical to the viewpoint which will be found to be implicit in Pareto's work,⁸⁴ Whilst both have agreed on the role of the common value system in social life, Durkheim with his greater interest in the structure of

systems of action went beyond Pareto and identified the nature and role of social institutions. Durkheim argued that although an individual's ultimate ends may conform to the system of common ultimate values,

"... there is a need for a regulatory system of rules explicit or implicit, legal or customary, which keeps action ... in conformity with that system. The breakdown of this control is anomie or the war of all against all.

This body of rules governing action in pursuit of immediate ends in so far as they exercise moral authority derivable from a common value system may be called social institutions." 85

For Durkheim the study of the social - the rules and institutions governing people's actions - became the proper focus for sociology, and this had major methodological implications: it meant a departure from the utilitarian tradition in respect of the ends of action which were now conceptualized as a social rather than an individual category whilst at the same time, the roles of the other utilitarian elements of action were maintained. Parsons argues that, like Pareto, Durkheim saw that the complex interwoven chains of the intrinsic means-end relationship provided the basis for distinguishing between the different social sciences in terms of the analytic separation of the elements of concrete social phenomenon. Consequently Parsons is able to claim;

"The view of the proper abstraction for the social sciences here put forward is not that of a series of hypothetical concrete systems, but rather of abstract analytical systems each of which assumes as data the main outline of fundamental structure of concrete systems of action including the elements other than those immediately dealt with by the science in question." 86

A major part of Durkheim's theoretical and empirical researches centred upon the nature of religion and its role in

social life. According to Parsons, Durkheim held the view that,

"Religious ideas may be held to constitute the cognitive bridge between men's active attitudes and the non empirical aspects of their universe. Action is not only 'meaningfully oriented', as the positivist inevitably concludes, to reality as rationally understood by science but to the nonempirical as well." 87

Hence, in examining religious actions Durkheim expanded the means-end schema to include a normative component of action systems which had always been rejected as 'irrational' by the positivists. Although ritual actions cannot be measured by the standards of intrinsic rationality they can be considered as an expression of peoples' attitudes towards the nonempirical aspects of social life. For Parsons this marked a clear rejection of positivistic methodology, a process which had begun with the recognition of the significance of ultimate values in relation to the intrinsic means-end chain and had become increasingly apparent as ultimate value attitudes were seen to be expressed directly in religious actions.

Parsons continues his interpretation of Durkheim's views on the role of religion in social life as follows:

"Society is... the reality underlying the symbols of religious ritual because it is only empirical reality which, as of a moral nature, can serve as the source of the ritual attitude. Therefore religious ritual is an expression of this social reality. This proposition may be modified to the form that religious ritual is (in large part) an expression of the common ultimate value attitudes which constitute the specifically 'social' normative element in concrete society." 88

Thus a common religion is the basis for a moral community, consequently, every society is characterized to a certain extent by the possession of a common religion. Without this system of common values, partly represented by religion, society as an organized and stable set of social relationships could not exist

and for Parsons, Durkheim's analysis of anomie clearly proved this. However, there is a constant possibility of disorganization in society because the ultimate ends of action may be submerged in the pressure of immediate interests, and for Durkheim it is in relation to this problem that the crucial role of religion is to be found:

"... by the common ritual expression of their attitudes men not only manifest them but they, in turn, reinforce the attitudes. Ritual brings the attitudes into a heightened state of self consciousness which greatly strengthens them, and through them strengthens, in turn, the moral community. Thus religious ritual effects a reassertion and fortification of the sentiments on which social solidarity depends. As Durkheim sometimes puts it, it recreates the society itself." 89

For Parsons, Durkheim's theory of religion is clearly based upon a voluntaristic conception of action. The actor is seen to play a creative rather than adaptive role, whilst the realization of value attitudes in action is not automatic. Indeed,

"Durkheim's view of the functions of ritual implies the necessity of still a further element, what is generally called will or effort." 90

Moreover, according to Parsons, Durkheim came near to the recognition that the science of sociology should address itself to the analytically separable common ultimate value elements and their relationships to the other elements of action. But Durkheim's epistemology prohibited an explicit realization of this and, in addition, towards the end of his career he moved away from his earlier objectivist standards. In The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Durkheim argued that society existed only in peoples' ideas and sentiments, in other words, it became part of the realm of eternal objects. For Parsons this is an idealist position which is contradictory to the standards of science.⁹¹ Although,

"It is of especial interest here because it represents a close approach to Weber's doctrine of 'Verstehen'." 92

Parsons explains this aspect of Durkheim's theoretical development in these terms;

"... one very important reason why Durkheim was attracted by idealism was that he never really outgrew his empiricism. He could never clearly and consistently think of social reality as one factor in concrete social life, but always tended to slip over into thinking of it as a concrete entity. Then since 'ideas' cannot be dissociated from the latter, it must consist of ideas." 93

For Durkheim, therefore, sociology became the study of the value ideas in themselves whereas, Parsons argues, the proper conceptualization of the subject matter of sociology as an explanatory science concerns the relationships between the normative elements and action.

In a summary of the lessons to be learned from the problems faced by the positivist tradition, Parsons makes the following points:

"It seems legitimate to conclude.. that neither the radical positivist position nor the related utilitarian view is a stable methodological basis for the theoretical sciences of action. Marshall came from the very midst of the utilitarian tradition, and, without meaning to do so, modified it out of recognition. The other two attacked it explicitly and successfully. Both of them tended at times to react from it in the direction of radical positivism, but for both that involved difficulties from the consideration of which they emerged with the conception of a common system of ultimate values as a vital element in concrete social life. Durkheim went beyond this to work out some of the most important modes of its relation to the other elements of action. This process may be interpreted to contribute a definite internal breakdown of the positivistic theory of action in the work of the two men strongly predisposed in its favour. In this breakdown the sheer empirical evidence played a decisive role along with theoretical and methodological considerations," 94

The other main tradition of European social thought examined by Parsons is that of idealism and his analysis of the way in which its specific limitations were overcome is predominantly in terms of Weber's sociological work. According to Parsons, Weber started from an intellectual milieu largely determined by idealist considerations, yet produced a framework for the study of social action identical in all important respects to the Voluntaristic Theory which had emerged from positivism. We have already observed in Chapter 1 where certain features of the idealistic tradition were explored, that Parsons' interpretation of Weber is inextricably linked to the exigencies of the convergence thesis. It is therefore unnecessary here, in examining the idealistic side of the transformation in social thought, to repeat what has already been said. It will suffice to summarize the theoretical background of idealism and focus attention in outline form on those aspects of Weber's work which were crucial to the convergence thesis simply to ensure that the relevant issues for the assessment of Parsons' arguments are established.

To recapitulate briefly: the influence of Kantian epistemology led to the separation of the sciences of natural phenomena and the sciences concerned with the human spirit. Actions could not be satisfactorily examined by the analytic and generalizing methods of natural science because the person was seen to be free to choose how to act, with the result that philosophical methods were regarded as more appropriate for their study, and this applied in particular, to the intuitive grasp of cultural totalities. The most sophisticated opposition to the use of the methods developed for the study of physical and biological phenomena in the realm of

human society and culture was expressed by Windelband, Dilthey and Rickert.⁹⁵ History was seen to be a succession of unique and unconnected periods, to be comprehended in terms of the organic unity of these ideal realities, and such meaningful relationships were sharply distinguished from the causal relationships developed by the positivistic tradition. For Parsons, idealism clarifies the possible relationships between the normative elements of action and the system of human conduct. He argues that the relationship can be conceptualized in two ways, intrinsically and symbolically.

"The first ... lies closest to positivistic modes of thought, since for thought processes the elements of scientific methodology constitute such a norm, especially the logical, and in so far as action is rational, in the sense employed throughout this study, the same elements are normative not only to thought but also to action ... In this context the meaningful elements of action become, in the terms of a voluntaristic theory of action, of causal significance, for it is only in terms of orientation to such norms that a measure of independence of the processes of action from their conditions is conceivable.

The second mode of relation, the symbolic, has come into prominence especially in connection with Durkheim's treatment of religion between the particular symbol and its meaning; certainly the relation is not that between the non-normative elements of a situation and a norm. In this context spatiotemporal phenomena of all sorts are capable of interpretation, not in terms of their intrinsic properties and their causal relations, but as symbolic expressions of meanings or systems of meanings. In so far as phenomena are interpreted in this context, it means dispensing with the causal explanation of the natural sciences altogether." 96

Methodologically, the explication of these meanings is known as Verstehen.⁹⁷ and for Parsons it is perhaps the most characteristic feature of idealism with the result that the rigid distinction between it and positivism was inevitable.

"Against mechanism, individualism, atomism, it has placed organicism, the subordination of the unit, including the human individual, to the whole. Against essential continuity in its field of study, which has looked upon particular cases as instances of a general law or principle, it has emphasized the irreducible qualitative individuality of the phenomena it was studying and has issued in a far-reaching historical relativism." 98

In idealism, like positivism, economic phenomena attracted the main focus of interest in the study of social life, but in this case the Historical School of Economics tended to examine the modern economic order as a unique system with the result that the conceptual schemes of the classical economic theorists were seen to apply exclusively to such an individualistic order. For Parsons, the Marxist theory of capitalism retained a major element of the historical approach in that although, following Hegel, a dialectical process of change was conceptualized from one form of society to the next, each separate stage of society was seen to be organized on quite distinct principles. Consequently, although Marx used the theoretical approach of classical economics, he

"... turned it from an analytic theory of the economic aspect of social phenomena in general into a historical theory of the functioning and development of a particular economic system, the capitalistic." 99

In contrast to Marx's emphasis on economic causation, Sombart can be seen as a much more central representative of idealism because he gives primacy in the explanation of modern capitalism to its spirit. According to Parsons, Sombart's economic concepts were relevant only to a specific economic system, they were not of the analytic type with general applicability, but in his identification of the spirit of the modern age he did refer to a common value element. However Sombart used this, Parsons

comments, in an empiricist manner believing that the total concrete phenomenon of capitalism could be explained by its spirit - an approach which left no room for utilitarian elements.

Max Weber

With the main features of the idealist tradition outlined Parsons introduces, what is, for his convergence thesis, its most crucial representative.

"Weber... was a thinker steeped both in the idealistic tradition of thought and in the particular empirical problems of Marx and Sombart. He transcended ... the Marx-Sombart dilemma in a way consonant with the general scheme of analysis developed in this study." 100

In particular, for Parsons, the empirical tradition of German historical thought was the context for Weber's intellectual development and his early attempts at theoretical statements undoubtedly bore this imprint, but his later and more significant work broke through this framework to arrive at a substantially different position.¹⁰¹ Like Marx and Sombart he saw the modern economic order to be unique and he shared with Marx the view of the compulsive nature of rational bourgeois capitalism in which people's actions were largely determined by the nature of the situation in which they found themselves. However, he disagreed with Marx over the issue of the origin of the modern economic order.

"At the opening of the new period of this thinking Weber came quite decisively to the view that an indispensable (though by no means the only) element in the explanation of the system lay in a system of ultimate values and value attitudes, in turn anchored in and in part dependent upon a definite metaphysical system of ideas. This constituted, for the particular case in hand, a direct polemical challenge to the Marxian type of explanation." 102

Parsons' account of the details of the Weberian explanation of the rise of modern western capitalism and the comparative studies in the world religions need not be pursued here because these studies reflect a sufficiently consistent theoretical orientation - unlike Durkheim's work in which substantive studies are intermingled with theoretical developments - that it was possible for Parsons to present these issues essentially in an expository manner.¹⁰³ The theoretical purpose of these studies was, according to Parsons, twofold: to demonstrate the effective role of values in social action, thereby relativizing the Marxist account; and, at the same time, to evaluate the relative importance of ideal and material circumstances in the particular historical settings, which leads equally to the relativization of a purely idealistic interpretation of social change.

One of the main reasons why Parsons was able to separate empirical and theoretical issues in his treatment of Weberian sociology lay in the explicit attention Weber devoted to methodological considerations, with the result that his discussion of these issues was far greater than that of Durkheim and more even than that of Pareto. This had the advantage to Parsons of obviating a good deal of analysis which as we have seen was needed in Durkheim's case to determine his theoretical and methodological position. However, the polemical context of much of Weber's writing on these topics and the absence of a very detailed general statement left a somewhat fragmented picture which enabled Parsons to discover certain underlying and implicit features about Weber's methodological and theoretical standpoint, as he had been able to do in his analysis of Pareto and Durkheim.

Again it will be sufficient to merely summarize the main characteristics of Weber's methodology, as Parsons' interpretation of this has already been examined in detail. According to Parsons, in opposition to idealism Weber argued for the indispensibility of general concepts in the scientific study of action, for the inevitability of their abstractness vis a vis empirical reality, and in this respect, then, for the same logical position in both natural and social science. The differences between the two groups of sciences lay in the subject matter which could be distinguished in terms of the observation of natural phenomena and the understanding of other people's actions - an understanding which was most apparent when rational actions were involved. For Parsons, Weber's use of the means-ends schema is significant, as too is his critical view of understanding based solely upon intuition without any other criteria being used to establish the validity of "knowledge".

Parsons, in a particularly important passage, identifies the implications of Weber's critiques for the epistemological or philosophy of science level of the convergence thesis:

"... it went a very long way toward bridging the hiatus which the idealist methodology had created between the natural and the social sciences in a logical context. He concludes that both must involve systems of general theoretical concepts, for without them anything approaching logical proof is out of the question. But in neither case can this system of concepts possibly be conceived of as a literal representation of the total concrete reality of raw experience ... It is interesting to note here a definite convergence on a common logical meeting ground with the movement of methodology from a positivistic basis, which has been seen most explicitly among the subjects of this study in Pareto. Pareto, it will be remembered, laid down a general methodological outline common to all empirical explanatory science, natural and social. But to make natural science methodology applicable to social subject matter it was necessary for him to divest it of certain positivistic-empiricist implications of earlier methodologies. Weber has come to the same result from the other side, and has seen the same implications for the natural sciences." 104

Within the context of these general methodological ideas, and as a result of his critique of idealisms, Parsons argues that Weber constructed his mature sociology on the basis of the category of understanding, the role of values in social life and the means-end schema. But this led to certain problems: in particular Parsons regards as unacceptable Weber's distinction between natural and social science on the basis of the contrast between an interest of control in the natural world and an interest based upon the scientist's values in social phenomena. Parsons argues that what was for Weber a unique feature of social science - namely value-relevance - was in effect the selective organizing principle for concept formulation which applied to all science. Nevertheless, despite certain reservations about Weber's methodology Parsons' overall assessment is favourable:

"Weber has succeeded in bringing a much needed element of relativity into his methodology thus relieving it of the necessity of making claims to an empiricist absolutism which would place it in a vulnerable position. At the same time he has vindicated its claims, properly qualified, to objectivity. Above all he has established the logical independence of the standards of objectivity, the scheme of proof from the relativistic elements." 105

For Parsons the main limitation of Weber's methodological position concerned the ideal type. This general concept, states a course of action which fully conforms to a norm with the result that it represents a hypothetically rather than a concretely observable action but according to Parsons its use led to a mosaic theory of society. For Parsons this limitation can be largely explained by the fact that Weber's views on general concepts were developed in opposition to an empiricist position which was opposed to all form of generalization, therefore Weber used the one

formulation which came closest to being an empirical description.¹⁰⁶

Implicit within this mosaic theory of society, Parsons argues that it is possible to detect a system of theory underlying Weber's classification of types of action and relationship. This is to be found most explicitly in the modes of orientation of action which are elements of regularity understandable in terms of subjective categories, and are concerned in particular with normative aspects of action systems. Weber's concepts of usage, interest, and legitimate order constitute for Parsons the framework for this classification of ideal types and the implicit outline of a generalized structure of systems of action which corresponds to all the distinctions of structural elements which he was able to identify in the work of Pareto and Durkheim; namely, the economic, technological, and political elements of the intermediate sector of the means-end chain.¹⁰⁷

In his analysis of the concept of legitimate order, Parsons finds a remarkable similarity with Durkheim's treatment of constraint as moral authority.

"Moreover, Weber has approached the question from the same point of view, that of an individual thought of as acting in relation to a system of rules that constitute conditions of his action. There has emerged from the work of both men the same distinction of attitude elements towards the rules of such an order, the interested and the disinterested. In both cases a legitimate order is contrasted with a situation of the uncontrolled play of interests. Both have concentrated their attention upon the latter element. Such a parallel is not likely to be purely fortuitous." 108

Another important similarity can be found in their analyses of religion which is one of the more important forms of legitimate order; Weber's concept of charisma refers to an extraordinary quality quite distinct from everyday life, a phenomenon which

resembles Durkheim's concept of sacred. In fact, Parsons agrees, some of their conclusions are practically identical.

"The identity applies at least two strategic points - the distinction of the moral and non-moral motives of action in relation to norms, and the distinction between the quality of norms as such (Weber - legitimacy; Durkheim - moral authority) and the broader element of which this is a "manifestation" (Weber - charisma; Durkheim - sacredness). The correspondence is the more striking in that the two started from opposite poles of thought - Weber from historical idealism Durkheim from highly self-conscious positivism." 109

A similar level of correspondence exists in their views on the relationship between the social factor and action: Parsons observes:

"Weber ruthlessly discarded from his work all non-empirical entities. The only Geist with which he will have anything to do is a matter of empirically observable attitudes and ideas which can be directly related to the understandable motivation of action. But in spite of this fact he definitely takes a sociologicistic position. For one of his most fundamental results is that of the dominant social role of religious ideas and value attitudes - specific embodiments or values of charisma - which are common to the members of a great social movement or a whole society ... A society can only be subject to a legitimate order, and therefore can be on a non-biological level something other than a balance of power of interests, only in so far as there are common value attitudes in the society." 110

Some of the differences between Durkheim and Weber can be accounted for through the diversity of their interests; Weber concentrated upon social change - particularly through the agency of charisma - and rationalization, with the result that he was not empirically concerned with the category of ritual which basically represents resistance to change. Hence Weber did not, according to Parsons, extend his analysis of traditionalism very far, but had he done so, then his treatment of ritual as symbolically meaningful action

outside the intrinsic means-end chain would have led to a greater correspondence with Durkheim's position.¹¹¹

In his final remarks on the convergence between the work of Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber, Parsons makes the following statement which conveniently summarizes his views on Weber's role in this movement in social thought:

"The catalogue of the structural elements of action discernable in or directly inferable from Weber's systematic scheme of ideal types has now been completed. It has proved possible to identify and assign to a clear and definite role in the general scheme every single element of the previous analysis, especially as gained from the study of the work of Pareto and Durkheim. Moreover, every one of these elements, if it emerges in their work in clear-cut form at all, can be given a formulation that will fit both the theoretical schemes and the empirical interpretations of all three writers and do justice to what, according to the best interpretation a careful analysis has been able to put upon them, these writers themselves meant by their theories. This definitely and finally established the convergence that it has been the principal object of this study to demonstrate. Finally, in Weber there has emerged still another structural element, the orientation of forms of expression to norms of taste, which fills a gap left in the other schemes." 112

(c) Assessment of Convergence

Let us briefly summarize the convergence towards the Voluntaristic Theory of Action: for Parsons its origin lay in the idea of rational action with the elements of ends, means and conditions unified, in the case of intrinsically rational action, by a normative relationship between ends and means, so as to conform with scientific knowledge of the connection between particular acts and certain objectives. Rational action was always important within utilitarianism although the nature of ends was not considered in detail. Frequently, the assumption was made that the ends of

action were random, and in this case, no explanation of order was possible. This was the dilemma which Marshall and Pareto attempted to overcome - though with varying degrees of explicitness and methodological sophistication - by focussing upon a system of shared values in society. Durkheim, who had begun by rejecting the utilitarian position in favour of a positivistic view of action, constrained by external social facts, gradually realized that constraint was a form of moral authority dependent upon a common system of values. In the idealist tradition the category of ultimate values had occupied a well established position, but it was in the methods used to study these values that the problems lay. In Weber's critique of Marx emphasis was placed upon the role of values in social life, not in the idealist sense of values becoming "real" so much as through a complex interaction with other elements in society - especially the economic. Weber was critical of idealist methodology and emphasised the necessity of both general theoretical categories and the norm of intrinsically rational action. In addition, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber identified ritual action as a phenomenon which could be examined in terms of the symbolic means-end relationship rather than being explained away, as frequently happened in the positivistic tradition, as the result of non-subjective determinism.

As a result, Parsons was able to identify a convergence in the different varieties of inquiry into human action towards an agreement between Pareto, Durkheim and Weber on the structure of social action: namely ultimate ends, means, and an intermediate sector. For Parsons this set of structures was unified by the concept of effort which related the normative and the conditional

elements of action because, he argued, norms can only be realized through the application of effort.¹¹³

Parsons drew five specific conclusions from his analysis of convergence: first of all,

"That in the works of the four principal writers ... there has appeared the outline of what in all essentials, is the same system of generalized social theory, the structural aspect of what has been called the voluntaristic theory of action." 114

In other words, there were no theoretically important differences between them which could not be reduced to variations in terminology, the point to which they pursued their analyses, and their objectives which conveyed different kinds of significance upon particular issues.

Secondly,

"That this generalized system of theoretical categories common to the writers here treated is, taken as a total system, a new development of theory and is not simply taken over from the traditions on which they built." 115

Whilst all of the elements of the new system of theory could be found individually in the earlier traditions, together they constitute a separate entity, a new advance which is incompatible with either positivism or idealism.

Parsons' third conclusion is,

"That the development of this theoretical system has in each case stood in the closest relation to the principal empirical generalizations which the writer in question formulated." 116

Hence, the empirical insights which these writers gained were incompatible with a positivist or idealist theoretical position and were only possible in terms of the categories of the voluntaristic theory.

The fourth conclusion involves several ideas:

"That one major factor in the emergence of the voluntaristic theory of action lies in correct observation of the empirical facts of social life, especially corrections of and additions to the observations made by proponents of the theories against which these writers stood in polemical opposition." 117

Whilst Parsons has been unable, for reasons of space, to present all the relevant empirical material with a bearing upon this issue, he argues that enough has been brought forward to be conclusive, especially when the fact of convergence amongst writers who initially held quite different intellectual, moral and political orientations is taken into account. Consequently,

"... the concepts of the voluntaristic theory of action must be sound theoretical concepts." 118

The fifth and final conclusion aggregates the four previous points to constitute the proof of Parsons' thesis about the nature of scientific development. In particular the changes in European social thought cannot be properly understood,

"...(a) as the resultant of a process of accumulation of new knowledge of empirical fact arrived at independently of the statement of problems and the direction of interest inherent in the structure of the initial theoretical systems; (b) as resulting from processes of the purely "immanent" development of the initial theoretical systems without reference to the facts; (c) as only the result of elements external to science altogether such as the personal sentiments of the authors, their class position, nationality etc. That leaves the material interdependence of the structure of the theoretical systems with observation and verification of fact in a position of great, though by no means exclusive importance." 119

Before commenting upon the validity of Parsons' convergence thesis and the conclusions which he draws, it will be helpful to relate our interest in Parsons' work to the kind of

criticism which it is possible to make at this stage of the inquiry. Clearly the most crucial and ultimately, perhaps, the most debatable aspect of the Parsonian thesis is the accuracy of his interpretation of the work of Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber. However our interest is specifically concerned with the validity of Parsons' interpretation of Weber and the extent to which the latter's approach was incorporated by Parsons' voluntaristic theory. Needless to say, therefore, we are not in a position to comment upon the validity of the convergence thesis per se, as the accuracy of Parsons' interpretation of the other writers is beyond the scope of this study, though it would be fair to say that since the publication of The Structure of Social Action considerable attention has been devoted to the nature of their respective contributions to sociology and certain problems in Parsons' work have been identified.¹²⁰ What can be said, on the basis of this analysis, is that certain assumptions implicit in Parsons' work, which have direct relevance for his assessment of Weber's theory of action and its relationship to the voluntaristic theory - to say nothing of the status of this theory as the starting point for Parsons' subsequent work - are in need of clarification and analysis.

When the convergence thesis is considered from the point of view of the different conceptions of the sociological enterprise involved, in other words, in terms of the epistemological, methodological and theoretical views of the three major writers, a fundamental problem emerges. In effect the views of Pareto, Durkheim and Weber on these issues were excluded from any central role in the convergence thesis. It is quite clear that for

Parsons the epistemological foundations, methodological practices and theoretical constructions of science as a whole had been clarified and demonstrated through the advances in physics and biology prior to his investigation into the relationship between economics and sociology which, as we have seen, was the original focus of his theory of action. Analytic realism as a conception of the scientific enterprise in the social sphere was not to be proven through convergence: the strategy of developing a general theory was quite independent of it although, of course, the assumptions and procedures which analytic realism sanctioned had been influential in the discipline of economics.

Parsons was, for example, very critical of Durkheim's methodological position. He saw Pareto's assumptions to be the closest to his own, and used Weber's methodological ideas only where they revealed problems in idealism and so justified the claim that Weber was moving away from his original tradition to a new one; where their assumptions about scientific method and social scientific knowledge diverged from what Parsons saw as the modern principles, they were rejected. The crux of the matter, therefore, is that in the absence of a methodological convergence, their respective contributions to the common conceptual scheme were to be judged exclusively in terms of their identification - intentionally or unintentionally, explicitly or implicitly - of the structural categories of social action.

Before proceeding with the argument it is necessary to explore some of the implications of this point in detail. First of all, it emphasizes the centrality to Parsons' entire argument of the correctness of his interpretation of the various features of

the earlier writers' work. It will be remembered that Pareto, Durkheim and Weber did not share Parson's aims of outlining the structural features of action systems, with the result that in each case it was necessary for him to develop implicit features of their work, to draw out possible implications, in short, to determine what their views on these structural properties would have been if they had wished to pursue such an inquiry. In particular, Weber's stated opposition to a general theory in the realm of sociology meant that it was necessary for Parsons to stress in his interpretation a developmental perspective; according to this Weber's later work was seen to be moving away from its earlier methodological foundations with the result that some degree of ambiguity and inconsistency arose between his formal views and his substantive practices. Clearly then the convergence is dependent to a large extent upon Parson's creative analysis of the work of the three sociologists and his discovery of a number of previously unseen features.¹²¹

The second point is perhaps even more important, because it means that according to Parsons, another writer's theoretical concepts and substantive formulations could be incorporated into the convergence thesis with no real loss of accuracy, intelligibility or implication even though the methodology which gave such concepts direction and purpose were seen to be problematic and outdated. However, a purely substantive convergence in conceptual schemes based upon different epistemological and methodological positions is quite vacuous; Pareto, Durkheim and Weber used some similar concepts, but the ways in which their conceptual schemes were designed to be used were not the same, and this difference was

directly related to their respective conceptions of social scientific knowledge. There could be little doubt, given their variety of starting points, that a convergence in conceptual schemes allied to a convergence in the methods they used to arrive at these concepts would, by itself, be a strong indication of the validity of such concepts and methods, but a substantive convergence - even if we disregard all the problems resulting from its highly inferential nature - must remain inconclusive.

In order to avoid any possible misunderstanding, let us clarify the extent to which Parsons does and does not establish methodological agreement between the three major writers. In other words, how similar are their methodological views to the position on which the voluntaristic theory is built. Certainly Parsons claimed that some convergence toward the methodology of analytic realism could be found in the work of Pareto and Weber; they both rejected the empiricist view of the relationship between a conceptual scheme and empirical reality and recognized the abstractness of scientific concepts, and in addition, Pareto accepted the need for combining different systems of analytic theory in the explanation of concrete phenomena.¹²² The position of Weber, however, is more complex because he strongly emphasized the distinction between natural and social science in terms of the principle of value relevance and argued for a limited role in social science for general theoretical statements, preferring instead to concentrate upon the explanation of particular causal sequences. Not surprisingly, of course, Parsons rejected these features of Weber's methodology but their very existence does place the utmost strain upon the credibility of a methodological

convergence between Weber and the voluntaristic theory - a problem which Parsons attempts to resolve by imputing a major element of inconsistency between Weber's statements on these issues and his implicit theoretical classification of social relationships.¹²³ Finally, there was little in Durkheim's methodology with which Parsons could agree because in its later stages it combined empiricist views on the nature of theoretical categories with an idealist position on the role of ideas in social life.

In reality, therefore, the result of convergence, the Voluntaristic Theory of Action, differs from its constituent parts of positivism, utilitarianism, and idealism, in that the category of subjective motivation in the form of action oriented toward common ultimate values is added to the methodological strategies of utilitarianism, thereby subsuming the analytic device of rational economic man within a wider and more comprehensive framework of normatively oriented action and supplementing the intrinsic form of relationship between the elements of the system with the symbolic means-end schema. But in the process of incorporating what Parsons called the subjective point of view, in other words, the notion of subjective meaning which had occupied such a central position in Weberian sociology, he isolated the category from the context in which it had been developed - a context involving assumptions about the nature of sociological meaning, the kind of procedures required in order to gain knowledge of such phenomena, and the sorts of generalization that can be formulated. The isolation of this category - and one suspects, several others as well - from its background assumptions, necessarily transforms it.

The approach utilized by Parsons has had some important consequences: by assuming that the epistemological and methodological nature of sociology was not problematic and by criticising earlier writers for diverging from his standards, he effectively removed the discussion of such issues from sociology for a considerable period of time.¹²⁴ In the case of Weberian sociology, this led to something of a paradox surrounding his "incorporation" into the contemporary discipline. On the one hand, the extent of Weber's historical and comparative knowledge is universally admired. His studies of the economic ethics of the world religions have become an exemplar of comparative method and his definitions of some of the most pervasive forms of social action - presented in Economy and Society - demarcate several major specialisms within the subject. Yet, on the other hand, the methodological rules which both guided and were refined by these empirical researches are either seen as out of date and of little more than historical interest, or are regarded as a "pioneering effort", a euphemism which not only damns with faint praise but in contemporary sociology has come to justify taking a particular component of an earlier writer's work out of its methodological context in order to legitimate possibly similar, but sometimes quite dissimilar ideas and concepts derived from unrelated perspectives.¹²⁵ In short, it provided Parsons with the justification for developing and modifying Weber's more theoretical concepts, analyses and typologies in the rarefied air of pure theory, unrestricted by the methodological framework in which they had been developed.

Consequently, Weber's sociology is left in a curious position by Parsons' interpretation: if the methods Weber used to reach his substantive findings are seen to be very limited, perhaps even harmful, then his empirical analyses which were reached through the use of these methods must be equally problematic. However, this inference is not made and as a result it comes as no surprise to find that there is a general lack of clarity about how Weber's contribution can be improved upon and about the criteria to be used in deciding when a particular Weberian concept, typology, causal relationship or empirical generalization is correct or in need of revision.¹²⁶

Returning to the main theme of our inquiry from this lengthy though important digression on the ramifications of the fact that all Parsons identifies is a convergence in the substantive concepts used by Pareto, Durkheim and Weber, which are then presented in terms of the structural features of a system of action - it is clear that Parsons does not establish any significant level of agreement between these writers over the nature of a scientific study of action, and in particular, the role of general theoretical statements.¹²⁷ Of course, Parsons is entitled to borrow concepts and ideas from different traditions and attempt to synthesise them into something of his own creation, but without demonstrating a methodological convergence his argument that the same conceptual scheme emerged from the different traditions and is valid because of this convergence, is quite unproven.

One of the main consequences of this appraisal is the reopening of the issue of ideological bias leading to a relativism of standards which Parsons believed had been overcome by the development

of a common basis for a truly general theory. Parsons saw particular significance to reside in the fact that agreement had taken place between writers who had reached the same conclusions inspite of their personal and intellectual predilections. For Parsons this was an adequate defence against those who suggested that;

"... there are as many systems of sociological theory as there are sociologists, and there is no common basis, that all is arbitrary and subjective." 128

More recently, in an examination of Weber's contribution to the Theory of Action, Parsons emphasized some of the ideological components of social thought at the turn of the century: idealism represented conservatism; utilitarianism and economic theory stood for individualism and a belief in the legitimacy of capitalism; and Marxism was committed to a new social order. Parsons continued:

"Weber broke out of what I have called the 'trilemma' presented by the structure of the principal currents of social thinking of his time. His resolution of the trilemma pointed in the direction of a new pattern of thinking in the area, of which an autonomous theoretical sociology was an essential ingredient. On this level Weber clearly converged with the other parts of a major intellectual movement of his generation. Taking his contribution which I regard as the most crucial single one - along with many others, I think it can be said that the whole intellectual social situation has been redefined in a way that makes the principle categorizations of the late 19th Century, many of which are still widely current, basically obsolete." 129

Finally, what are the consequences of Parsons' failure to establish a genuine convergence, rather than to impose his ideas of social scientific theory upon the categories of Pareto, Durkheim and Weber, for his thesis concerning the way in which scientific theory advances? Two points can be made. On the one hand, the fact that Parsons was unable to prove the validity of the concepts

of the voluntaristic theory, due to the restricted nature of the convergence he demonstrated, completely undermines the whole argument. What Parsons regards as valid concepts derived from correct empirical analysis and logical inference must now be seen as a set of concepts of unknown scientific validity with the result that their status as proof of the way scientific knowledge develops is equally transformed. On the other hand, even if these problems were to be ignored, there are major difficulties with the relevance to Parsons' argument of the material which he draws from idealism. Whilst the developments within utilitarianism in relation to the problem of order are examined by Parsons in considerable detail and offer support for his thesis, the relationship of Weber's sociology to idealism is much more problematic. There are several reasons for this. To begin with, Parsons's treatment of idealism is in rather marked contrast to his very detailed knowledge of the development of economic theory within the positivist tradition, a fact demonstrated by his considerable reliance upon von Schelting's discussion of Weber's critique of idealism. Moreover, Parsons is not able to show that Weber ever subscribed to idealist principles; rather, the point he makes is that Weber's treatment of religion and capitalism represents an overcoming of the limitations of Marxism on the one hand, and an intuitionist approach on the other. But he is unable to show the development of Weber's ideas in relation to a central problem within idealism, comparable for instance with the utilitarian dilemma for the positivist approach. Hence the evidence Parsons presents about changes within an idealist perspective are inconclusive for his thesis that increasing factual knowledge leads to changes in empirical generalizations and subsequently to

modifications in the structure of theoretical systems.

Let us bring this analysis of Parsons' convergence thesis to a close by indicating the consequences of our criticisms for his General Theory of Action. Parsons failed to demonstrate the validity of the concepts of the voluntaristic theory through the convergence of positivism and idealism, but this failure leaves open the whole question of the usefulness of his work. It remains to be seen in the next chapter if Parsons could validate his concepts and methods in terms of other criteria. However, the points we have made are not without significance because if Parsons had merely claimed that his work was a development of various aspects of the theories and methodologies of Pareto, Durkheim and Weber - aspects which he selected - then it is inconceivable that his work would have received so much attention, for its authoritative status lay in the idea of convergence and the belief that it represented all that was valid in the earlier traditions of social thought.

NOTES

1. Of course, Parsons has collaborated with many others throughout his career, in particular, Shils, Bales, Smelser and, more recently, Platt. In addition, he has been involved in certain projects which were explicitly based upon collective efforts, for example, Towards a General Theory of Action, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951) and more recently his work in the area of the "Human Condition".
2. Parsons wrote a chapter on Simmel for The Structure of Social Action, but for reasons of space did not include it in the final version. For a comment on the relevance of other founding fathers for his work see the "Introduction" to the paperback edition, op.cit., xii-xiv.
3. Parsons first refers to the importance of Freud for the convergence thesis in the "Preface" to the second edition (1949) of The Structure of Social Action.
4. Parsons, "On Building Social System Theory", Daedalus, 99 (1970), 839.
5. Ibid., 870 where Parsons refers approvingly to Geertz's comment that synthesis has been a dominant feature in his intellectual career. For more recent discussions of these issues see Parsons, "Social Interaction" and the "General Introduction", in his Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, op.cit.
6. Martindale, "Talcott Parsons' Theoretical Metamorphosis from Social Behaviourism to Macro-Functionalism", op.cit. and J.F. Scott, "The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme", op.cit. Their detailed arguments are examined in Chapter Three, part two (c).
7. Parsons, op.cit., 2. See also Parsons "The Point of View of the Author" in M. Black (Ed.), The Social Theories of Talcott Parsons, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1961) 321, 350; "On Building Social System Theory", op.cit., 867 and his comments on Gerstein's discussion of the continuity of his work in "Reply to Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope", American Sociological Review, 41 (1976), 303.
8. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., x-xi. C.f. "On Building Social System Theory", op.cit., 842-4 and the "General Introduction" to Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, op.cit., 12.
9. Parsons, The Social System, (New York: The Free Press, 1951). On changes in his conception of social system see also "Cause and Effect in Sociology", in D. Lerner (Ed.), Cause and Effect, (New York: Free Press, 1965), 52.

10. T. Parsons and N.J. Smelser, Economy and Society, (London: Routledge, 1956).
11. T. Parsons, R.F. Bales and E. Shils, Working Papers in the Theory of Action, (New York: Free Press, 1953).
12. T. Parsons, R.F. Bales, J. Olds, M. Zelditch and P.E. Slater, Family, Socialization, and Interaction Process, (New York: Free Press, 1955).
13. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., xii, and "On Building Social System Theory", op.cit., 844-848.
14. Parsons, "Evolutionary Universals in Society", American Sociological Review, 29 (1964), 339-357.
15. Parsons, Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966).
16. Parsons, The System of Modern Societies, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971).
17. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., xii.
18. Parsons, Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, op.cit., 5-6 and 110-111.
19. Parsons, Action Theory and the Human Condition, op.cit., x and 356-70 where the importance of Henderson's work is examined.
20. Parsons, Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, op.cit.
21. Parsons, Action Theory and the Human Condition, op.cit.
22. Although Parsons published various articles before 1937, it is significant that none of them have ever been reprinted in any of the editions of his collected papers and we may interpret this to mean that The Structure of Social Action represented a much more systematic and advanced statement than the earlier formulations. Hence it would be unwise, like Scott, to rely too heavily upon them.
23. For example, "Some Reflections upon the 'Nature and Significance of Economics'", Quarterly Journal of Economics, 48 (1934), 511-545; "Sociological Elements in Economic Thought", I and II, Quarterly Journal of Economics, 49 (1934), 414-453 and 49 (1935) 645-667; and "The Place of Ultimate Values in Sociological Theory", International Journal of Ethics, 45 (1935), 282-316.
24. Parsons, "An Approach to Psychological Theory in Terms of The Theory of Action", S. Koch (Ed.), Psychology: A Study of a Science, (New York: McGraw Hill), Vol.3, 624-5,

25. A.N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, (Cambridge, C.U.P., 1953), 72-3.
26. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., viii.
27. Parsons, The Social System, op.cit., the dedication.
28. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 754.
29. Ibid., 730.
30. Ibid., 30
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 33
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 34
35. Ibid., 34-5.
36. Ibid., 748.
37. Ibid., 36
38. Ibid., 38.
39. For a more sceptical view see C.W. Mills, The Sociological Imagination, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 25-49.
40. The problems concerning objectivity, bias and the problem of order have received a great deal of critical attention, whereas, the convergence thesis has not.
41. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 6.
42. Ibid., 7.
43. Ibid., 9.
44. Ibid., 9-10.
45. See "On Building Social System Theory", op.cit., 826-829, and "The Point of View of the Author", op.cit., 316-7.
46. Ibid., 316.
47. Ibid., 317.
48. Ibid.
49. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 125.

50. Ibid., x and viii.
51. Ibid., 58.
52. Ibid., 52-60, 451-2, 698-702.
53. Ibid., 63, 699.
54. Ibid., 64, 702.
55. Ibid., 61
56. Ibid., 89-91.
57. Ibid., 102.
58. Ibid., 167, 453.
59. Ibid., 173.
60. Ibid., 455.
61. Ibid., 300
62. Ibid., 180.
63. Ibid., 183, 264, 294, 455, 704.
64. Ibid., 294. Significantly Parsons criticizes Pareto for failing to analyze certain phenomena, not for analyzing them incorrectly. The most important example for Parsons was Pareto's failure to examine the role of normative elements in action - a problem which did not arise in physical theory. Had Pareto followed this strategy, then, Parsons argues, the result would have been closer to an analysis of the structural features of action: see 460.
65. Ibid., 300.
66. Ibid., 187-191.
67. Ibid., 230, 457.
68. Ibid., 232.
69. Ibid., 458.
70. Ibid., 247.
71. Ibid., 288.
72. Ibid., 274, 460.
73. Ibid., 302.
74. Ibid., 314, 461.
75. Ibid., 376.

76. Ibid., 377.
77. Ibid., 383. Parsons recognizes that Durkheim's views underwent considerable development on this issue, see 386.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., 367.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., 389.
82. Ibid., 390.
83. Ibid., 404.
84. Ibid., 309, 405.
85. Ibid., 407. C.f., Parsons, Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, op.cit., 161-2.
86. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 466.
87. Ibid., 424.
88. Ibid., 433-4.
89. Ibid., 435.
90. Ibid., 440.
91. Ibid., 445.
92. Ibid., 442.
93. Ibid., 446.
94. Ibid., 469-70.
95. Ibid., 474-80.
96. Ibid., 483-4.
97. Bauman argues that Parsons' use of "Verstehen" rather than an English translation implies an element of scepticism about one of the most important aspects of Weber's approach to the study of action. Z. Bauman, Hermeneutics and Social Science, (London; Hutchinson, 1978), 134.
98. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 485. Bershadsky argues that the desire to overcome relativism which was closely linked with the idealist tradition was a major factor in the adoption of a strategy to formulate a general theory. H.J. Bershadsky, Ideology and Social Knowledge, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 10, 14.

99. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 489.
100. Ibid., 499.
101. Ibid., 502-3. On Weber's relationship with idealism see Parsons, "Social Interaction" in his Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, op.cit., 163, and for a more general discussion of the background issues, "Theory in the Humanities and Sociology", op.cit.
102. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 510.
103. The significance of Weber's substantive studies is briefly considered in Chapter 5.
104. Ibid., 590.'
105. Ibid., 600.
106. Ibid., 610.
107. Ibid., 654-5.
108. Ibid., 661.
109. Ibid., 669.
110. Ibid., 670.
111. Ibid., 673-676.
112. Ibid., 682.
113. Ibid., 719.
114. Ibid., 719-20.
115. Ibid., 720.
116. Ibid., see also Parsons letter to Schutz, January 16th 1941, in R. Grathoff (Ed.) The Theory of Social Action: the Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 67.
117. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 721.
118. Ibid., 724.
119. Ibid., 725.
120. See R. Bendix, "Two Sociological Traditions", in R. Bendix and G. Roth, Scholarship and Partisanship: Essays on Max Weber. (London: University of California Press, 1971); "Introduction" to A. Sahay (Ed.) Max Weber and Modern Sociology, (London: Routledge, 1971), W. Pope, J. Cohen and L.E. Hazelrigg, "On the Divergence of Weber and Durkheim: A Critique of Parsons' Convergence Thesis", American Sociological Review, 40 (1975),

417-427. In addition, in response to criticisms about the accuracy of his interpretations of Durkheim and Weber, Parsons makes the point that it was never his intention to present a secondary study of their work per se. For this reason he does not defend certain details of his interpretations of them in The Structure of Social Action, and, instead, continues to maintain the validity of his convergence thesis on grounds akin to poetic license. In other words, that a certain amount of freedom from the confines of textural detail is required in order to develop a synthesis between writers who, after all, were not aware of the "convergence" between their respective formulations. See the debate between Parsons and Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope. W. Pope, "Classic on Classic: Parsons' Interpretation of Durkheim", American Sociological Review, 38 (1973), 399-415; T. Parsons, "Comment on 'Parsons' Interpretation of Durkheim'", American Sociological Review, 106-111; Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope, "De-Parsonizing Weber: A Critique of Parsons' Interpretation of Weber's Sociology", American Sociological Review, 40 (1975), 229-241; Parsons, "On 'De-Parsonizing Weber'", American Sociological Review 40 (1975), 666-669; Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope, "Reply to Parsons", American Sociological Review, 40 (1975), 670-674; Pope, Cohen and Hazelrigg, "On the Divergence of Weber and Durkheim: A Critique of Parsons' Convergence Thesis", op.cit.; and Parsons, "Reply to Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope", op.cit.. For a discussion of the value of the issues raised in this debate see S. Butts, "Parsons' Interpretation of Weber: A Methodological Analysis", Sociological Analysis and Theory, 7 (1977), 227-241.

121. On the creativity of Parsons' interpretation see G. Roth "Introduction to the New Edition" in R. Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait, (London: University of California Press, 1977), xvi.
122. On the differences between the theoretical and methodological strategies of Pareto and Parsons, see A. Sahay, Sociological Analysis, op.cit., Chapters 3 and 4.
123. This point was developed in the concluding remarks to Chapter 1 and is examined in detail in Chapter 5.
124. With the result that when the crisis occurred it took a more severe form than might otherwise have been the case.
125. C.f. S.M. Eisenstadt, "Introduction", in Max Weber, On Charisma and Institution Building (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).
126. For an important exception to this see G. Marshall, Presbyteries and Profits: Calvinism and the Development of Capitalism in Scotland, 1560-1707, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

127. This does not, of course, mean that there are no such similarities. For an attempt to discover them see A. Sahay, Sociological Analysis, op.cit., Chapter 4.
128. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 774.
129. Parsons, "Evaluation and Objectivity in Social Science..", op.cit., 98.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GENERAL THEORY OF ACTION AND ITS PROBLEMS

The previous chapter dealt with the origins of Parsons' theoretical sociology in his analysis of the contribution made to social scientific knowledge by Pareto, Durkheim, and Weber as the leading representatives of the positivist and idealist traditions of European social thought. In addition, it sought to clarify the limitations of the Parsonian convergence of conceptual schemes.

This chapter is divided into two main parts each of which has a distinctive style: the first is expository, and the second is critical. We begin by outlining the various theoretical and conceptual innovations which have appeared in Parsons' work during his career. This task is relatively straightforward because Parsonian theory can be divided into clear stages within an overall process of thinking about action and society which has exhibited remarkable continuity. This progressive character has been the result of Parsons' attempt to achieve higher levels of systematization in his theoretical scheme, and the pursuit of this objective had led Parsons into new substantive areas; for example, the development of the General Theory of Action necessitated reference to the psychological elements of motivation. The undoubted benefit of this eclectic and synthesizing strategy has been the incorporation of different empirical problems and conceptualizations which have fostered a dynamic quality in Parsons' work that is quite remarkable given an active career of over 40 years since his first major publication.

In more detail, then, the examination of the theoretical and methodological foundations of Parsons' attempt to formulate a

system of theory capable of explaining complexes of action is divided into four stages: (1) the original 1937 formulation, (2) the structural-functional phase of theoretical analysis, (3) the general systems theory orientation, and (4) the evolutionary perspective.

Utilizing this overall view of Parsons' work as a resource the second part of the chapter moves on to consider the validity of his various theoretical formulations. It deals with the contemporary assessments of Parsons' General Theory of Action, its influence within sociology and the various responses to it, and is organized around the three key issues of testability, objectivity and the centrality to the theory of the subjective point of view. The aim here is to establish how the particular characteristics of Parsons' work led directly to the "crisis" in sociology and to demands for a radical revision of the discipline.¹ To be more specific, many commentators had great difficulty in finding an appropriate basis for evaluating Parsonian Theory whilst being convinced of the triviality², partiality³ or sheer irrelevance⁴ to empirical investigations of its conceptual schemes. The result was that the objectivity of sociological work, which had hitherto been a basic principle of the discipline, came to be increasingly questioned.⁵

Within the context of the overall objectives of this study the reception of Parsons' work by his critics and the role of his ideas in precipitating a "crisis" is particularly crucial to our interest in his relationship to Weber's Theory of Action. These circumstances serve to reveal the viability of Parsons' modification and development of key features of Weber's conception of a scientific analysis of social action. The themes of testability, objectivity and

the subjective point of view have been emphasized because they help to clarify the divergence between the theoretical and methodological ideas of Parsons and Weber. The issues examined under the heading of "testability" relate directly to Parsons' attempt to develop a general theory and his rejection of Weber's use of ideal types which was based upon scepticism of the possibility of deducing precise statements about the empirical world from a set of abstract concepts. Whilst the differences between Parsons and Weber over the nature of objectivity may not appear to be so profound, in reality, there is a sharp divergence of opinion. For Parsons objectivity is guaranteed by the role of the structure of the theoretical system in the selection of important information, whereas for Weber, the role of values in selection was crucial. Finally, in terms of the concept of the subjective point of view, we examine the extent to which Parsons' original emphasis upon the actor was subsequently changed by the development of the General Theory. In this process the attempt is made to clarify what precisely was involved in Parsons' reference to the subjective meaning of the actor and, thereby, to establish an accurate basis for a comparison with Weber's approach.

I STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARSONIAN THEORY

(a) Structural Units as a Basis for a Voluntaristic Theory of Action

In the previous chapter, the analysis of the theoretical and methodological basis of the Voluntaristic Theory of Action largely took place in the context of the convergence thesis, but it is now possible, and indeed very desirable, to consider these issues in their own right because they represent the crucial base line upon which all Parsons' own theoretical schemes were built.

The ideas Parsons derived from the convergence thesis which he synthesized to form the first level of his own theory can best be seen in terms of his notion of the action frame of reference. This constitutes the framework for all the concepts which are required for a satisfactory description and analysis of action. The most important concept within this scheme is the unit act which is the basic category from which all other concepts are derived. The unit act is made up of certain properties: namely, an actor, an end which is the object of the action, a situation consisting of conditions and means - the former lying beyond the actor's control, the latter within it. In addition,

"... there is inherent in the conception of this unit, in its analytic uses, a certain mode of relationship between these elements. That is in the choice of alternative means to the end, in so far as the situation allows alternatives, there is a 'normative orientation' of action. Within the area of control of the actor, the means employed cannot, in general, be conceived either as chosen at random or as dependent exclusively on the conditions of action, but must in some sense be subject to the influence of an independent, determinate, selective factor, a knowledge of which is necessary to the understanding of the concrete course of action. What is essential to the concept of action is that there should be a normative orientation, not that this should be any particular type." 6

Significantly, this view of action avoids any deterministic problems through the element of choice, which allows for the possibility of the actor making a mistake in the decision about the means needed to achieve a specific end. Consequently, Parsons does not claim that the mere fact of having a particularly valued end leads automatically to a specific kind of action.⁷

The purpose of the frame of reference is to make possible the description of

"... phenomena in such a way as to distinguish those facts about them which are relevant to and capable of explanation in terms of a given theoretical system from those which are not." ⁸

This problem arises because different considerations are involved in the description of an empirical phenomenon and it is the Action Frame of Reference which makes explicit the criteria to be used in the selection of relevant facts about the phenomenon which, taken together, represent an adequate description. Parsons uses the example of a person committing suicide by jumping from a bridge to illustrate the point that whilst information about the motivation of the individual is required for the theoretical system dealing with action it is only necessary to establish other data sufficiently for the immediate purpose. For example, it is quite unnecessary to pursue information about the speed of the individual's fall from the bridge to the point required by the theoretical system dealing with physical phenomena.⁹

The frame of reference also facilitates the distinction between constant and variable data. The constants are related to the description of empirical phenomena and the formulation of concrete historical individuals, which can be examined in terms of their various subdivisions into parts and units, as well as their combination into increasingly complex structures.¹⁰ The frame of

reference sets the limit to sub-division and in the study of action this is reached with the unit act, which is the smallest part that can be conceived of as existing by itself.

"Description of the same phenomena in terms that isolate these elements, or, inturn, further subdivided parts of them, from their relation to an act in this sense, destroys the relevance to the action schema so that if the facts are relevant to any scientific theory it must be a theoretical system other than that of action." 11

For Parsons the subjective point of view is used as the criterion for determining the level to which phenomena can be subdivided whilst remaining relevant to the frame of reference of the theory of action.

However, the organic-like properties of social phenomena present certain difficulties for their subdivision into units and parts. According to Parsons, at certain levels of complexity action systems have emergent properties which evaporate when the level of analysis is taken to the point of isolating the unit act: consequently, analysis at the unit level, rather than of units within systems of action leads to abstract and fictional concepts. Parsons gives as an example of this problem the isolated rational act, which he argues, cannot be described as economically rational because the economic aspect of action involves the relationship of scarce means to a variety of different ends.

"Economic rationality is thus an emergent property of action which can be observed only when a plurality of unit acts is treated together as constituting an integrated system of action." 12

However, at the descriptive level, it is unnecessary to reduce phenomena on all occasions to their parts or units, rather it is possible on the basis of scientific economy to utilize several secondary descriptive schemes, for example, those of social

relationship, personality and social group. But for Parsons, it remains a fundamental characteristic of the Action Frame of Reference that:

"There are no group properties that are not reducible to properties of systems of action and there is no analytic theory of groups which is not translatable into terms of the theory of action." 13

In contrast to the use of the Action Frame of Reference as a way of describing phenomena, it can be used as a theoretical system of analytic elements. In this case,

"Its elements have causal significance in the sense that variation in the value of any one has consequences for the values of the others. Above all, the means-end schema becomes the central framework for the causal explanation of action. Furthermore it is the specific peculiarity of this schema that it has a subjective reference. It involves a real process in the mind of the actor, as well as external to it." 14

The realism of a body of scientific knowledge is limited firstly, by the fact that it uses conceptually constructed concepts of specific phenomena (historical individuals) as the basis of analysis which are broken down into units or parts in isolation from their actual context and, secondly, by the abstractness of analytic elements.

"The empirical reference of such a concept is not necessarily a concrete phenomenon even in the above relative sense, but may be one aspect of it; the particulars corresponding to the general concept may constitute only a small part of the many facts ascertainable about the phenomenon in question." 15

Thus a general system of theory can only explain some of the facts which are important to a particular frame of reference. This is a point of fundamental difference between Analytical Realism and earlier orientations to social science, which as in the case of some versions of utilitarianism involved what Parsons called an

"empiricist reification" of systems of theory. Within these approaches it was argued that only one system of analytic categories was required to understand a particular class of empirical phenomena. In contrast, for Parsons the categories of several theoretical systems may be required to account for a concrete phenomenon. Orthodox economic theory is, therefore,

"... the formulation of the relations of a limited group of analytic elements in the broader concrete system of action." 16

And it is to this wider system of action that Parsons gives the name, the Voluntaristic Theory of Action.¹⁷

This leads on to the problem of the classification of the different sciences of action within the wider framework for the study of human conduct. As we have already seen, for Parsons there are two kinds of sciences, the historical and the analytical: the former attempt to account for a class of concrete historical individuals and in so doing, at the very least, refer to theoretical categories of one or more analytical sciences, whereas the latter attempt, "... to develop logically coherent systems of general analytic theory."¹⁸ In this case the primary reference is not to a class of historical individuals but where possible to a self contained system of theory which is independent of, and irreducible to any other theoretical system. Once this has been achieved then an independent science has been established.

Within the theoretical system of action there are various specialisms which Parsons classifies in terms of the emergent properties of increasingly complex relationships between unit acts. The first emergent property to develop from an action system, Parsons argues, is economic rationality and this has led to the

formulation of a sophisticated theoretical system, namely economics. With increased complexity of action systems the numbers of people involved increases and so the possibility arises of some coercing others - this is the problem of order associated with Hobbes.

But,

"In order that there may be a stable system of action involving a plurality of individuals there must be normative regulation of the power aspect of the relationships of individuals within the system, in this sense there must be a redistributive order." 19

These political action elements are studied by political science.

The next emergent property is explained by Parsons in these terms:

"...it has been seen the solution of the power question, as well as of a plurality of other complex features of social action systems, involves a common value system, manifested in the legitimacy of institutional norms, in the common ultimate ends of action, in ritual and in various modes of expression. All these phenomena may be referred back to a single general emergent property of social action systems which may be called 'common value integration'." 20

This property is distinct from the economic and the political and constitutes the subject matter of sociology, which Parsons defines as,

"... the science which attempts to develop an analytic theory of social action systems in so far as these systems can be understood in terms of the property of common-value integration." 21

Having clarified the main features of Parsons' thinking on methodological and theoretical issues at the time of the original formulation of the theory of action, it will perhaps be useful to conclude our consideration of the foundation level of his work with an indication of how The Structure of Social Action stood in relation to the different kinds of scientific conceptualization

and levels of theoretical strategy which have been outlined. Parsons tells us that the book is exclusively concerned with unit and part concepts together with their structural relationships, all of which together constitute actual systems of action. His objective in the book, therefore, is quite limited. There is no attempt to formulate a system of analytic variables; rather the aim is much more preparatory, it is to establish the structural outline of general systems of action to which analytic theory can be applied and, despite Weber's views to the contrary,

"... by showing that the conception of a generalized system is useful in its structural aspect, it has demonstrated that the task of setting up a corresponding system of elements and their relations is not logically impossible." 22

(b) Structural-Functional Theoretical Analysis

The transition from a Voluntaristic to a structural-functional form of theory represents a development in two main areas: on the one hand the unit act was replaced by the system of action as the basic reference point of analysis, and on the other, the programme for formulating dynamic analysis of a system of theory was simplified, in the face of insuperable difficulties, by a structural-functional orientation. These changes led to some of the most celebrated commentaries which Parsons' work has attracted; namely Scott's charge that Parsons' pre-war Voluntarism had been entirely superseded by a deterministic view of action consistent with Tolman's purposive behaviourism²³ and, Martindale's view that with the growing emphasis upon systems of action the study of interaction became increasingly Durkheimian whereas in the

Voluntaristic stage it had appeared to be very similar to Weber's position,²⁴ Whilst these criticisms will be examined in detail toward the end of the chapter it is sufficient for our purposes, at this stage, merely to note that Parsons saw the situation quite differently. In a reply to critics of his The Social System²⁵ and Toward a General Theory of Action²⁶, which were characterized by the stress upon systems and the use of structural-functional analysis, Parsons argued that although considerable theoretical and conceptual advances had been introduced, the books

"... were in no sense meant to suggest any fundamental break in the continuity of theoretical development ... they stand in the most intimate relation to a great deal of work done before." 27

Indeed Parsons draws exactly the same distinction between a descriptive and an analytic interest in phenomena as he did at the Voluntaristic stage of his thinking. "Accurate description necessitates selection from the facts of experience and the frame of reference performs the vital role of establishing the criteria which make this possible. In addition, the movement to systems of action as the basic unit of the theoretical approach, which represented the growing importance in Parsons' thinking of the concept of system itself, added a new tool to the descriptive armoury as the idea of the structure of a system could be used to organize the varying kinds of relationship between the units and subsystems which together constitute the system of action."²⁸

At the analytic level the goal of science remains for Parsons the realization of dynamic analysis of complex systems:

"... the essential feature of dynamic analysis in the fullest sense is the treatment of a body of interdependent phenomena simultaneously in the mathematical sense. The simplest case is the analysis of the effect of variation in one antecedent factor, but this ignores the reciprocal effect of these changes on this factor. The ideal solution is the possession of a logically complete system of dynamic generalization which can state all the elements of reciprocal interdependence between all the variables of the system. This ideal has, in the formal sense, been attained only in the systems of differential equations of analytical mechanics. All other sciences are limited to a more 'primitive' level of systematic theoretical analysis." 29

However, the lack of success which Parsons experienced after 1937 in his attempts to achieve such dynamic analysis, based upon generalized analytic knowledge, meant that in order to achieve theoretical generalization about empirically significant variables it was necessary to artificially reduce the complexity of the concrete phenomena and processes under investigation.³⁰ The resulting compromise produced a rather abstract form of analysis.

However, the effect of this problem was to some extent minimized by the use of structural categories which according to Parsons,

"... simplify the dynamic problems to the point where they are manageable without the possibility of refined mathematical analysis. At the same time the loss, which is very great, is partly compensated by relating all problems explicitly and systematically to the total system. For the structure of a system as described in the context of a generalized conceptual scheme is a genuinely technical analytical tool. It ensures that nothing of vital importance is inadvertently overlooked, and ties in loose ends, giving determinacy to problems and solutions. It minimizes the danger, so serious to commonsense thinking, of filling gaps by resort to uncritical residual categories." 31

The structures themselves are identified in terms of their functional or dysfunctional effect upon the on-going processes of the system. As a result of the gradual movement away from the

earlier analytic programme for dynamic analysis, of the kind possible in mechanics, Parsons argues that it is now more accurate to describe his theoretical work as structural-functional: in other words, the analysis of the functional contribution of particular structures to the social system or system of action.³²

Parsons' greater emphasis upon the concept of system, which was particularly inspired by the work of W.B. Cannon³³, was closely related to his extension of the theory of action to a much wider variety of social scientific approaches than he had covered in The Structure of Social Action. He acknowledges that his conception of the theoretical system, in the studies leading up to that book, was confined to the social system and that it was only after 1949 that he began to develop the idea of a truly general theory incorporating social psychology and cultural systems.³⁴ Reflecting this much more general background, Parsons was able to describe, in 1951, the development of the basic categories involved in the formulation of a general theory of action in these terms; the theory ...

"... for many years has been developing through the convergence of anthropological studies of culture, the theory of learning, the psychoanalytic theory of personality, economic theory, and the study of modern social structure." 35

This substantive widening of the scope of the theory meant that it became fruitful to distinguish, within the action frame of reference, three distinct and irreducible though nevertheless inter-related sub-divisions; namely, the personality system, the social system and the cultural system.³⁶

For Parsons one of the most important properties of empirical systems were the interdependence of parts or variables which were characterized by some uniformity of pattern rather than randomness. More specifically, the relationships between the components of the system have a tendency to equilibrium - to the maintenance of a particular state of affairs, which need not be static but is likely to involve an orderly form of change. Looking at a group of elements as a system with a tendency to equilibrium makes it possible to focus attention upon the boundaries of the system with the environment, and the processes and structures whereby the system is able to maintain its position vis a vis the environment.³⁷

The utilization of this conception of system led to attention being concentrated upon the ability of the system to meet certain conditions if it was to remain broadly the same or undergo an orderly process of change. This new theoretical advance was based, therefore, upon the assumption that the biological and psychological needs of an adequate proportion of the population must be met and if orderliness is to be maintained within the system the actions of the members must be coordinated to maintain standards of fairness and efficiency. Hence for Parsons,

"The system can only function if a sufficient proportion of its members perform the essential social roles with an adequate degree of effectiveness," 38

Having considered some of the more general epistemological and methodological features of the Action Frame of Reference it is now possible to examine the specific conceptual schemes which Parsons developed for the analysis of social systems.

Faced with the problem of simplifying the number of variables required for dynamic analysis, Parsons' strategy was to develop structural categories and the most important of these units within the social system was that of status-role. At a very early stage in his use of this concept, Parsons said this:

"Role, as the behavioural aspect of status, furnishes the link between the ideal and the behavioural patterns of a society. Each definition of a status includes that of an expected role. These expectations are, however, conformed with to varying degrees, and the kinds and degrees of deviance from the ideal patterns which are found in the actual behavioural patterns are of the greatest importance." 39

For Parsons the major difficulty involved in the study of social roles was this: How is it possible to take full account of the different cultural patterns which have become institutionalized in social roles? Parsons acknowledges a debt to Weber in his recognition of the complexity of this issue because, he argues, in contrast to Toennies' distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft Weber had demonstrated in his studies of the world religions how the belief systems of particular religious traditions corresponded to the main forms of the social structure in the societies in which the beliefs were institutionalized. Parsons comments on the importance of Weber's research:

"This was the first major development in modern sociology in the systematic discrimination of major types of value system in terms directly articulated with the comparative analysis of social structures, which went well beyond the impressionistic level of Toennies." 40

Parsons' solution to this problem of accurate classification took the form of a precise and systematic set of concepts which he called the pattern variables of role-definition.⁴¹ According to

Parsons, with the pattern variables as developed in Toward a General

Theory of Action and The Social System the "... classification of social structure ...for the first time goes beyond Max Weber."⁴²

In the development of this schema Parsons was strongly influenced by his consideration of the nature of professional groups in modern society and the extent to which their actions could be characterized as rational. The professionals did not fit easily into either of the two main ideological interpretations of industrial society: capitalism was seen to be based upon the rational pursuit of collective interest. In fact this concern with the professions, especially the analysis of the role of the medical practitioner, was for Parsons a major element of continuity between The Structure of Social Action and the development of the General Theory because he came to realize that Toennies' dichotomy did not just involve one variable, but was based upon the mixture of several quite independent ones.⁴³

The Pattern Variables, then, were a set of five dichotomies of orientation which an actor had to resolve, implicitly or explicitly, consciously or unconsciously in the course of each action. The five sets of alternatives are as follows:

" Affectivity - Affective Neutrality ... is that between accepting an opportunity for gratification without regard for its consequences, on the one hand, and evaluating it with regard to its consequences, on the other. Self Orientation - Collectivity Orientation ... is that between considering an act solely with respect to its personal significance, on the one hand, and considering it with respect to its significance for a collectivity or a moral code, on the other. Universalism - Particularism ... is that between evaluating the object of an action in terms of its relations to a generalized frame of reference, on the one hand, and evaluating it in terms of its relations to the actor and his own specific relations to objects, on the other. Ascription - Achievement ... is that between seeing the social object with

respect to which an action is oriented as a composite of performances (actions), on the one hand, and seeing it as a composite of ascribed qualities, on the other. Specificity - Diffuseness ... is that between conceding to the social object with respect to which action is oriented an undefined set of rights (to be delimited only by feasibility in the light of other demands), on the one hand, and conceding to that social object only a clearly specified set of rights on the other." 44

According to Parsons the pattern variables are thoroughly consistent with his pre-war use of concepts embodying the subjective point of view, as can be seen in the following comment; they ...

"... apply to the normative or ideal aspect of the structure of systems of action ... They are equally useful in the empirical description of the degree of conformity with or divergence of concrete action from the patterns of expectation or aspiration." 45

Indeed if allowance is made for modifications in terminology to take account of developments in sociology and the extension of his work into other disciplines, Parsons' conception of the relationship between the individual and society in connection with the problem of order is also remarkably similar to his pre-war view.

"The structural roles of the social system ... must be oriented to value alternatives. Selections are of course always actions of individuals, but these selections cannot be inter-individually random in a social system. Indeed one of the most important functional imperatives of the maintenance of social systems is that the value orientations of the different actors in the same social system must be integrated in some measure in a common system. All ongoing social systems do actually show a tendency toward a general system of common cultural orientations." 46

By reducing the analysis of the way the normal consensus in society affects conduct to more detailed levels, through a utilization of a combination of learning theory and a Durkheimian approach, Parsons arrived at a very characteristic feature of this phase of his work.

"... value patterns, institutionalized in the social structure, through the operation of role mechanisms, and in combination with other elements, organize the behaviour of adult members of society. Through the socialization process, they are in turn constitutive in establishment of the personality structure of the new adult from the plasticity of early childhood." 47

This process of institutionalization, which is a key theme in Parsons' work, is defined in these terms:

"... the organization of action around sufficiently stable patterns so that it may be treated as structured from the point of view of the system." 48.

Indeed for Parsons it is only possible to talk of a social system when interaction has become institutionalized in this sense. This is the key to Parsons' conceptualization of the role for sociological analysis in the study of social action - it is concerned with institutions because this class of phenomena represent a structural framework of social systems. Thus for Parsons sociology is to concentrate upon several related theoretical issues: the comparative study of the integration and differentiation of institutional patterns; the analysis of the relationships between institutions and culture; the motivation of institutional behaviour; the motivation of deviance and the problem of control within society; and finally a theory of institutional change.⁴⁹ Of course, sociology was only intended by Parsons to be a theory of part of the social system: consequently sociological theory was inevitably abstract vis a vis empirical reality. For example, Parsons considered that economic theory was concerned with distinct processes within such a system taking place within a framework of institutions which facilitated the operation of the market, although the theory did not concern itself with the nature of these institutions in themselves.⁵⁰

(c) Systems Theory and the Four Function Paradigm

However, certain problems emerged concerning the level of theoretical systematization which had been attained; in particular it was apparent that a degree of logical imbalance existed between the personality and social systems on the one hand, and the cultural system on the other. In addition, whilst there was a notable emphasis upon the disciplines of psychology and sociology, economics was relatively neglected. Given Parsons' desire to create a genuinely systematic general theory of action, and the prestige of economic theory in its own right, it was inevitable that Parsons would seek to integrate the analysis of economic phenomena more successfully within his conceptual scheme. At the level of Parsonian thinking represented, for instance by The Social System, economic theory was conceptualized as an abstract set of analytic elements within a wider theory of social systems, but with the development of the functional problems this view was radically transformed⁵¹ - this new theoretical advance constituting the basis for Economy & Society.⁵²

Parsons' Functional Problems were a development of the Pattern-Variable scheme together with Bales' categories of interaction process analysis. Bales' categories were formulated on the basis of the conceptualization of a small group of people, as a functioning social system, in which four different structures and processes contributing to the systems' needs were identified. The four functional problems were as follows; adaptation to environmental conditions; goal attainment - the instrumental control of parts of the system to achieve specific goals; latency - the management of the members' sentiments and tensions; and the

integration of the various members of the unit, In collaboration with Bales and Shils⁵³ Parsons concluded that the Functional Problems and the Pattern Variables were, in essential respects, attempts to conceptualize the same thing, and that the new combined scheme could be used to analyze all types of action system from small group to total society.

"The fundamental conception underlying both original schemes is that a process of on-going social interaction can be usefully described by comparison with a hypothetical system in a state of moving equilibrium. If no new elements at all were introduced into the system, the interaction process would, according to the 'law of inertia' stated in The Social System, continue unchanged." 54

The more familiar A-G-I-L terminology quickly became established representing a schema for the analysis of the structure and process of systems of action in terms of their contribution to the four functional problems of adaption, goal-attainment, integration and latent pattern maintenance and tension management.⁵⁵ In this way Parsons' earlier emphasis upon structures which contributed to the integration of social systems was replaced by a new interest in the relationships between the A-G-I-L sub-systems and the other systems which together constitute their environment.

Utilizing this new framework Parsons concluded that the economy as the term was used by economists represented a special type of social system, a functional sub-system of the total social system which specialized in its adaptation to the environment. As a sub-system it is clearly not self-sufficient and therefore is involved with the exchange of inputs and outputs at its boundaries, the most important of which demarcate the other functional sub-systems.⁵⁶

"This conception of the economy as a societal sub-system proved capable of generalization. In the first instance, such generalization opened a new approach to the theoretical analysis of the "polity" by suggesting that it be treated as an analytically defined sub-system of a society strictly parallel to the economy. This eliminated a very serious asymmetry within the general theory of social systems between the status of economic and political theory." 57

In this phase of Parsons' thinking, the analytic sub-division of the Action Frame of Reference itself underwent a major change; to the personality social and cultural systems was added a fourth, the biological organism. This addition was, no doubt, a result of his pursuit of systematization given the central role of the functional requisites in his work. This development enabled Parsons to draw a parallel between the interchanges of the four sub-systems at the most general level of action theory, in other words, the biological organism, the personality, the social, and the cultural systems and the interchanges between the four functional sub-systems of a social system. Hence the biological organism is concerned with the resolution of adaptive problems, the personality system specifically deals with goal seeking and decision making issues, the social system represents a pattern of norms and roles which integrate the cultural and personality systems, and the cultural system refers to the symbolic meanings which structure behaviour. This schema can be represented in the following well known diagrammatic form:⁵⁸

A	Biological Organism Adaptation	Personality	G
		Goal Attainment	
L	Culture Latency	Social System Integration	I

Given that it was in the period of the late 1950's and early 1960's that Parsons' influence in sociology and the social sciences was at its highest, it will be instructive to pause in our examination of the developmental stages of his work and look in rather more detail at certain issues of particular relevance to our concerns: namely the status of the actor and normative order.

Whilst the focus of Parsons' analytic interests turned to interchanges between the four distinct action systems, his conceptualization of action as a decision making process remained although some of the voluntaristic connotations of the earliest stages of his work were modified to take account of the structural-functional analysis of collectivities.⁵⁹ However, his views on normative control as the basis for social order were unchanged.

For Parsons, then, a system of action is composed at the very least of two units, though frequently many more. The units can be both actors and social collectivities.

"The unit act involves the relationship of an actor to a situation composed of objects, and it is conceived as a choice (imputed by the theorist to the actor) among alternative ways of defining the situation." 60

The duality of actor and situation is particularly crucial to Parsons' Action Frame of Reference:

".... one cannot speak of action except as a relation between both, it is not a 'property' of one or the other or of the two as aggregated rather than related." 61

From the point of view of the actor, and for Parsons the concept of actor is broad enough to include collectivities, the situation is composed of all those objects - social, physical and cultural - which have acquired a meaning for that actor.

"Actors are oriented to objects in their situation in so far as the object in its relation to him may be said to have acquired a pattern of meaning to the actor in question which is relatively stabilized and can, therefore, serve as a reference point for the analysis of his action. Meaning is ... resolvable with two components (a) cathetic meaning as a goal object (or object to be avoided) or source of gratification (or deprivation) (b) cognitive meaning, as part of a relatively stable definition of the situation." 62

In addition, interaction takes place through communication which involves common meanings:

"That is in order for ego to communicate with alter and to impute intentions to him and vice versa, they must both to some degree of approximation 'understand the same thing' by each other's acts. This means in turn, that if he is to be understood or if he is properly to understand the intentions of the other, he must conform with the 'conventions' of the 'language' involved in communication." 63

Hence communication and ultimately action has to conform with normative standards. Indeed for Parsons the frame of reference of action can best be seen as a framework for the analysis of the structures and processes which control action and behaviour and this, of course, is the reason for the theoretical salience of the functional problems which represent the exigencies constraining all systems of action. 64

It is in these terms that Parsons is able to say:

"The most fundamental theorem of the theory of action seems to me to be that the structure of systems of action consists in institutionalized ... and/or ... internalized patterns of cultural meaning." 65

And with reference to a system of action:

"In such a structured system both actor and object share institutionalized norms, conformity with which is a condition for stability of the system." 66

For Parsons the institutionalization of norms as a solution to the problem of order is much to be preferred to the alternatives, either the actors or acting units are seen as orientated to each other in a purely random fashion or such severe conflict must be envisaged as to bring the continuation of the system into doubt. One of the benefits of using the idea of normative control is that it leads into the concept of a boundary maintaining system in relation to its environment with some very clear parallels between the structures and processes leading to order in a social system and the problem of control in any boundary maintaining system in relation to a changing external environment;⁶⁷ and this conveniently introduces the next phase of the General Theory of Action.

(d) The Evolutionary Perspective

The final stage of Parsons' thinking which began in the mid-1960's⁶⁸ was marked by the use of an evolutionary context for the analysis of social change and this was only one, albeit very significant, example of the increasing tendency towards the end of his career to emphasize the similarities between the concepts used for the study of the phenomena of action and nature. The four function paradigm continues to be the basis for analysis, but increasingly, in the context of the class of all living systems. Consequently, the direct influence of biological approaches, information theory and cybernetics can be increasingly detected in his work. Indeed the theoretical category of social system is, for Parsons, merely one form of the basic methodological principle of the generalizing sciences, namely, systems analysis.⁶⁹

For Parsons the concept of system provides the key to the analysis of interdependencies between parts of a phenomenon and between the phenomenon and its environment. It is crucial to all generalizing disciplines because, by focussing upon the total context, it facilitates a more accurate understanding of structures, processes, and interrelationships. In the use of this concept Parsons again acknowledges a debt to the work of W.B. Cannon.

"With homeostasis, he conceived of a spontaneous built-in control within the organism which maintained an equilibrium state within boundaries; this concept referred more to a 'pattern of functioning' like that of behaviour than to an 'inert' anatomical structure. ... later ... this trend ... established contact with that of cybernetics and information theory ... which grounded conceptions of an organized system maintained by integrative control mechanism much more solidly in the general theory of science." 70

The purpose of the inevitably abstract theoretical concept of social system is to describe and analyze empirical systems of social interaction, which for Parsons can be seen as the behaviour rather than the physical existence of living organisms. This theme of the unity of the objects of all the sciences is increasingly in evidence as can be seen from his description of human social interaction organized on a cultural level as "... a late evolutionary product ... continuous with a very broad range of interaction phenomena among other organisms."⁷¹ In more detail, the paradigm Parsons formulates for the analysis of social interaction focusses upon:

"... a social system generated by and composed of the interaction of units which are 'behaving organisms', personalities, or various levels of collectivity. Acting units, however, are always involved in cultural systems, which express, symbolize, order, and control human orientations through patterned meaning systems consisting of both codes of meaning and specific combinations of symbols in particular contexts." 72

Such an interaction system is analytically differentiated by Parsons as follows: firstly, a group of interacting units; secondly, a collection of rules which provide a framework guiding both the interaction and the orientation of the components; thirdly, an ordered process or sequence of the interaction; and fourthly, an environment within which the system functions and to which it is interrelated.⁷³ For Parsons each interacting unit is both an active agent and an object to be taken into consideration by other acting units; but in each case the unit has meaning both to itself and to others. Hence the characteristic feature of interaction which Parsons refers to as double contingency:

"Not only, as for isolated behaving units, animals or human, is a goal outcome contingent on successful cognition and manipulation of environmental objects by the actors, but since the most important objects involved in interaction act too, it is also contingent on their action or intervention in the course of events." 74

The analysis of social systems proceeds on the basis of the examination of their exchanges with their environments as well as the exchanges between the different parts of the system and it is this context which provides the notion of functional problem with its significance. The functional importance of an exchange to a system can be readily determined by considering the consequences to the system of a sudden rise or fall in the level of the particular input or output.⁷⁵

In fact, for Parsons the concept of function is;

"... simply the corollary of the concept living system, delineating certain features in the first instance of the system-environment relationship, and in the second, of the internal differentiation of the system itself," 76

Broadly speaking, then, living systems are conceptualized as having an internal state which is more stable than the environment and

different from it. They are also to some extent self regulating and it is in the mechanisms which facilitate this that the meaning of the concept function can be found. According to Parsons the designation "structural-functional theory" is no longer appropriate to this kind of analysis because structure and function are not parallel terms; structure is much more equivalent to process and refers to relatively stable relationships between parts of the system, whereas function refers to the operation of a living system seen as a going concern in its relationships with the environment and, thereby, meeting certain requirements through a combination of structure and process.⁷⁷

The basis of the four-function paradigm has become increasingly secure, according to Parsons, as the developments in biological theory and general science have been extrapolated into the field of action; in particular the conceptions of homeostasis and cybernetics provide valuable new opportunities for dealing with the problem of integration:

"It thus seems significant that the four function paradigm proved useful in integrating economic theory within that of the social system and in particular by analyzing money as a mechanism of integration - indeed a cybernetic mechanism at the symbolic cultural level - through ramified systems of market exchange." ⁷⁸

Moreover, Parsons was able to use the analytic scheme of the primary sub-system of society, and the mechanisms of their integration, as a framework for the analysis of total societies.

Parsons' interest in the media of interchange, as symbolic modes of communication forming part of a cybernetic hierarchy of control, was closely associated with his development of the paradigm of the four sub-systems of action. This was initially

based upon the example of money, but was subsequently extended to political power and, in turn, this led to the analytic treatment of two more functional sub-systems, the societal community which is concerned with integration, and the pattern-maintenance sub-system.⁷⁹ The complete analytic scheme, seen primarily from the point of view of the scope of sociology, is as follows:

"... the core of a society is the societal community, which, functionally regarded, is the integrative subsystem. It interpenetrates and interchanges directly with each of the other primary subsystems: the pattern-maintenance or cultural-primary subsystem; the goal-attainment subsystem, or polity; and the adaptive subsystem, or economy. The medium focal to the societal community is influence which is interchangeable for power, money, and value commitments." 80

According to Parsons in interchanges involving the polity, power is used to mobilize and secure human services, money is used by the economy in exchanges with the physical environment concerning the factors of production, and finally, the relationship between the social and cultural system is in terms of value commitments.

Having considered the way in which general systems theory influenced Parsons' general analytic scheme in this period of his work, it is now possible to examine how his specific views on the treatment of social change were modified by his introduction of an evolutionary perspective. This represented an increasing stress upon the similarities between developmental changes which take place in the human and sub-human worlds.

Parsons defines an evolutionary universal as,

"... any organizational development sufficiently important to further evolution that, rather than emerging only once, it is likely to be 'hit upon' by various systems operating under different conditions." 81

For Parsons, the concept of adaptation provides the theoretical framework for the identification of such an organizational development which is conceptualized in terms sufficiently broad to include both a passive adaptation to the environment as well as a more active alteration of environmental circumstances in the favour of the living system. Systems which develop an evolutionary universal have, Parsons argues, so radically enhanced their long term ability to adapt to the environment that only those systems possessing this new characteristic can progress to "... higher levels of adaptive capacity."⁸² He cites several examples of such evolutionary universals: vision for evolution in the organic world, and in the case of the biological evolution of mankind, the development of the human hand as a general purpose tool, as well as the human brain. However, failure to develop the particular evolutionary universal does not necessarily mean that the system will die out.⁸³

For Parsons the characteristic feature of the evolution of human society is the interchange between natural and social conditions:

"... it is not only the genetic constitution of the species that determines the 'needs' confronting the environment, but this constitution plus the cultural tradition. A set of "normative expectations" pertaining to man's relation to his environment delineates the ways in which adaptation should be developed and extended. Within the relevant range, cultural innovations, especially definitions of what man's life ought to be, thus replace Darwinian variations in genetic constitution." 84

The development of a common cultural orientation, which in its most basic form is, according to Parsons, similar to religion, presupposes the evolutionary universal of language. The establishment of social organization presupposes kinship systems and,

the evolution of technology presupposes culture and the development of specialized knowledge of practical techniques. Together, religion, language, kinship and technology...

"... may be regarded as an integrated set of evolutionary universals at even the earliest human level. No known human society has existed without all four in relatively definite relations to each other. In fact, their presence constitutes the very minimum that may be said to mark a society as truly human." 85

Parsons argues that at the social structural level evolution beyond the primitive stage is dependent upon two other evolutionary universals; first, a clear system of social stratification and, second, a system of legitimations dealing in particular with political roles. Those societies which develop beyond this point, especially if they have a literate population exhibit another pair of universals, administrative bureaucracy and money and markets. In reference to bureaucracy Parson's says:

"It is by no means the only structural factor in the adaptive capacity of social systems, but no one can deny that it is an important one. Above all, it is built on further specializations ensuing from the broad emancipation from ascription that stratification and specialized legitimation make possible." 86

Both bureaucracy and money and markets incorporate and are dependent upon the further development and specialization of universalistic norms, such as law. These norms are probably necessary for the emergence of the last structural complex which Parsons considers, namely the democratic association based upon elected leadership and wide franchise.⁸⁷ Within this process Parsons attaches particular weight to changes in levels of knowledge in society and argues that the revolution in education and its universalization has had effects of comparable significance in modern society to

the industrial and political revolutions; he argues that it has certainly led to problems of integration of which the most common symptom has been the student revolt.⁸⁸

In the last few years of his life Parsons attempted to place the General Theory of Action within a more comprehensive framework than had been used before⁸⁹ a framework entitled the human condition.⁹⁰ As this development is consistent with the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the evolutionary phase of his work - an emphasis upon open systems theorizing and interchange with the environment - a brief examination will be sufficient for our purposes: the essential point is that Parsons' interest in the human condition does not entail any major revisions of the four function paradigm or the media of interchange in the study of systems of action.

"My attempt to develop a paradigm of the human condition is premised in the assumption that the scientific method, in this case of theorizing rather than of empirical investigation, can be extended to contributing to the problem of the systematizing of our knowledge of the "setting", as we have called it, beyond the boundaries of the system of action, in the 'environment', if we use that concept, in which human action is placed".⁹¹

Anticipating some criticism Parsons defends the new venture in two ways: first, whilst he fully recognizes that the issues involved in the human condition are more speculative than have hitherto been acceptable to empirical science, he argues that although there are limits to knowledge, they do not necessarily lie at the boundary of the action system, afterall, the physical and organic worlds have been particularly well studied;⁹² second, that he is merely following his usual theoretical strategy when faced by a problem - in such a situation he attempts

"... to improve understanding of one sector of the subject matter of action by seeking better understanding of the framework in which it is located in a more comprehensive system." 93

Discussing the environment in which the general system of action is placed, Parsons states:

"All students of human action have long been aware of the importance to human beings of the physical world, the organic world, and, though its status has been more controversial, the 'transempirical' (telic) world, besides that of action itself in our technical sense. What is new in the present venture is the attempt to put their relations to action and each other in a more systematic framework." 94

Within the paradigm of the human conditions Parsons' main interests are centred upon the telic system as a source of meaning for the action system and the interchanges which are possible. Following his normal systematic practice he also examines the relationship between the telic and the physicochemical system and the telic and the human organic system, as well as the relationships between all the different permutations of pairs of sub systems in the human condition and the media which makes it all feasible. 95

II PARSONIAN THEORY AND THE CRISIS IN SOCIOLOGY

As a result of our examination of the origin of Parsons' work in the 'convergence' of theoretical schemes and its subsequent development through various stages of refinement and extension, culminating in the paradigm of the human condition, there can be no doubt that Parsons⁹⁶ has produced a theoretical system of remarkable systematic coherence and enormous complexity. This is particularly true when the range of variables the theory seeks to encompass and the different levels of analysis which it is designed to facilitate are taken into account. But above all, it is the ambitiousness of the enterprise allied to its author's persistence in spite of criticism and indifference, which will, perhaps, prove to be its most distinctive features.

In presenting an overview of the various forms and conditions of Parsons' general theory it has been necessary to adopt an expository approach, but having reached this vantage point, it is now possible to pursue a more critical path and consider Parsons' work in relation to the strengths and weaknesses identified by his contemporaries which point to certain themes of particular relevance to our study. In other words, then, we shall attempt to assess the permanent value of the General Theory of Action as an extension and development of certain aspects of Weber's approach to the theoretical and methodological features of sociology.

However, it is at the very point of considering the value of Parsons' work as a contribution to social scientific knowledge that a rather curious phenomenon becomes apparent. From the first reviews of The Structure of Social Action through to the comments

on, his latest collection of essays published in 1978,⁹⁷ Parsonian Theory has evoked feelings ranging from wonder to disbelief amongst other sociologists - and this choice of terminology is quite deliberate - because by its very nature the basis on which an assessment could have been made, was incomplete. Indeed both the acceptance and rejection of Parsonian Theory exhibited remarkable similarities with a spiritual or ideological transformation, a Kuhnian paradigm shift,⁹⁸ in short it was analogous to an act of faith. The explanation of this lies in the fact that Parsonian Theory was not consistent with existing standards and assumptions within sociology concerning the nature of 'theory'. To be precise, Parsons redefined the criteria for judging the role and value of theory in social science. Hence his comment

"There is an ambiguity in the common use of the term "theory" - the term is often used to designate what I have called the solution of a problem, e.g. a theory of juvenile delinquency. By theory ... I mean a logical system of abstract propositions which as such have no direct empirical content at all. A prototype is the system of differential equations constituting the theory of classical mechanics." 99

Moreover, whilst the presentation in an extricably linked form of both a theoretical system and a framework legitimating the theoretical strategy was a source of initial strength and appeal, in the longer term, it appears to be responsible for what can now be seen to be a major eclipse of influence - certainly to a level which would have been quite unimaginable in the heady Parsonian days of the early 1950's.

To be more specific, the initial source of Parsons influence can be traced to the nature of American Sociology in the 1930's and 40's. At that time the discipline was predominantly

atheoretical and pragmatic in form and often viewed its subject matter in behaviouristic terms.¹⁰⁰

Against this background Parsons explicitly attempted to situate his theory in the context of an analysis of theoretical and methodological issues directly relevant for sociology and the other sciences of action. Parsons' work stood out dramatically because such problems of method and object of study, on the borderline of sociology and philosophy, were of marginal interest to most American sociologists at a time when an operationalist philosophy of science exerted a major influence. Having rewritten the rules for discourse, having apparently incorporated the main ideas of the three most eminent sociologists of the turn of the century generation into his work, Parsons came to dominate sociology. His General Theory of Action provided a legitimating framework for several generations of less ambitious sociological endeavour: it defined the questions to be asked, suggested the concepts to be used in analysis, and its systematic interconnectedness provided a coherent thread linking up the various substantive areas of the discipline. Thus Parsons shaped a conception of theory which largely moulded theoretical debate until the mid 1960's.¹⁰¹

However, throughout this time the paradox at the centre of the theory remained: whilst the theoretical strategy continued to be broadly consistent with the conventionally accepted philosophy of science its application was constantly disappointing in the sense that testable results were meagre. At the same time it was not possible to identify any obviously erroneous components of the strategy and, inevitably, this led to a question which was posed with growing frustration: How can the value of Parsons'

General Theory of Action be judged? Significantly this question was not satisfactorily resolved at the time and Parsons work only began to recede from the centre of the theoretical stage because of the growth from the early sixties of phenomenologically inspired versions of the subject based upon rather different epistemological and methodological assumptions.¹⁰² In other words then, Parsons' influence did not decline because it was suddenly shown to be invalid, rather Parsonian sociology waned because it was increasingly ignored as other issues became more fashionable.¹⁰³

The heart of the matter is that Parsons' conception of theory appeared to equate a programme for the construction of a general theory with a contribution to knowledge of empirical reality. With the benefit of hindsight it is now possible to see much more clearly than was possible for his contemporaries of the 50's and 60's that the programme has not been realized, that the promise of innovatory conceptual schemes has been repeatedly unfulfilled, and that despite Parsons' formidable intellectual efforts throughout his career there has been insufficient empirical corroboration of relationships between his analytic elements to validate his theoretical system.¹⁰⁴

His theory of action remains a purely theoretical set of concepts and classificatory schemes which have not been demonstrated in any rigorous fashion, to have a basis in the empirical world. Whilst this lack of corroboration of the general theory has no conclusive implications for the validity of the methodological approach and the related conception of sociology, it may well be a valuable clue to their potentiality for realization. And, in

particular, it does serve to highlight the crucial nature of Parsons's analysis of the convergence of theoretical schemes for the assessment of all his work, because without empirical corroboration of the theoretical system the only basis for determining its value or usefulness consists of the arguments about convergence - the base line from which all his subsequent work has been inferred in accordance with the methodological framework of the general theory.¹⁰⁵

But this of course is to anticipate one of the main themes of the argument which can only proceed on the basis of a thorough examination of the value of Parsons work as a contribution to scientific knowledge of social action. Since its initial formulation Parsons' work has been subjected to considerable critical attention from a variety of perspectives, and by utilizing the problems which have been identified as a framework, it is possible to provide a detailed answer, oriented to our specific interests, in terms of three themes; (a) the extent to which Parsonian theory represents tested scientific knowledge. (b) the objectivity of his work and (c) the nature of the subjective point of view which Parsons has always insisted is crucial to his conception of action.

(a) The Testability of Parsonian Theory

The extent to which Parsons work could or could not be seen as tested scientific propositions was raised most sharply within the mainstream of American Sociology by George Homans in his Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association in 1964.¹⁰⁶

After recognizing the value of functional analysis for sociological research, Homans argues that the position of functional theory is quite different: the purpose of a scientific theory is to explain empirical phenomena, and in so doing it must conform to a logico-deductive structure. A theory has to be a strictly deductive propositional system in which statements capable of testing with empirical reality can be logically deduced from the more abstract ones. If in the process of testing, a lower level proposition is corroborated then logically, the more abstract and general propositions are similarly corroborated. A theory which lacks these characteristics belongs to metaphysics, not empirical science.

In rather trenchant tones, Homans continues:

"One may define properties and categories, and one still has no theory. One may state that there are relations between the properties, and one still has no theory. One may state that a change in one property will produce a definite change in another property, and one still has no theory. Not until one has properties, and propositions stating the relations between them, and the propositions form a deductive system - not until one has all three does one have a theory. Most of our arguments about theory would fall to the ground, if we first asked whether we had a theory to argue about." 107

Functional theory has not met these criteria and, Homans argues, the practice of resorting to conditional statements of the form, "If x is to be maintained then institutions of type y are necessary", do not resolve the problem. Rather, he argues, "... what sociology has to explain are the actual features of actual societies and not just the generalized society." 108

In a particularly clear reference to Parsons, Homans makes the point that although some functionalists have recognized

these problems and sought to avoid them by developing a different form of theory, a conceptual scheme based upon a group of functional problems to be faced by any society, it is still not a deductive system.

"From their lower order propositions, as from their higher order ones, no definite conclusions in logic could be drawn. Under these conditions, there was no way of telling whether their choice of functional problems and categories was not wholly arbitrary. What the functionalists actually produced was not a theory but a new language for describing social structure, one among many possible languages; and much of the work they called theoretical consisted in showing how the words in other languages, including that of every-day life, could be translated into theirs." 109

In view of the importance of Homan's critique it is necessary to examine Parsons' work to see if the substance of this argument is correct: Can statements be deduced from the theory and compared with empirical reality in order to determine the validity of the theoretical system? Conveniently, Parsons has frequently commented upon this issue so that it is possible to resolve the question by reference to his own statements on his theory of action as it has unfolded through its various stages.

As we have already seen, the initial formulation of the theoretical scheme in The Structure of Social Action was, for Parsons,

"... the first level of integrated general theory in ... (his) .. own work. This was clearly very far from being a logico-deductive system ... but ... it was very much more than an eclectic collection of unrelated theoretical ideas." 110

However, according to Parsons, the task of discovering the relationships between the various elements within the structure of action had proved to be very formidable.¹¹¹

In an address presented in 1949, Parsons summarized his views on his basic orientation to social theory, its concepts and problem areas, and concludes by saying that his work so far "... is not a system of sociological theory. It is rather a programme for the development of such a system."¹¹²

Somewhat later, writing about the change from analytic to structural-functional theory, Parsons argued that the advantages of a structural-functional orientation lay in the fact that it was possible to use it to develop a theoretical system on the basis of a simplification of variables to more manageable proportions. And whilst progress could not be made immediately on deriving empirical propositions from the theory at least the theoretical system itself could be made more systematic and coherent.¹¹³

For Parsons, The Social System represented such a purely theoretical statement:

"the subject of this volume is the exposition and illustration of a conceptual scheme for the analysis of social systems in terms of the action frame of reference. It is intended as a theoretical work in the strict sense. Its direct concern will be neither with empirical generalization as such nor with methodology, though of course it will contain a considerable amount of both. Naturally the value of the conceptual scheme here put forward is ultimately to be tested in terms of its usefulness in empirical research. But this is not an attempt to set forth a systematic account of our empirical knowledge. ... the focus is on a theoretical scheme." ¹¹⁴

His subsequent assessments indicate that his work has continued to be concerned with the systematization of concepts at the expense of stating their empirical reference. In 1956, for example, Parsons commented,

"It is a theory in the process of development which has not yet evolved to a desirable level of refinement and elegance or empirical validation." 115

Some years later in the article "Pattern Variables Revisited ..."

Parsons concedes that his analytic schemes do not constitute an empirical contribution and agrees with Dubin that the empirical verification of his work is important and, as an instance of this, refers to the codification of the theory with bodies of empirical material. However, the theoretical propositions remain ...

"... couched at a very high level of generality, deliberately designed to cover all classes of action system. Therefore it is unlikely that these propositions as such can be empirically verified at the usual operational levels." 116

Indeed Parsons recognizes that there are considerable problems involved in deriving lower level propositions for the purpose of testing with suitable empirical material.

Finally, in an analysis of his own work written in the late 1960's Parsons makes a realistic assessment of its progress, an assessment which lacks the note of optimism which was frequently to be found in his earlier statements.

"This theory ... clearly stands in an early stage of its development, with only a broad consensus on the principal frame of reference, with uneven degrees of clarity and precision of conceptualization in its various parts, with only spotty formulations of analytical uniformities in the relations among variables, and with uneven achievement of empirical verification of such propositions as we have." 117

The undoubted inference to be drawn from this is that within Parsonian Theory as long as ambiguity surrounds the specific empirical reference of the theoretical concepts - whether unit acts, pattern variables, systems' problems, the four function paradigm or

evolutionary universals - there can be little possibility of empirical support for the theoretically alleged relationships between the variables of the system.

Thus we can see that Homans' criticism of Parsonian Theory is entirely justified: yet it is at this point that the paradoxical nature of Parsons influence within the sociological discipline again emerges because Homans was not the first to make this criticism,¹¹⁸ although perhaps he made it most decisively. Indeed after Merton's plea for theories of the middle range in 1948 the status of Parsonian Theory with regard to the extent of its empirical corroboration should have been clear.¹¹⁹ Two questions therefore, need to be answered: first, How is it possible when these issues were widely understood, both by Parsons and the rest of the discipline, that he would continue to follow a theoretical strategy based upon programmatic theory; and second, How is it possible that Parsons' work could have gained such a position of influence in spite of this strategy?¹²⁰

Programmatic Theorizing

Parsons' most detailed exposition of the rationale for his theory building strategy, as it affects the issue of testability, is to be found in the monograph 'Values, Motives and Systems of Action',¹²¹ which initiated the General Theory of Action. His subsequent work has remained consistent with these criteria. However, before examining the issues in detail, it is worth noting that they represent a change of emphasis in comparison with the views expressed

fourteen years earlier in The Structure of Social Action. There the prospect of empirical corroboration of the theoretical system is considered to be relatively immediate;¹²² hence his discussion of the nature of a body of theory:

"... the propositions of the systems have reference to matters of empirical fact; if they did not, they could have no claim to be called scientific. Indeed, if the term fact is properly interpreted it may be said that a theoretical proposition, if it has a place in science at all, is either itself a statement of fact or a statement of a mode of relations between facts." 123

Even allowing for the inevitable limitation upon the scope of reference inherent in Henderson's definition of fact - a verifiable statement about a phenomenon "... in terms of a conceptual scheme"¹²⁴

- the empirical testing of his theory was crucial to Parsons.

But in the years leading up to the publication of Towards A General Theory of Action precise empirical support for such theoretical propositions had been singularly difficult to establish with the result that his statement of the different levels of systematization of scientific theory was a clear attempt to defuse potential criticism of his system-building activities by emphasizing the abstractness of theory and the difficulties of deriving precise empirical reference in the absense of ideal experimental conditions.

In "Values, Motives and Systems of Action", four levels of conceptual schemes are presented in ascending order of scientific sophistication. First are ad hoc classificatory schemes of common sense which are frequently based upon quite arbitrary distinctions. At the second level is the categorial type of system:

"... a system of classes which is formed to fit the subject matter, so that there are intrinsic relations among the classes, and these are in accord with the relations among the items of the subject matter." 125

The classifications are based upon criteria which identify the variables and at least some of their relationships with the result that the elements can be seen as an interdependent system. Moreover, such a system has sufficient complexity "... to duplicate, in some sense, the interdependence of the empirical systems which are the subject matter".¹²⁶ The example Parsons gives is the categorial system in classical mechanics, consisting for example, of such elements as space, time, particle and mass.

The third level of conceptual scheme is represented by the theoretical system. This is based upon a categorial system of interrelated elements with the addition of verified laws stating general propositions about the interdependence of the elements of the system. According to Parsons the transition from categorial theoretical system can be gradual, and categorial systems can exist consisting purely of precisely defined elements with little or no knowledge of laws stating relationships between them. And this aptly described the situation of the General Theory of Action in the early 1950's; Parsons illustrates the point with the relationship between reward and learning - although the general nature of the relationship is known, it is not possible to predict in a particular situation how reward would affect, and be affected by, other variables. Hence,

"Knowing that a variable is significant, having a definite conception of it and its logical distinctions from other variables and other aspects of the empirical system is categorial knowledge; and that is where most of our theoretical knowledge of action stands today." 127

For Parsons, classical mechanics constitutes the best example of a theoretical system, in other words, then, a categorial system together with laws stating the relationships between the elements. In a theoretical system, because the laws of the system are known, it is possible through logical manipulation to predict the effects of particular changes in the values of certain variables. But even in the case of classical mechanics it is not possible to predict exactly changes in empirical systems; in fact the predictions presuppose the existence of ideal or experimental conditions. In the specific case of the astronomy of the solar system predictions derived from the theoretical system do correspond to the nature of the empirical system, but in general there is a discrepancy between the predictions at the theoretical level and the state of the corresponding empirical system.

This sets the scene for the fourth and final level of conceptual development, the empirical-theoretical system. According to Parsons this is achieved - or may be achieved because he provides no example,

"Whenever a sufficient number of relevant variables can be brought together in a single (theoretical) system of interdependence adequate for a high level of precision in predicting changes in empirical systems outside the special experimental conditions. This is the long term goal of scientific endeavour." 128

This strategy based upon a gradual increase in the systematization of his conceptual scheme is clearly dependent upon Parsons confidence in the ultimate success of his pattern of theorizing. That Parsons does not recognize the inherent problems in this form of development is to be explained by the fact that for

him there are no alternative strategies. After all, according to Parsons, the General Theory of Action is based upon the most impressive work of earlier generations of sociologists and, therefore, represents the best prospect for the formulation of scientific theory. It is a question of trial and error, of gradual refinement of concepts, and of a closer and closer resemblance of the relationships between the concepts and reality; in the early stages in terms of the experimental simplification of the number of relevant variables, but ultimately, in terms of the full complexity of empirical reality itself.

The Credibility of the Strategy

Parsons' conception of the movement from the categorial system of theory, involving the identification of the major variables involved in the empirical situation, to the theoretical system where the relationships between the variables are corroborated under artificial conditions, implies a progressively increasing validity of the knowledge represented by the different levels of theory. Even allowing for the immense problems involved in the idea of corroboration through artificial or ideal circumstances,¹²⁹ what happens before the theory attains the degree of sophistication in which corroboration is possible at all? To be precise; What grounds are there for seeing the categorial system as more than a possible identification of the elements of a General Theory of Action and the suggestion of the relationships between them?

The guidelines Parsons identifies for distinguishing between productive and misleading insights, between useful and arbitrary classifications and conceptual schemes, have already been referred

to, though in different contexts: first, the logical structure of the theory identifies the essential from the unessential factual material; second, the social scientists' training enhances the ability to make such discriminations; third, the working out of the implications of schemes for adjacent sub-systems, and fourth, the reliance upon concepts and forms of reasoning given in other branches of scientific work.¹³⁰ Again the conclusion is inescapable, without the assumption that convergence had been proven, and by implication that the initial system of theoretical elements was valid, the Parsonian strategy looks extremely speculative and its product can be seen for what it is, a hotch-potch of concepts, schemes, and ideas, which in the hands of anyone less talented than Parsons would never have attained such a level of coherence and systematization. But this of course, is only a side issue because in terms of Homans argument Parsons' work is not a scientific theory at all.

Parsons, however, resisted such a conclusion; his view of different levels of scientific development implied, as we have seen, a gradual and incremental process. Consequently he was able to argue,

"... my approach is not yet a logico-deductive system, but rather a temporal and historical series of contributions toward the development of such a system. Above all I would reject the rigid alternative: either a fully integrated deductive system or a congeries of unrelated conceptualizations and generalizations. I should contend strenuously that the level of The Structure of Social Action represented genuine systematization, at a certain rather elementary level, to be sure, but well in advance of previous attempts. The steps taken since then have by and large been real advances from that point, advances by extension, but also clarity of definition, analytical refinement, and better theoretical integration." 131

Indeed Parsons draws a parallel between his role and that of an appellate judge in the development of the law, whose task is not so much to rule on particular cases as to interpret the rules at a more general level and to ensure consistency with fundamental principles - and for Parsons The General Theory of Action, with its origins in convergence, represents such basic principles for the study of action.¹³²

As Parsons' career developed, the role of theory in the interpretation of empirical phenomena became a substitute for a more strictly empirical kind of testing. He argues that the successful use of the theory in the codification of empirical material does confer some validity upon it; and it is in this context that Parsons' essays on substantive topics acquire a new significance.

"... the empirical essays in this volume can claim to be contributions to empirical sociology and to the development of theory at the same time. (Not products of operational research techniques). They are ... called essays in the "application" of theory in that in every case they represent attempts to bring to bear theoretical considerations in interpreting the various broad phenomena with which they are concerned. It matters profoundly to theory whether the theoretically expected relationships in fact hold up empirically." 133

In this case, Parsons argues, the explanations derived from the theory about the phenomenon of the youth culture are supported by the contrast between the American middle class urban kinship system and those of classical China and Japan; he continues, "Then however impressionistically these differences have been established, theory enables us to draw conclusions from them." 134

But the usefulness of a theory for ordering a mass of empirical information and its value in the interpretation of that data in particular ways can in no way be taken to confer validity

upon the elements of the theoretical system and their interrelatedness. Indeed the essentially theoretical character of his work is recognized by Parsons.

"Both the pattern-variables and the four system problems are conceptual schemes, or sets of categories, for classifying the components of action. They provide a frame of reference within which such classifications can be made. The figures presented here indicate the methods sets of rules and procedures, that state how these categories may be used analytically; they imply theorems - propositions that admit of logical, not empirical, proof - which state a set of determinate relationships among the categories and, in so doing, outline a theory of action. The theory, then, is a set of logical relationships among categories used to classify empirical phenomena and, in empirical reference, attempts to account for whatever may be the degree of uniformity and stability of such phenomena." 135

More recently, in an attempt to justify the empirical relevance of the media of interchange paradigm in the social system, Parsons refers to its consistency with both the basic principles of the theory of living systems and the theory of cybernetic control of symbolic systems. These similarities ensure "... that is is neither purely speculative nor simply arbitrary."¹³⁶ He continues, and this can perhaps stand as a fitting last word on the issue of the testability of his theoretical system:

"If it is correct, as has often been said, that it is highly general and abstract, though this is by no means necessarily a fault. The fault lies rather in that at the many levels and in the many contexts where it is inherently relevant - if its general claims mean anything - the terms cannot be precisely defined, nor can they yet be adequately operationalized." 137

(b) Objectivity, Abstraction and the Problem of Order

Parsons has been criticised for his partisanship whilst he claimed to represent objective standards.¹³⁸ This issue

largely revolves around his treatment of the problem of order, but it is a debate which involves a good deal of misunderstanding. In the majority of cases his critics have failed to appreciate the abstractness of his theoretical work - an abstractness or artificiality which is inevitable in a theoretical system which has only been developed to the categorial stage - in which comparisons with the full complexity of the empirical world can only be misleading. Indeed the entire debate¹³⁹ over the problem of order in which Dahrendorf, Lockwood, Mills, and Rex played such a prominent part by advocating the crucial role of conflict in society, in opposition to a society conceptualized in terms of consensus, was based upon misapprehension of the nature of Parsons work. This was a result of their failure to fully appreciate its theoretical and methodological character, a problem which was aided and abetted by Parsons' mode of expression. Indeed, on occasions he failed to make sufficiently explicit the distinction between his conceptual scheme and the empirical reality to which it referred.¹⁴⁰

Let us begin, therefore, with the problem of objectivity in Parsons work because it is his apparent denial of the political realities of the modern world which led to most critical attention.¹⁴¹

Parsons' thinking on the objectivity of the sciences dealing with the phenomena of action was strongly influenced by Weber who, he suggests, even anticipated Whitehead's demonstration of the analytical abstraction of science.¹⁴² With the recognition of the inability of any theory to grasp the full complexity of empirical reality comes the realization that theory is not possible without selection and evaluation of problems and facts. It is in this context that Parsons considers Weber's distinction between the motives which guide interest into certain problems - motives which are dependent upon certain value orientations - and the grounds for

determining the validity of scientific propositions, which are specifically independent of such orientations.¹⁴³

"This is the focus of Weber's famous doctrine of the "value freedom" of social science (Wertfreiheit). It does not mean that the scientist should be free of any values, but rather that in his professional role, he must be free to give the discipline's values priority over others, notably in Weber's mind over political commitments." 144

However, for Parsons, as for Weber, the selection of problems is relevant to values (Wertbeziehung), it is inextricably tied to the values of society which take their form from the history of the society, its level of knowledge and culture, and the events of the day. But for Parsons,

"... selection in this sense must be carefully distinguished both from a secondary type of selection and from distortion, which is realistically always present but which analytically must be attributed to a quite different order of factors. Weber's concept of Wertbeziehung, in my opinion, adequately takes care of the concept of what may be called the 'primary selectivity' involved in the value-science integrate." 145

Within the context of the selectivity of problems, Parsons considers that the findings of social science can aspire to the reliability which characterizes natural scientific work so long as the rules of the intellectual inquiry are followed: that is, objectivity in empirical observation, clear and precise concepts, and logical inference.¹⁴⁶ Parsons has always argued that in this procedure the structure of the theory plays an important role: it facilitates the determination of the scientifically important facts, provides a framework within which factual material can be arranged, and indicates those areas where factual information is missing.¹⁴⁷ And this is perfectly illustrated by the role of the problem of order in Parsons' thinking.

More recently Parsons summarized his views on the relations between the active role of the theoretical structure and research as follows:

"The best strategy for maintaining objectivity thus lies in the emphasis upon the match between the theoretical scheme employed in the study which is explicitly comparative and evolutionary, and the statements of empirical fact that have been selected to validate theoretical interpretation." 148

Now whilst this strategy may be entirely satisfactory in natural science, or those social sciences with a tried and tested theory, Parsons' use of a theoretical structure of untestable empirical validity clearly offers no guarantee of objectivity. Indeed, despite Parsons' commitment to the scientific ideal of objectivity a great many commentators came to regard his work as unreasonably conservative and committed to the status quo because of its concern with norms to the detriment of interests.¹⁴⁹ However the real point of contention has been not so much its political commitment or partiality, but the problem of determining the empirical significance of the exclusively theoretical propositions.¹⁵⁰ And this problem has undoubtedly been made worse by Parsons' enthusiasm for abstraction.

Indeed it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Parsons was not merely content to accept the inevitable degree of abstraction in relation to empirical reality, to be found in prestigious natural scientific theories,¹⁵¹ but positively fostered the level of abstraction in his own work. And although abstraction may go hand in hand with increasing generality there is a constant danger of artificiality if the concepts lose touch with reality. Given Parsons' strategy of theory building, the very limited role for

experiment, and the problems inherent in ideal conditions for the testing of propositions, the monitoring of the progress of the theory in terms of empirical corroboration became extremely difficult. To make matters worse, the abstraction of the theory was enhanced because of the formalization of four sub-divisions within the theory of action. Subsequently the abstraction was extended by the sub-division of responsibility for different academic disciplines, namely economics, politics, sociology and psychology to different aspects of the social system, which was one of these sub-systems. Consequently it became a major problem to determine the kind of empirical evidence which was relevant to a specific theoretical statement because the sub-division of the General Theory of Action, on the basis of specialization, presupposed that the explanation of an empirical phenomenon would require the recombination of the various theoretical schemes.¹⁵² And it was the labyrinthine nature of this task which was largely responsible for the misunderstanding of Parsons work.

Parsons was aware of the dangers of abstraction and recognized that it was vital to specify the particular system level for functional analysis:

"... human action cannot be dealt with in terms of one system reference, such as 'society', but most involve multiple system references: perhaps the problem of keeping these system references straight has been the most prolific single source of difficulty and confusion in theoretical analysis in this field." 153

But failure on the part of the critics to keep this point in mind led to quite unnecessary debates over Parsons' definition of sociology.¹⁵⁴ In the preface to The Social System Parsons argued,

"... the book should be regarded as a statement of general sociological theory, since this is here interpreted to be that part of the theory of the social system which is centred on the phenomena of institutionalization of patterns of value orientation in roles." 155

Parsons definition of sociology was closely related to his views on analytic specialization and the division of labour within the sciences of action. Consequently, the apparent unreality of this selection of elements should not necessarily be seen as a result of Parsons' idealogical or other predilections.

Another factor which has enhanced the abstract nature of Parsonian theory has been the use of functional analysis. For Parsons the concept provided a basic set of reference points for structural analysis. The identification of the functional contribution of a structural component to a system is based upon the expected alteration to the operation of the system which would result from changes in such structures. This kind of assessment is dependent upon the study of a wide range of cases which demonstrated the relationship between such structural changes and specific effects on the social system. 156

In addition, functional analysis exhibits certain special features:

"A functional explanation begins with a postulated state of affairs, and refers back to the necessary antecedent or underlying conditions. Such teleology must of course be conditional, couched in the form that if certain patterns are to be maintained, or certain goals achieved, certain conditions must be fulfilled." 157

The same kind of conditional reasoning is implicit in Parsons' use of equilibrium as a theoretical device. At an earlier point in his career Parsons made this quite explicit,

"We have concentrated our attention on the processes of equilibration in carefully defined, indeed in a strict sense in hypothetical, systems of action ... we have been very careful not to imply that there is any inherent presumption that empirical systems must remain in equilibrium... We merely use the concept of the equilibrating system as a theoretical mode." 158

For Parsons a theoretical model is a hypothetical structure or process derived from certain theoretical premises and compared with a body of empirical information in order to facilitate its analysis. Models include a theoretical ordering of elements and relationships, they represent a particular kind of abstraction as they are formed on the basis of a certain range of theoretical relationships for particular purposes, but there is a constant danger of reifying a model if it is forgotten that they were constructed for very specific analytic purposes.¹⁵⁹

This kind of hypothetical reasoning is an inevitable corollary of Parsons' analytic strategy with its distinction between an empirical system - a group of empirical phenomena - and the relevant conceptual scheme at the categorial level of theoretical development. This distinction between hypothetical or simplified reasoning at the theoretical level and the full complexity of the empirical system can also be seen in the concept of 'social system',¹⁶⁰ which as a theoretical device is quite different to a concrete society.

The conditional nature of Parsons' reasoning in relation to the concepts of functionalism, equilibrium, norms and institutionalization has not been widely appreciated.¹⁶¹ Indeed Parsons could argue with some justification that functional analysis has no ideological implications, that it is not committed to the status quo, and that it does not represent an assessment of the

balance between integrating and disintegrating elements and on this basis, with Merton, he rejected as misconceived the suggestion of rival consensus and conflict theories.¹⁶²

To be fair to his critics, however, there are occasions when Parsons omitted to distinguish between the theoretical and the empirical level, as for instance, can be seen in his comments on the four function paradigm and the extent of its empirical corroboration:

"...the four function scheme is grounded in the essential nature of living systems at all levels of organization and evolutionary development, from the unicellular organism to the highest human civilization. The contributions of homeostatic physiology, the new genetics, and cybernetics and information theory lend strength to the view that in these basic respects there is strong continuity over the class of living systems, especially with regard to the central role of the processes we have characterized as pattern-maintenance." 163

This leads directly to the problem of order, one of the most important themes in Parsons work,¹⁶⁴ which has suffered acutely from the level of ambiguity between theoretical schemes based upon conditional reasoning and theoretical schemes presented as if they had full empirical support. According to Parsons,

"Order is a sociological problem because the unlimited and random desires of man might lead to the state which is described by Hobbes: 'a life poor, solitary, nasty, brutish and short'. If our lives are not poor, solitary, nasty, brutish and short, why are they not? So Hobbes presented a problem: explain how man's life in society is more satisfactory than in a state of nature." 165

His solution to this problem is that order results from a combination of two factors, from the actor's and object's orientations which at a particular stage in the development of his theory could be analyzed in terms of the pattern variables,

together with a system of structures which is quite independent of particular actors.

"In such a structural system both actor and object share institutionalized norms, conformity with which is a condition for stability of the system. The relationship between the actor's orientation and the modalities of objects in the situation cannot be random." 166

In this passage the conditional nature of Parsons' view is explicit; if stability is to exist there has to be conformity by actors with a system of institutionalized norms.

The same viewpoint can be found in the 'General Statement' in Toward a General Theory of Action where the solution to the problem of order exhibits the same features.

"The structural roles of the social system ... must be oriented to value alternatives. Selections are of course always actions of individuals, but these selections cannot be inter-individually random in a social system. Indeed, one of the most important functional imperatives of the maintenance of social systems is that the value orientations of the different actors in the same social system must be integrated in some measure in a common system. All on-going social systems do actually show a tendency toward a general system of common cultural orientations." 167

Again the hypothetical nature of this statement is revealed by the phrases - "cannot be inter-individually random" and "must be integrated in some measure".

These views have remained a permanent part of the General Theory of Action, in 1968 Parsons emphasized:

"The most important single condition of the integration of an interaction system is a shared basis of normative order." 168

It is in this context of the conditional nature of this formulation that Parsons can argue with some justification that he has been

unfairly accused of being a defender of order at any price when in fact he has always regarded order as a problem and not an imperative, hence:

"... the remarkable thing about social order is not how perfect it is, but that it does exist at some sort of reasonably tolerable level". 169

However, on other occasions the hypothetical nature of Parsons reasoning, based upon consciously simplified selection of variables, is not made explicit and the theoretical solution to the problem is presented as if it had precise empirical support.

"... so fundamental is the Problem of Order that the structure of systems of human social action, whether they be personality systems of individuals or social systems, consists of internalized and institutionalized normative patterns of culture - rules, values and other normative components." 170

And,

".. the most fundamental ground of order in societies is the internalization of the normative culture in the personalities of its members and the institutionalization of that in the normative structure of the society." 171

Given this kind of statement it is hardly surprising that Parsons attracted a considerable amount of criticism, but it was criticism which in general failed to appreciate the purely theoretical reasoning involved in the General Theory of Action.

From our point of view this was the real weakness of the discussion and evaluation of Parsons' work in the 1940's, 1950's, and early 1960's. There was an absence of detailed examinations of the methodological and theoretical nature of Parsons' strategy for building a general theory and, as a result, a failure to identify its weaknesses and suggest alternative solutions where possible.¹⁷² Indeed the framework within which Parsons had

developed his conceptual scheme was accepted by supporters and critics alike.¹⁷³ Sociological theory was seen to consist of highly abstract and general propositions which could be used in the analysis of structures and processes on the basis of presupposing certain conditions about either equilibrium and normative order, or change and conflicting interest groups. On this artificial basis Parsons, and to a lesser extent the conflict writers, formulated complex theoretical schemes that were self-contained and essentially autonomous from the world of experience. But this meant ignoring a fundamental issue, namely: what procedures were necessary for accurate and precise translation of the generality of the theoretical level to the specific and detailed realm of empirical reality so that the analytic schemes and models could even be tested, let alone their corroboration be established.

The point of our argument is that in this Parsonian era sociological theory was little more than speculation, admittedly, of varying degrees of abstraction. Associated with this was a lack of interest in the problems of the relationship between general theoretical concepts, encompassing a class or group of empirical phenomena, and the particular explanation of a concrete phenomenon by itself. This lack of interest can be accounted for in terms of two factors. First, by the authoritativeness of Parsons' The Structure of Social Action with its examination of the theoretical and methodological ideas of Pareto, Durkheim and Weber, and in particular, his claim to have identified a convergent set of concepts which became the basis of the General Theory of Action. And second, the wider context of the appreciation of sociology which was strongly influenced by the discussions of the philosophers of

social science concerning the natural scientific model of a logico-deductive theoretical system, served to legitimate the role and value of general and abstract conceptual schemes.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps the most notable attempt to provide an alternative to the Parsonian conception of the theoretical and methodological character of sociology was made by Dahrendorf,¹⁷⁵ but his arguments did not lead to a substantial challenge to the Parsonian orthodoxy because he failed to develop a systematic framework linking the "problem oriented" view of sociology with a continued use of an abstract conflict model. With the exception of Marxist analyses which, anyway, were concerned with rather different problems, discussion of the theoretical and methodological foundations of sociology gradually atrophied¹⁷⁶ until they were suddenly projected into the forefront of attention by the emergence of the "crisis" in the late 1960's, as a result of critiques of conventional sociology from a broadly phenomenological point of view.¹⁷⁷

A fitting conclusion to these two sections, which have dealt with the problems of testability of Parsons' work, its objectivity, level of abstraction and the nature of order in society, can be found in a characteristically trenchant comment by C. Wright Mills. He argued, in a reference to Parsons' solution to the problem of order, that because of the diversity of actual societies in terms of the extent to which values, norms, and interests were shared, there could not be just one solution.¹⁷⁸ In what can stand as a final word on the scientific usefulness of this form of theoretical sociology, Mills identifies the weakness of Parsons' approach by arguing:

"... he is possessed by the idea that the one model of social order he has constructed is some kind of universal model; because he has fetishized his concepts." 179

(c) The Subjective Point of View

Reference to the subjective point of view of the actor was one of the basic principles of Parsons' Voluntaristic Theory of Action; throughout his career he has continued to emphasize that it has remained an indispensable assumption of his work. However, the developing nature of Parsonian Theory presented supporters and opponents alike with a substantial task of analysis and clarification. The extension of its scope into a general theory of action, and the considerable innovation in analytic schemes, led to ambiguity about its central principles with the result that it defied straightforward categorization.

Martindale¹⁸⁰ was the first to focus attention upon the extent of the changes between Parsons' pre-war theoretical system consisting of analytic elements and the post-war structural-functional version. He argued that Parsons' earlier position was strongly influenced by Weber and took as its basic category the unit act, whereas the later theory was based upon the analysis of systems of action within which the concept of role became the basic category. For Martindale, The Social System represented an approach which was increasingly critical of a Weberian perspective and correspondingly receptive to the work of Durkheim¹⁸¹. The implication was clear: the value of a body of work which was claimed by its actor to be consistent with its initial formulations and yet had moved radically away from them, must be severely reduced.

This critique was quickly followed by J.F. Scott's much more detailed and, for that reason, much more effective examination: "The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme"¹⁸². Drawing upon Martindale's account of a general movement in the character of Parsons work, Scott identified a fundamental change of assumptions between a pre-war voluntarism and a post-war naturalism. According to Scott, Parsons' pre-war voluntaristic theory of action stressed the "... causal efficacy of valuation"¹⁸³, in other words, the early Parsons was opposed to the explanation of human conduct in terms of a natural scientific frame of reference. In an article written in 1935¹⁸⁴, Parsons had stated the philosophical presupposition of voluntarism: man is a thinking, evaluating, and ultimately creative being whose values cannot be satisfactorily explained by the circumstances of the material world. For Scott, Parsons' early work is very similar to a form of philosophical idealism. Indeed he argues that Parsons' had rejected a naturalistic interpretation of the "... phenomena of minded behaviour" ... because it did not allow a role for ... "the mental phenomena of cognition, rationality and evaluation", and in this context voluntarism can be seen to be based upon ... "non-natural factors of volition or 'will'."¹⁸⁵

However, according to Scott, in the voluntaristic theory Parsons did not accept an idealistic reductionism because he assumed that

"... human action participates in two metaphysical realms, that of ideas and values for its formation, and that of material fact for its realization." 186

But in methodological terms, Scott suggests that Parsons recognized a degree of independence between the sciences of action and nature because special methods were required to deal with subjective material from the point of view of the actor.¹⁸⁷

Although in The Structure of Social Action the emphasis upon voluntarism is reduced, the fact that it is contrasted with both positivism and idealism in the book's main theme is a demonstration of its continuing importance with the result that for Scott, Toward a General Theory of Action represents a stark contrast, because voluntarism is replaced by a cautious naturalism.¹⁸⁸ In fact Scott considers that Tolman's participation in this collaborative effort is a measure of the changed nature of Parsons post-war work, because Tolman had consistently argued that a behaviouristic account of purposive behaviour is both feasible and desirable.¹⁸⁹ In this context, therefore, Parsons' claim that there had been a convergence between his conceptual scheme and Tolman's form of behaviourism is of particular significance to Scott who refers to Parsons' statement:

"The organization of observational data in terms of the theory of action is quite possible and fruitful in modified behaviouristic terms, and such formulation avoids many of the difficult questions of introspection or empathy." 190

Indeed, according to Parsons, all that is needed is the addition of the concept of "complementarity of expectations" to Tolman's categories of orientation and cognition because "... What the actor thinks or feels can be treated as a system of intervening variables,"¹⁹¹

For Scott, within the General Theory of Action the role of Voluntarism has been reduced to the point where it has practically

ceased to exist yet, paradoxically, Parsons' post-war discussions of normative orientation and subjective reference exhibited a terminological continuity with his earlier but very different approach. For Scott these "crucial equivocations" seriously undermined the value of Parsons' work.¹⁹²

One example of ambiguity which Scott examines in the post-war theory is the category of action: this can be interpreted in two ways, first and most straightforwardly as a naturalistic concept consistent with Tolman's purposive behaviourism and second in potentially voluntaristic terms because although the scope of naturalistic elements has been increased the assumption of a metaphysical dualism has not, in principle been denied.

Scott continues:

"...the postwar ambiguity obtains because Parsons no longer believes that valuation involves a metaphysical autonomy. As a result of a new respect for psychoanalytic theory and other naturalistic persuasions, plainly at odds with his prewar doctrine, he has had to make the appropriate adjustments in the action scheme. At the same time he has stressed the continuity of his postwar work with what he did before. Since the subjective and normative aspects of action were the means by which voluntarism was given its salience and necessity in the action scheme of 1935 and 1937, they are the parts most changed in the scheme of 1951, where voluntarism has been obscured and reduced to a wholly hypothetical role." 193

What is for Scott perhaps the most significant change in the post-war theory is to be found in Parsons' discussion of the relationship between the theory of action and Tolman's work: for Scott, Parsons' argument that his approach does not presuppose a mind which is separate from a material organism is particularly important.¹⁹⁴ Yet according to Scott in the voluntaristic theory the independence of mind from material nature was the whole reason for basing the theory

upon the subjective point of view. Extending this point of contrast, Scott argues:

"What actors think or feel was not only independent, it was private; a subjective reference was essential and the method of verstehen was invoked. But Tolman's behaviouristic position, in terms of which the action scheme can now be defined, was always opposed to the confirmatory use of such non-public data as those which verstehen would provide. The retreat from mind-body dualism has removed the need for a subjective reference." 195

With the main points of Scott's analysis in mind it is now possible to consider the significance which Parsons gives to the changes between his prewar and postwar theory. He explicitly recognises that there have been modifications to the treatment of the subjective point of view over this time.

"Contrary to the view ... in The Structure of Social Action it now appears that this postulate is not essential to the frame of reference of action in its most elementary form. It is, however, necessarily involved at the levels of elaboration of systems of action at which culture, that is, shared symbolic patterns, become involved". 196

For Parsons the modification is an extension of the frame of reference rather than a major change of principles. Indeed, in a related discussion in The Social System of the relationship between the theory of action and the theoretical frameworks for the study of nature, Parsons argues that the subjective point of view - the analysis of action from the viewpoint of the actor - is one of its three distinctive features.¹⁹⁷ The importance of this theme is established in Parsons' subsequent examination of the role of communication in interaction.

"It is not possible ... to interpret alter's behaviour in terms of the action frame of reference without communicating with him, without 'understanding his motives' in the full sense of the theory of action as we have developed such a conception. This is essentially what is meant by the subjective reference or the subjective point of view of the theory of action," 198

Consequently, Parsons was not prepared to accept Scott's argument about a discontinuity between The Structure of Social Action and the structural-functional theoretical system represented by Toward A General Theory of Action and The Social System. Differences of emphasis and terminology were the result of extending the theoretical scheme to include a more comprehensive set of factors relevant to the explanation of action in society.¹⁹⁹ In particular, the changes in the frame of reference were necessary in order to clarify the problems of motivation, but ... "no fundamental change has been made. The analysis has simply been carried to a more generalized level." 200

Undoubtedly between 1937 and 1951 there was considerable development in Parsons' Theory of Action, and in the same period the notion of voluntarism disappeared. But the concept had been used by Parsons in 1935 with considerable metaphysical overtones,²⁰¹ although this was reduced two years later in The Structure of Social Action. Hence by 1951 although the metaphysical form of voluntarism had disappeared Parsons clearly believed that its substance had remained broadly the same, and this is borne out by the fact that he has subsequently both emphasized the importance of the subjective point of view²⁰² and acknowledged that Weber's ideas on subjective understanding were a stimulus to reject the monopolistic claims to scientific status of the extreme behaviourists who held that only

bodily movements could be studied objectively,²⁰³

Whilst Scott took Parsons' continuing support for the subjective point of view in Toward a General Theory of Action and The Social System as evidence of major confusion and ambiguity, he does in fact advance a plausible explanation for these changes although he does not give it sufficient weight. Scott refers to the incentive for Parsons of having as many subscribers to the "General Statement" as possible in the context of the creation of Harvard's Department of Social Relations. The implication is that Parsons' use of terminology was specifically influenced by this collaborative enterprise and, as Scott shows, the fact that "Values, Motives and Systems of Action" by Parsons and Shils is noticeably less naturalistic in orientation than the "General Statment" can be explained by the political exigencies of setting up the new department. The essential point, however, is this; there is no necessary implication of a major change in Parsons' conception of action or the way it is to be studied. Indeed after the pace of institutional integration at Harvard slowed, Parsons' behaviouristically oriented terminology was gradually phased out as the focus of his theoretical work moved from roles conceptualized in terms of the pattern variables to that of systems of interaction regarded as functioning entities.²⁰⁴

It is important to note that at the voluntaristic stage, and even at the time of the merger with Tolman's behaviourism, Parsons distinguished between his approach to the explanation of action and its explanation in terms of the frames of reference of biology and physiology. In methodological terms it is clear that Parsons was only opposed to radical behaviourists who denied the

relevance of any subjective materials in the explanation of behaviour, not to the use of natural scientific concepts and procedures which stopped short of this position. Afterall, Parsons was explicit that a pure behaviourist position must either reject the action frame of reference altogether and follow a biologically oriented perspective, or limit its scope to the study of biological organisms which lack culture.²⁰⁵

It is possible to see, therefore, that Scott overestimated the meaning of the changes which he identified in Parsons' terminological style. He did not give sufficient weight to Parsons' desire to formulate a general theory of action and the inevitable accommodation which this meant toward psychological language and, aided by a judicious choice of quotations, Scott never felt the need to consider that Tolman may have moved in the direction of Parsons for equally pragmatic reasons. Yet the "General Statement", which had Tolman's support as much as Parsons', in an examination of the orientation of action and the motivation of individual actors, states:

"Action has an orientation when it is guided by the meaning which the actor attaches to it in its relationship to his goals and interests." 206

Now it may well be that the authors of this statement intended the analysis of this action to proceed in terms of the concept of intervening variables, but this euphemism cannot disguise the fact that some kind of subjective reference is involved.

Consequently Scott does not really clarify what Parsons meant by this particular conceptualization. Hence it is necessary to examine Parsons work in rather more detail (especially between 1935 and 1951) to see what changes occurred in the elements of

his analysis of action from the point of view of the actor.

In "The Place of Ultimate Values in Sociological Theory"²⁰⁷ the article to which Scott attributes so much significance, we find a schematic outline of Parsons' views that were to be expressed in more detail in The Structure of Social Action: Parsons viewed action in the structural context of ultimate ends, an intermediate sector, and ultimate means or conditions and argued that action could only be explained as a result of a specific combination of the three sets of factors as people attempted to achieve their goals. And in the course of the analysis of this effort to achieve goals the use of a means-ends schema became important because it formulated a scientifically verifiable relationship between means and ends. The significance of the means-end relationship for Parsons cannot therefore be overestimated: it is,

"... a scientific statement couched in the conditional ... form. That is, if I do certain things, bring about certain conditions, I will achieve my end. But this rational schema of the relationship of means and ends is not to be arrived at by empirical generalization from the crude facts of experience. It is not only an analytical scheme, but one of a particular sort. What it formulates is a norm of rational action. Its empirical relevance rests on the view, which I believe to be factually borne out, that human beings do in fact, strive to realize ends and to do so by the rational application of means to them." 208

Let us be clear on this point. Parsons did not say that human beings automatically act in accordance with such a rational norm, rather, the essence of early voluntarism was that the norm provided a limited case to which the individual's actions could approximate depending upon the amount of effort - among other things - expended in the attempt to achieve a particular end. The conditional nature of this kind of rational analysis is quite explicit:

"The concepts built up on the basis of the means-end schema are thus not empirical generalizations but, to use Max Weber's term 'Ideal Types'. But, precisely in so far as this voluntaristic conception of action holds true, they are indispensable to the understanding of concrete human affairs". 209

In The Structure of Social Action the emphasis changed from the factor of ultimate ends, to that of the means employed by the actor, which were conceived by Parsons to be normatively orientated to the extent at least that the problem of order was solved.²¹⁰ In addition, Parsons argued, the action frame of reference.

"... deals with phenomena, with things and events as they appear from the point of view of the actor whose action is being analyzed and considered. Of course, the phenomena of the 'external world' play a major part in the influencing of action. But in so far as they can be utilized by this particular theoretical scheme, they must be reducible to terms which are subjective in this particular sense." 211

For Parsons the fact that within the social sciences the inquirer studies the content of others peoples' minds, rather than his own, is the basis for the distinction between the objective and the subjective points of view; the former refers to the viewpoint of the observer, the latter to the view of the actor.²¹²

In perhaps Parsons' most explicit statement of what the subjective point of view entails for scientific analysis he clearly reveals how in his approach, subjective references, normative orientation and conditional reasoning are inextricably linked. Referring to the abstractness of some of the concepts of the theory of action, Parsons suggest that this results from the fact that,

"... they are descriptive not of the actual observable state of affairs of overt action, but of the norms toward which it may be regarded as being oriented hence these concepts contain an element of 'unreality' which is not involved in the physical sciences. Of course the only reason for admitting such concepts to a scientific theory is that they are in fact descriptive of an empirical phenomenon, namely the state of mind of the actor. They exist in this state of mind, but not in the actor's 'external world'. It is, indeed, this circumstance which necessitates resort, on the part of the theory of action, to the subjective point of view." 213

The post-war form of the theory, as we have seen, involved a change of emphasis in particular a much greater use of a psychologically oriented terminology but, with this exception, there were no fundamental changes in Parsons' approach to what he called the actor's point of view. Consistent with the more general nature of the theory the concept of actor was broadened to include collectivities as well as individual people. This meant that analysis could be phrased more successfully in terms of large scale social phenomena and the theory now referred to the orientation of action rather than its motivation because the concept of motivation has individualistic connotations which Parsons argued would not always be appropriate.²¹⁴ This was consistent with a change in emphasis from the unit act in The Structure of Social Action to units within systems, in other words, to systems of interaction, and with the growing importance of structural-functional analysis, the concept of role came to the fore as a structure which could be used to simplify the analysis of a complex interaction system.²¹⁵ Despite these detailed alterations, in effect, Parsons' basic assumptions about subjective reference were little changed from his pre-war theory²¹⁶; this can be seen from three different examples taken from 'Values, Motives and Systems of Action', written jointly with Shils and published in 1951.

First, Parsons is emphatic that the theory of action is distinguished from the biological analysis of the person by the fact that its main concern lies in the "... actor's relations to his situation",²¹⁷ consequently,

"... the structure of action is not the structure of the organism. It is the structure of the organism's relationship to the objects in the organism's situation." 218

Second, the analysis of action concentrates upon the organism's selection between different alternatives²¹⁹. Selection is conceptualized in terms of internalized cultural values, and whilst there is no presupposition of the empirical importance of value standards as determinants of action, the theory

"... analyzes action in such a way as to leave the door open for attributing a major significance to these standards (and their patterning)". 220

Third, in a comment upon the distinction between action and behaviour Parsons suggests that action is that segment of an organism's behaviour which can be analyzed in terms of the future state of affairs to which it is directed, the situation in which it takes place, its normative orientation and the amount of effort involved.²²¹

In other words, then, the changes which Scott identified are no more than alterations of style and language, which occurred at a time when Parsons' theoretical analysis was changing its focus from the unit act to systems of action in an attempt to overcome the problems of dynamic analysis and make possible the formulation of general statements about systems of action. Inevitably, given Parsons' desire to examine complex collections of actions within interactive systems the earlier emphasis upon the individual unit

act diminished but this did not mean that the earlier ideas became irrelevant, rather they were subsumed within a theoretical scheme which, for pragmatic reasons²²², focussed increasingly upon the more complex levels of interaction and the results of the interaction of large groups of people conceptualized in terms of the exchanges between analytically distinguished parts of a social system.

One particularly crucial feature of Parsons' treatment of the subjective point of view which has emerged in the course of this analysis is the reservation he expressed about the reliability of data incorporating the point of view of the actor. However, it would be a mistake to consider that this degree of scepticism suddenly appeared in 1951 when, for example, in distinguishing action from behaviour he referred to observable behaviour together with "... theoretically postulated intervening variables and 'convert' processes".²²³ In fact Parsons' approach to the theory of action has always exhibited a liking for the sort of analysis represented by the rational man of economic theory, and this is, no doubt, the reason why in his earlier work he found Weber's use of the rational norm of the means-end relationship to be such a significant step beyond the problems of the idealist tradition.

In recent years Parsons' thinking on subjective reference and voluntarism has been clarified by a series of critical articles by Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope²²⁴ who examined the divergence between the sociologies of Durkheim and Weber and the way in which Parsons, in order to substantiate his convergence thesis, systematically misinterpreted Weber - especially the balance in his work between norms and interests. These articles together with Parsons' rejoinders

produced a much more incisive debate about the nature of Parsons' work, the role of voluntarism, and the place of the subjective point of view than was achieved by Scott's critique.²²⁵

In the course of replying to Pope's claim that Durkheim's work was totally inconsistent with a theory of action, given his explicit reservations about the scientific usefulness of information concerning subjective consciousnesses, Parsons makes a revealing comment,

"My own view has developed greatly since I wrote The Structure of Social Action. I regard human voluntarism as an extension of what many biologists call the self-regulating properties of living systems. This point of view has become increasingly prominent in modern biological theory ... has been immensely furthered by the development of cybernetics and information theory ... Durkheim's views are on the whole consistent with this view and certain themes that become increasingly important in his later work link up with it." 226

The year before, Parsons had again emphasized the voluntaristic nature of Durkheim's work and had argued that it was possible to follow a Durkheimian approach to the study of action, whilst being able to

"... remain completely true to Weber's famous 'methodological individualism' with respect to which he maintained that action in a proper sense occurs only through the agency of individual human beings and that the 'intentions' of these human beings, the meaning of their actions, and of their consequences to them 'subjectively' are of the essence of the Weberian method." 227

Parsons argued that he fully supported this Weberian view point and saw nothing inconsistent between it and Durkheim's approach.²²⁸

Whilst Parsons may have found this statement believable an increasing number of commentators do not.²²⁹ The basis of the problem is to be found in the ambiguity of the concept of

subjective reference which means one thing to Parsons and something rather different to the Weberian perspective.

In principle Parsons' General Theory of Action has always been concerned with the subjective point of view, and conceived of action in terms of "... meaningful motivations and goal directedness",²³⁰ in practice the views of specific actors, or groups of actors, have received little attention and it becomes pertinent to ask: Does the theory deal with the meaning of action for the actor and other participants in empirical situations or with the meaning as perceived by an observer of general and typical forms of interaction peopled by 'oversocialized'²³¹ and normatively oriented actors? The answer is not difficult to discover. In a discussion of the role of communication in interaction Parsons suggests that language can be seen to function as a form of normative control in that it is dependent for its effective operation upon the use of the proper meaning of signs. He continues:

"Interaction operates through communication. This involves the transmission of meanings common both to the agent and to the recipient object. On the part of the agent the meaning is 'intended' (not necessarily consciously) and on the part of the recipients is 'understood' (again not necessarily consciously): All communication operates through signs, symbols, acts, etc., which can have intended meaning to the agent and can be 'understood' by the recipient of the communication." 232

Parsons made a very similar point in connection with the pattern variables of role orientation which in their original formulation referred to five basic and exhaustive dilemmas of choice which had to be resolved before the actor could be said to be oriented to a situation. The actor it will be remembered has

to choose between affectivity and affective neutrality, collectivity orientation and self-orientation, particularism and universalism, ascription and achievement, and finally, diffuseness and specificity, before the action could have a precise meaning.²³³ Significantly Parsons argued that the choices represented by these five dilemmas may be made consciously or unconsciously, implicitly or explicitly.²³⁴ The meaning of an action as a choice between these alternatives is therefore determined by the observers point of view which attains the status of objectivity merely because of the scientific observer's non-involvement in the interaction. With the transition to the systems' problems and the media of interchange the focus of analytic interest moved to more complex levels at which the results of the ongoing processes of interactive systems, and collections of such systems, are examined in terms of their contributions to functional problems. But despite these changes of emphasis, Parsons' views on action and the subjective point of view were merely subsumed within this higher level of analysis.

For Parsons, therefore, the subjective point of view of the actor whilst remaining a fundamental presupposition of the entire approach became an unattainable methodological ideal throughout the course of his development of the General Theory of Action. There were two main reasons why the subjective meaning of action to empirical actors, or groups of actors, remained beyond the reach of Parsons' work. The first was an inescapable consequence of his epistemological and methodological assumptions about the kind of knowledge admissible in the field of action, the second was a direct result of his strategy of programmatic theorizing, namely

a gradual approximation of the system of theory to the complexities of empirical reality allied to the decision to concentrate upon the theoretical systematization of the conceptual scheme even though this meant that little progress could be made in the direction of empirical corroboration.

In more detail than there were, first of all, the inevitable difficulties associated with what he called the problem of empathy, which resulted from the 'non-observable' status of subjective data. Second, given the categorial nature of the development of Parsons' theoretical system, there was the practical need to simplify the number of variables so that some kind of statement about the general nature of processes within systems of action could be made: this simplification took the form of holding certain variables constant and in most cases this meant using conditional statements of subjective reference represented especially in his early work by the rational norm of the means-end relationships. When Parsons dealt with system of action rather than individual acts the central importance of the problem of order meant further simplification of actors orientations (or motivations) and the reduction in the number of values and goals from the potential range available in society to those consistent with the theoretically derived system of common values conceptualized as a necessary condition for stability and order, and it became simpler to focus upon roles.

In practice, the subjective point of view which Parsons always argued was both essential to his approach and was derived from Weber's sociology, came to be used in such a way that the theory of action dealt exclusively with generalized but hypothetical meanings of typical actions undertaken by typical

actors, Such actors were conceptualized as either occupying roles for which the potential range of choices were derived in a purely theoretical fashion, or who took part in transactions between similarly derived sub-units of social systems. The subjective reference of Parsons' study of action was not, therefore, primarily oriented toward the meaning of action to real people in real situations - although of course, Parsons' views as an observer were based upon his participation in particular social situations. Although Parsons' own experience, together with knowledge derived from enquiry, clearly bore some resemblance to such empirical meanings it is quite impossible to say how accurate or representative his views were in this respect. Instead, the subjective references of Parsons' theory of action primarily represented a highly simplified picture of actors linked together in interactive systems by commonly held values and norms aided and abetted by the socialization process and where necessary the conforming effect of appropriate institutions. It was a picture derived by purely theoretical reasoning from a number of assumptions which for Parsons had been justified in the course of his analysis of the structural features of social action and they have, of course, occupied such a salient position in the development of his work ever since.

Parsons would, no doubt, have justified the relevance of his Theory in terms of the fact that this highly integrated theoretical scheme of an action system constituted one indispensable element of empirical systems of action, and consequently, concrete reality could not be explained without it. It represented a starting point; a logically integrated and systematic theoretical scheme which although not at all perfect in the sense of containing

a sufficient number of variables to mirror the complexities of reality, undoubtedly, for Parsons, could be said to represent a summation of all the earlier contributions to social inquiry. Moreover it was abstract, not only because of the inherent simplicity of all new undertakings - in this case the explicit attempt to formulate a general theory in contrast to the single-discipline boundedness of most of the previous contributions - but also because it took the idea of a theoretical division of labour between the sciences of action extremely seriously. Hence, sociological theory which focussed upon integrative mechanisms needed to be supplemented by the theoretical schemes of other action disciplines in order to; provide the sort of analysis which could be compared with an empirical phenomena, but afterall, this was entirely compatable with his views at the earlier self-consciously voluntaristic stage of his thinking in which the explanation of action was conceived of as the result of a state of tension between normatively oriented goals, a knowledge of appropriate means and the application of effort in the face of obstacles.

NOTES

1. The following are some of the most influential statements of the "crisis": A.V. Cicourel, Method and Measurement in Sociology, (New York: Free Press, 1964); J.D. Douglas (Ed.), Understanding Everyday Life: Toward the Reconstruction of Sociological Knowledge, (London: Routledge, 1974); P. Filmer, M. Philipson, D. Silverman and D. Walsh, New Directions in Social Theory, (London: Collier-MacMillan, 1972); and H. Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967); A.W. Gouldner, The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology, (London: Heineman, 1971).
2. C.W. Mills, The Sociological Imagination, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), and P.A. Sorokin, Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology and Related Sciences, (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1965).
3. Mills, The Sociological Imagination, op.cit.; J. Rex, Key Problems in Sociological Theory, (London: Routledge, 1961); J. Rex, Sociology and the Demystification of the Modern World, (London: Routledge, 1974); T.B. Bottomore, "Out of this World: The Sociology of Talcott Parsons", reprinted in his Sociology as Social Criticism, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975); R. Dahrendorf, "Out of Utopia: Toward a Reorientation of Sociological Analysis", American Journal of Sociology, 64 (1958); A.W. Gouldner, The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology, op.cit.
4. Sorokin, Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology and Related Sciences, op.cit.
5. A.W. Gouldner, "Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of a Value-Free Sociology" in J.D. Douglas (Ed.), The Relevance of Sociology, (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1970).
6. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 44-5.
7. Ibid., 733.
8. Ibid., 735.
9. Ibid., 734-5.
10. Ibid., 737.
11. Ibid., 738.
12. Ibid., 739-40.
13. Ibid., 747.

14. Ibid., 750.
15. Ibid., 755.
16. Ibid., 757.
17. Ibid., 762, where, in footnote 1, Parsons argues that voluntarism is merely used to distinguish his approach from a positivistic theory of action and is not necessary to differentiate it from the sciences of nature and culture. The significance of this was entirely missed by J.F. Scott, "The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme", op.cit.
18. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 760.
19. Ibid., 768.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 751. In footnote 1 Parsons does admit that Weber would have rejected this programme as impracticable.
23. J.F. Scott, "The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme", op.cit.
24. D. Martindale, "Talcott Parsons' Theoretical Metamorphosis from Social Behaviourism to Macro-Functionalism", op.cit.
25. T. Parsons, The Social System, op.cit.
26. T. Parsons, E. Shils et.al., Toward a General Theory of Action, op.cit.
27. T. Parsons, "Some Comments on the State of the General Theory of Action", American Sociological Review, 18 (1953), 618-631.
28. T. Parsons, "The Present Position and Prospects of Systematic Theory in Sociology", in G. Gurvich and W.E. Moore (Eds.) Twentieth Century Sociology, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), 44.
29. Ibid., 46.
30. On the paradox of precise, but theoretically unimportant variables see T. Parsons, "Introduction to the Revised Edition", Essays in Sociological Theory, (New York: Free Press, 1954), 13.
31. Parsons, "The Present Position and Prospects of Systematic Theory in Sociology", op.cit., 47.

32. Ibid., 48. C.f., T. Parsons "The Position of Sociological Theory", American Sociological Review, 13 (1948), 156 and "Social Interaction", in Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, op.cit., 160-1.
33. W.B. Cannon, The Wisdom of the Body, (London: Routledge, 1932), 24-5, 294.
34. T. Parsons, "An Approach to Psychological Theory in Terms of the Theory of Action", in S. Koch (Ed.), Psychology: A Study of a Science, (New York: Free Press, 1959), III, 708.
35. Parsons et.al., "A General Statement", in Toward a General Theory of Action, op.cit., 3-4. C.f., Parsons "Introduction to the Paperback Edition" in The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., xi. For the biographical circumstances leading to Parsons' interest in Freud see Parsons "On Building Social System Theory", op.cit., 835.
36. The personality and social systems were empirical systems, but the cultural system was not because it was involved in a different level of abstraction. See Parsons and Shils, "Values, Motives and Systems of Action" in Parsons et.al., Toward a General Theory of Action, op.cit., 55.
37. Parsons and Shils, "Values, Motives and Systems of Action", op.cit., 107-8.
38. Parsons, "The Position of Sociological Theory", op.cit., 159.
39. T. Parsons et.al., "Toward a Common Language for the Area of Social Science", in T. Parsons, Essays in Sociological Theory Pure and Applied, (New York: Free Press, 1949), 43-4.
40. Parsons, "Introduction" to Essays in Sociological Theory, op.cit., 14-15.
41. Parsons, The Social System, op.cit., 66.
42. Parsons, "Some Comments on the State of the General Theory of Action", op.cit., 627.
43. Parsons, "On Building Social System Theory", op.cit., 842.
44. Parsons and Shils, "Values, Motives and Systems of Action", op.cit., 48.
45. Ibid., 79.
46. Parsons et.al., "A General Statement", op.cit., 24.
47. Ibid., 27.

48. Parsons, "The Position of Sociological Theory", op.cit., 159. Significantly, in a footnote to that page, Parsons argues that such a pattern governing action within a social system is institutionalized in so far as "... it defines the main modes of the legitimately expected behaviour of the persons acting in the relevant social roles ... it is an ideal pattern, but since conformity is legitimately expected it is not a utopian pattern". Presumably Parsons is concerned to avoid the criticism which he directed against Weber concerning fictional concepts.
49. Parsons, "The Position of Sociological Theory", op.cit., 162-3. C.f. Parsons, The Social System, op.cit., 548, 552.
50. Parsons, "The Position of Sociological Theory", op.cit., 164. At this point in the development of his ideas Parsons did not consider that political theory could lay claim to a distinct set of elements for its subject matter like economics and sociology.
51. Parsons, "Comment on 'De-Parsonizing Weber'", op.cit., 669.
52. T. Parsons and N.J. Smelser, Economy and Society, (London: Routledge, 1956).
53. T. Parsons and R.F. Bales "The Dimensions of Action-Space", in T. Parsons, R.F. Bales and E.A. Shils, Working Papers in the Theory of Action, (New York: Free Press, 1953). For the attempt to formulate law-like statements see 102-3.
54. Parsons and Bales, "The Dimensions of Action-Space", op.cit. 71. C.f., Parsons "On Building Social System Theory", op.cit., 844. The link between the pattern variables and the functional problems is discussed in detail in Parsons, "The Pattern Variables Revisited: A Response to Robert Dubin", in his Sociological Theory and Modern Society, op.cit.
55. Parsons, "Some Comments on the State of the General Theory of Action", op.cit., 625.
56. Parsons and Smelser, Economy and Society, op.cit., 306-7. C.f. Parsons, "On Building Social System Theory", op.cit. 845-6.
57. Parsons, "Introduction to the Paperback Edition", op.cit., xii.
58. Parsons, "An Approach to Psychological Theory in Terms of the Theory of Action", op.cit., and "Some Problems of General Theory in Sociology" in J.C. McKinney and E.A. Tiryakian (Eds), Theoretical Sociology: Perspectives and Developments, (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1970), 43-4.

59. Scott, "The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme", op.cit., 721, footnote 21, in which he refers to a conversation with Parsons who described the pre-war article "The Place of Ultimate Values in Sociological Theory" op.cit., as unnecessarily polemic.
60. Parsons, "The Pattern Variables Revisited...", op.cit., 193.
61. Parsons, "The Point of View of the Author", op.cit., 324.
62. Parsons, "An Approach to Psychological Theory in Terms of the Theory of Action", op.cit., 629.
63. Parsons, "Some Highlights of the General Theory of Action", in R. Young (Ed.), Approaches to the Study of Politics, (Evanston: North western University Press, 1958), 286.
C.f. T. Parsons, "Introduction to Culture and the Social System", being part 4 of T. Parsons, E. Shils, K.D. Naegle, J.R. Pitts (Eds.), Theories of Society, (New York; Free Press, 1961), 963, and Parsons, "An Approach to Psychological Theory in Terms of the Theory of Action", op.cit., 629.
64. Ibid., 630-31.
65. Parsons, "The Point of View of the Author", op.cit., 342.
C.f., Parsons, "Order as a Sociological Problem", in P.G. Kuntz (Ed.), The Concept of Order, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 379.
66. Parsons, "Pattern Variables Revisited...", op.cit., 195.
67. Parsons, "The Point of View of the Author", op.cit., 325.
68. Recently Parsons identified this new phase of his thinking as beginning in 1965, see his Action Theory and the Human Condition, op.cit., 7.
69. T. Parsons, "Systems Analysis: Social Systems", in D.L. Sills (Ed.), International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1968), 458.
70. Parsons, "Unity and Diversity in the Modern Intellectual Disciplines...", op.cit., 181.
71. Parsons, "Systems Analysis: Social Systems", op.cit., 459.
72. Parsons, "Social Interaction" in Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, op.cit., 163.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid., 167.

75. Parsons, "Systems Analysis; Social Systems", op.cit., 460. For the argument that functional analysis contains no ideological implications, see "The Present Status of 'Structural-Functional' Theory", in Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, op.cit., 108.
76. Parsons, "Some Problems of General Theory in Sociology", op.cit., 29. C.f, Parsons "The Present Status of 'Structural-Functional' Theory", op.cit., 101.
77. Ibid., 101-2 and "Some Problems of General Theory", op.cit., 35. Parsons first developed the idea that structure is parallel to process rather than function in "Recent Trends in Structural-Functional Theory", in E.W. Count and G.T. Bowles (Eds.), Fact and Theory in Social Science, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1964), 144.
78. Parsons, "Some Problems of General Theory in Sociology", op.cit., 60.
79. Parsons, "Introduction to the Paperback Edition", op.cit., xii.
80. Parsons, "Systems Analysis; Social Systems", op.cit., 471-2.
81. T. Parsons, "Evolutionary Universals in Society", American Sociological Review, 29 (1964), 339.
82. Ibid., 341.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid., 342.
86. Ibid., 349.
87. Ibid., 353. See also T. Parsons, "Comparative Studies in Evolutionary Change", in I. Vallier (Ed.) Comparative Methods in Sociology, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) and T. Parsons, The System of Modern Society (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971), Chapter 1.
88. See Parsons "On Building Social System Theory", op.cit., and T. Parsons, G.M. Platt and N.J. Smelser, The American University, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).
89. Parsons, Action Theory and the Human Condition, op.cit., x.
90. For the origin of the concept see Parsons, Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, op.cit., 9.

91. Parsons, Action Theory and the Human Condition, op.cit., x.
92. Parsons, Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory, op.cit., 12.
93. Parsons, Action Theory and the Human Condition, op.cit., 8.
94. Ibid., 361.
95. Ibid., 405.
96. Given his collaborative ventures, he has not produced the General Theory of Action entirely by himself, but his role has been overwhelmingly significant.
97. For example, W.J.H. Sprott, "Principia Sociologica", British Journal of Sociology, 3 (1952).
98. T. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
99. Parsons et.al., Theories of Society, op.cit., 966. Parsons develops his position on theory in more detail in "Comment on 'Preface to a Metatheoretical Framework for Sociology'", American Journal of Sociology, 67 (1961), 137.
100. For a discussion of the nature of American Sociology see G. Rocher, Talcott Parsons and American Sociology? (London: Nelson, 1974), 11-15.
101. Nevertheless it is a persisting influence, see S.N. Eisenstadt and M. Curelaru, The Form of Sociology: Paradigms and Crises, (New York: Wiley, 1976).
102. Undoubtedly the work of Alfred Schutz was crucial to these developments.
103. Social and political events in the U.S.A. played an important role in making value-consensus and equilibrium theories seem inadequate to contemporary circumstances.
104. S. Butts, "Parsons, Weber and the Subjective Point of View", Sociological Analysis and Theory, 5 (1975), 185-218.
105. But the importance of the convergence thesis for his subsequent work has been largely ignored. See, for example, J.H. Bershad, Ideology and Social Knowledge, op.cit.. For exceptions see: J.F. Scott, "Review of 'Sociological Theory and Modern Society'", American Sociological Review, 33 (1968), 454; P.A. Sorokin, Sociological Theories of To-Day, (New York: Harper, 1966), 404-5; A. Sahay, "Introduction" in Sahay (Ed.), Max Weber and Modern Sociology, (London: Routledge, 1971), 4; S. Butts, "Parsons, Weber and the Subjective Point of View", op.cit., 188-190; Pope, Cohen and Hazelrigg, op.cit., 420-24.

106. G.C. Homans, "Bringing Men Back In", in H. Turk and R.L. Simpson Institutions and Social Exchange; The Sociology of Talcott Parsons and George C. Homans (New York; Bobbs-Merril, 1971).
107. Ibid., 106.
108. Ibid., 106-7.
109. Ibid., 108. The characteristics in abstraction, generality and the difficulty of deriving empirical generalizations from the theoretical concepts has been a frequent source of comment. See, for example, Bershad, Ideology and Social Knowledge, op.cit., 13; W.F. Whyte, "Parsons' Theory Applied to Organizations" in M. Black (Ed.), The Social Theories of Talcott Parsons, op.cit., 258-9; Rocher, op.cit., 164; A.J. Gregor, "Review of Sociological Theory and Modern Society", American Sociological Review, 33 (1968), 451-2; Sorokin, Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology and Related Sciences, op.cit., 246-7; Mills, op.cit., 34, 43; Bottomore, op.cit., 37-8; and J.H. Turner and L. Beeghley, "Current Folklore in the Criticisms of Parsonian Action Theory", Sociological Inquiry, 44 (1974), 54.
110. Parsons "The Point of View of the Author", op.cit., 316-7.
111. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 727.
112. Parsons, "The Position of Sociological Theory", op.cit., 164.
113. Parsons, "Recent Trends in Structural-Functional Theory", op.cit., 140.
114. Parsons, The Social System, op.cit., 3 and 536-7. It was very much in these terms that Mills in The Sociological Imagination, op.cit., defined Grand Theory as "... the associating and dissociating of concepts" (26) and that it could be called systematic, only in "the way it outruns any specific and empirical problem". (48). In "Out of this World...", op.cit., 40, Bottomore argues that "Parsons confines himself largely to the analysis and classification of concepts ... a sphere which is ... characteristic of sciences at an early stage of their development, in which theory involves no more than classifying the phenomena with which the subject deals, mapping out the problem areas, defining the rules of procedure and schemes of interpretation". What is particularly ironic to Bottomore is that the classic sociologists developed testable explanatory generalizations.
115. Parsons and Smelser, Economy and Society, op.cit., 4-5. But compare this statement with a much more optimistic forecast written two years earlier: "... now beginning to get the kind of relation which combines empirical precision and high theoretical generality of implication in the same statement of fact". Parsons, "Introduction to the Revised Edition", op.cit., 13.

116. Parsons, "Pattern Variables Revisited", op.cit., 218.
117. Parsons, "Sociological Theory" in Encyclopaedia Britannica, 20 (1969), 799.
118. See, for example, R. Bierstedt, "The Means-Ends Schema in Sociological Theory", American Sociological Review, 3 (1938), 668. "The System generates its own concepts which require further clarification; this clarification in turn generates more concepts, and so on, ending in a relatively autonomous congeries of deductive propositions whose nexus with the empirical world grows proportionately more vaporous". It has long been recognized that the decision, by Parsons, to develop the logical systematization of his concepts can only be served by increasing their level of abstraction. See : R.M. Williams, "The Social Theory of Talcott Parsons". in M. Black (Ed.), op.cit., 93; R.C. Sheldon, "Some Observations on Theory in Social Science", in Parsons et.al. Toward a General Theory of Action, op.cit., 37; M.H. Lessnoff, "Parsons' Systems Problems", Sociological Review, 16 (1968), 185-215; J. Berger and M. Zelditch, "Review of Sociological Theory and Modern Society", American Sociological Review, 33 (1968), 446-7; A.T. Turk, "On the Parsonian Approach to Theory Construction", Sociological Quarterly, 8 (1967), 49; M.J. Mulkay, Functionalism, Exchange and Theoretical Strategy (London: Routledge, 1971), 67; and Gouldner, The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology, op.cit., 207.
119. R.K. Merton, "Discussion of 'The Position of Sociological Theory'", American Sociological Review, 13 (1948), 164-168.
120. The answer would appear to lie in the widespread support for the development of general theory, and the recognition that statements of sufficient generality and systematicness could only be achieved at a very abstract level and one at which the possibility of testing was extremely limited.
121. Parsons et.al., "Values, Motives and Systems of Action", op.cit.
122. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 6-15, 753-4. Nevertheless, Parsons has always recognized that an important role is played in science by philosophical or residual elements. He frequently distinguished between theory and the higher level assumptions on which a particular theory depends. In "Social Interaction", op.cit., 154, Parsons comments: "Afterall, science is not common sense, and its most basic theoretical ideas and frames of reference require development through complex intellectual processes which involve not only interpretation of observation but also theoretical and partly philosophical conceptualization.

123. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 7.
124. Ibid., 41, For more recent, though largely identical formulations of "fact", see T. Parsons and C. Ackerman, "The Concept of 'Social System' as a Theoretical Device", in G.J. DiRenzo (Ed.), Concepts, Theory and Explanation in the Behavioural Sciences, (New York: Random House, 1966), 26-7 and Parsons "The Present Status of 'Structural-Functional' Theory", op.cit., 104-5.
125. Parsons et.al., "Values, Motives and Systems of Action", op.cit., 50.
126. Ibid.
127. Ibid., 50-1.
128. Ibid., 51
129. The difficulties involved in the notion of artificial conditions are examined in the following section.
130. See Parsons, "The Role of Theory in Social Research", op.cit., and "Systems Analysis: Social Systems", op.cit.
131. Parsons, "The Point of View of the Author", op.cit., 321. Parsons, undoubtedly, gained a good deal of support for his strategy because of the widespread acceptance of the need for a general conceptual scheme in sociology. For this reason J.F. Scott is only able to conclude a review of Parsons' work by saying that it represents a major contribution, but if only it had been written more clearly! See "Interpreting Parsons' Work: A Problem in Method", Sociological Inquiry, 44 (1974), 60.
132. It is in this context that Parsons et.al., Theories of Society, op.cit., xxi, include the following quotation from Darwin: "But I believe in Natural Selection, not because I can prove in any single case that it has changed one species into another, but because it groups and explains well (as it seems to me) a host of facts in classification, embryology, morphology, rudimentary organs, geological succession and distribution". Clearly the idea that the value of a theory lay in its power to provide a basis for organizing a vast array of empirical material, irrespective of the testability of the theoretical system per se, appealed to Parsons!
133. Parsons, "Introduction to the Revised Edition", op.cit., 16.
134. Ibid., 17.

135. Parsons, "Pattern Variables Revisited,,"; op.cit., 194.
136. Parsons, "Some Problems of General Theory in Sociology", op.cit., 42.
137. Ibid., 43.
138. A.W. Gouldner, "Anti-Minotau ...", op.cit., 67, and "The Sociologist as Partisan: Sociology and the Welfare State", in J.D. Douglas (Ed.), The Relevance of Sociology, op.cit., 144.
139. For instance, R. Dahrendorf, op.cit., D. Lockwood, "Some Remarks on 'The Social System'", British Journal of Sociology, 7 (1956); C.W. Mills, op.cit.; J. Rex, Key Problems in Sociological Theory, op.cit.
140. Parsons, "Order as a Sociological Problem", op.cit., 375, 379.
141. The issue of power in society clearly divided Mills and Parsons.
142. Parsons, "Unity and Diversity in the Modern Intellectual Disciplines ...", op.cit., 185.
143. Parsons, "An Approach to the Sociology of Knowledge", op.cit., 139.
144. Parsons, "Unity and Diversity in the Modern Intellectual Disciplines...", op.cit., 185-6. C.f., Gouldner, "Anti-Minotaur..", op.cit., 69-70.
145. Parsons, "An Approach to the Sociology of Knowledge", op.cit., 152.
146. Parsons, "Unity and Diversity in Modern Intellectual Disciplines...", op.cit., 185. C.f., Gouldner, "The Sociologist as Partisan ...", op.cit., 143-4.
147. Parsons, "The Role of Theory in Social Research", op.cit., 20.
148. Parsons, The System of Modern Societies, op.cit., 138.
149. Parsons' emphasis upon norms and the neglect of interests has received considerable attention; Bottomore, op.cit., 41, Rex, op.cit., 110; Rex, Sociology as Demystification, op.cit., 12; Mills, op.cit., 37; Lockwood, op.cit., 140-2; and Dahrendorf, op.cit., 120. See also R.S. Warner's attempt to reconstitute the debate over norms and interests, "Toward a Redefinition of Action Theory: Paying the Cognitive Element its Due", American Journal of Sociology, 83 (1978)

and the critique of Parsons' interpretation of Weber, in terms of the relative emphasis upon norms and interests, by Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope, "De-Parsonizing Weber...", op.cit., 423-4. In addition those who found Parsons' work to be inadequate in its treatment of interests also criticized its ability to account for social change. See, for example, L.A. Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict, (London: Routledge, 1956), 21; Lockwood, op.cit., 140-2, and Dahrendorf, op.cit., 127.

150. Indeed, both Mills and Gouldner saw Parsonian Theory to be of rather vague ideological use.
151. Parsons and Ackerman, op.cit., 26-7.
152. The difficulties were revealed most decisively by Lessnoff, op.cit., though the strategy was recently defended by T. Burger, "Talcott Parsons, the Problem of Order, and the Programme of an Analytic Sociology", American Journal of Sociology, 83 (1978), 325-6.
153. Parsons "The Present Status of 'Structural-Functional' Theory", op.cit., 108.
154. For example, Lockwood, op.cit., 141-2.
155. Parsons, The Social System, op.cit., vii; c.f., 548, 552.
156. Parsons, "Recent Trends in Structural-Functional Theory", op.cit., 142.
157. Parsons, "Some Problems of General Theory in Sociology", op.cit., 33.
158. Parsons et.al., Working Papers in the Theory of Action, op.cit., 108.
159. Parsons, "An Approach to Psychological Theory in Terms of the Theory of Action", op.cit., 695-6.
160. Parsons and Ackerman, op.cit., 27.
161. See, for example, A.W. Gouldner, "Some Observations on Systematic Theory 1945-1955", in his For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today (London: Allen Lane, 1973) and "Reciprocity and Autonomy in Functional Theory" in L. Gross (Ed.), Symposium on Sociological Theory (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 241-270.
162. Parsons, "The Present Status of 'Structural-Functional' Theory", op.cit., 108.
163. Parsons, "Some Problems of General Theory in Sociology", op.cit., 35.

164. Parsons, "On Building Social System Theory", op.cit., 869-70.
165. Parsons, "Order as a Sociological Problem", op.cit., 373.
166. Parsons, "Pattern Variables Revisited", op.cit., 195.
167. Parsons et.al., "General Statement" in Toward a General Theory of Action, op.cit., 24.
168. Parsons, "Social Interaction", op.cit., 168.
169. Parsons, "Order as a Sociological Problem", op.cit., 374.
170. Ibid., 375.
171. Ibid., 379.
172. For the followers of a logico-deductive model of scientific theory, it was sufficient to point out that Parsons' work did not measure up to this standard, though little attempt was made to suggest why this might be the case. The problematic nature of both convergence and theoretical sociology was not examined until the 1970's when methodological and theoretical issues come to the centre of attention. See the authors cited in footnote 105.
173. Two neatly contrasting examples are Gouldner "Reciprocity and Autonomy in Functional Theory", op.cit., and J.O'Neill "The Hobbesian Problem in Marx and Parsons", in J.H. Loubser et.al., (Eds.) Explorations in General Theory in Social Science, I, (New York: Free Press, 1976), 295-308.
174. See, for example, E. Nagel, The Structure of Science, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World 1961), and C.G. Hempel, Aspects of Scientific Explanation, (New York: Free Press, 1965).
175. Dahrendorf, "Out of Utopia...", op.cit.
176. For a notable example of the way in which interest in theoretical and methodological issues was replaced by analyses of background influences, see A. Dawe, "The Two Sociologies", British Journal of Sociology, 21 (1970), 207-218.
177. One of the most effective critiques was Filmer et.al. New Directions in Sociological Theory, op.cit.
178. Mills, op.cit., 44.
179. Ibid., 48.
180. D. Martindale, The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory (London: Routledge, 1964), 484-5.

181. Martindale, "Talcot Parsons' Theoretical Metamorphosis from Social Behaviourism to Macro-Functionalism", op.cit. 168-70.
182. Scott, "The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme", op.cit.
183. Ibid., 716.
184. Parsons, "The Place of Ultimate Values in Sociological Theory", op.cit.
185. Ibid., 718.
186. Ibid., 723.
187. Ibid.
188. Ibid., 716, 724. Scott traces a gradual decline in the importance of voluntarism in Parsons' work between 1937 and 1951, see 725, footnote 36.
189. Ibid., 719, footnote 12.
190. Parsons et.al., "Values, Motives and Systems of Action", op.cit., 64.
191. Ibid.
192. Scott, "The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme", op.cit., 719.
193. Ibid., 725.
194. Ibid., 727.
195. Ibid., 728.
196. Parsons, The Social System, op.cit., 543. Somewhat artfully, Scott used the first half of this quotation by itself to support the interpretation of a sharp break between the pre-war and post-war versions of Parsons' work. However, if the quotation is used in full, it is not at all conducive to such an argument, see Scott, "The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme", op.cit., 729.
197. Parsons, The Social System, op.cit., 541-43.
198. Ibid., 544.
199. Parsons et.al., "Values, Motives and Systems of Action", op.cit., 53.
200. Parsons, The Social System, op.cit., 9.

201. Parsons, "The Place of Ultimate Values in Sociological Theory", op.cit.
202. Parsons, "Introduction to the Paperback Edition", op.cit. xi, and Parsons, "Comment on 'Current Folklore in the Criticisms of Parsonian Action Theory'", Sociological Inquiry 44, (1974), 55.
203. Parsons, "The Point of View of the Author", op.cit., 324, 341; "An Approach to Psychological Theory in terms of the Theory of Action", op.cit., 625; "Recent Trends in Structural Functional Theory", op.cit., 140; and Parsons et.al., Theories of Society, op.cit., 963.
204. For a discussion of the importance of terminology for setting up the Department of Social Relations at Harvard see R.N. Apostle, "Parsonian Sociology", Sociology and Social Research, 51 (1967), 280-1.
205. Parsons, The Social System, op.cit. 544. Moreover, in his "Comment on 'Current Folklore in the Criticism of Parsonian Action Theory'", op.cit., 56, Parsons remarks that Tolman's purposive behaviourism "... clearly implied a voluntaristic element at animal as well as human levels in the sense of the autonomy of the behaving organism in its relations with its environment".
206. Parsons et.al., Toward a General Theory of Action, op.cit., 4.
207. Parsons, "The Place of Ultimate Values in Sociological Theory", op.cit.
208. Ibid., 286. Parsons' view of scientific statements was expressed earlier in "Some Reflections on 'The Nature and Significance of Economics'", Quarterly Journal of Economics, 48 (1933-4), 539.
209. Parsons, "The Place of Ultimate Values in Sociological Theory", op.cit., 287. C.f., "Some Reflections on 'The Nature and Significance of Economics'", op.cit., 519-20.
210. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 44.
211. Ibid., 46.
212. Ibid.
213. Ibid., 295.
214. Parsons et.al., "Values, Motives and Systems of Action", op.cit., 61 and "Pattern Variables Revisited", op.cit., 195.

215. Ibid., 193. It is worth noting, at this point, Parsons' comment upon Weber's definition of sociology "... for purposes of sociology and, indeed, of 'action' in general, Weber ties it too closely to the 'individual' rather than to the system of social interaction". See "Theory in the Humanities and Sociology", op.cit., 506.
216. See, for example, Turner and Beeghley, op.cit., 47-50; D.R. Gerstein, "A Note on the Continuity of Parsonian Action Theory", Sociological Inquiry, 45 (1975), 11-14; and Bershad, op.cit., 20.
217. Parsons et.al., "Values, Motives and Systems of Action", op.cit., 61.
218. Ibid., 62.
219. Ibid., 63. Here Parsons distinguishes the biological analysis of motivation, in terms of what a person has to do to survive, from the interests of the sciences of action.
220. Ibid., 63-4. C.f., Parsons, The Social System, op.cit., 544-5.
221. Parsons et.al., "Values, Motives and Systems of Action", op.cit., 53. C.f., Parsons, The Social System, op.cit., 4-5.
222. Essentially because it is more straightforward to make very general statements about complex phenomena than it is to explain individual phenomena in detail.
223. Parsons, "An Approach to Psychological Theory in Terms of the Theory of Action", op.cit., 613.
224. In particular, "De-Parsonizing Weber: A Critique of Parsons' Interpretation of Weber's Sociology", op.cit., and "On the Divergence of Weber and Durkheim: A Critique of Parsons' Convergence Thesis", op.cit. For Parsons' most revealing rejoinders, see his "Comment on 'Parsons' Interpretation of Durkheim' and on 'Moral Freedom Through Understanding in Durkheim'", American Sociological Review, 40 (1975), 106-111, and "Reply to Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope", op.cit.
225. Scott, "The Changing Foundations of the Parsonian Action Scheme", op.cit.
226. Parsons, "Comment on 'Parsons' Interpretation of Durkheim'...", op.cit., 108.
227. Parsons, "Comment on 'Current Folklore in the Criticisms of Parsonian Action Theory'", op.cit., 56.

228. Ibid. For an argument in support of Parsons see, Warner, op.cit., 1338.
229. For example Bendix, op.cit., Sahay, op.cit., Butts, op.cit., and Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope, op.cit.
230. Parsons, "Social Interaction", op.cit., 167.
231. D. Wrong, "The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology" , American Sociological Review, 26 (1961), 183-93.
232. Parsons, "An Approach to Psychological Theory in Terms of the Theory of Action", op.cit., 629.
233. Parsons et.al., "Values, Motives and Systems of Action", op.cit., 76.
234. Ibid., 48.

... ..
CHAPTER FOUR

... ..
SCHUTZ AND THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MEANING

Viewed historically, the sociological enterprise has been seen primarily in terms of a natural science of society. Attention has been concentrated upon the search for universal propositions about human conduct, and in this search the role of society has been emphasized at the expense of the interpretation of the activities of individual people, whether in small domestic groups or the larger settings of economic and political life. Through the 1950's and into the 1960's sociology was dominated by various approaches which drew support from the prevailing mood of the positivistic philosophy of science and were characterized by the use of methods, concepts and procedures proven useful in the study of natural phenomena.¹ But the weakness of these approaches lay in the lack of consideration afforded to the question of their appropriateness for the study of social reality. The result was a commitment to the form of a scientific analysis of social conduct which went hand in hand with an inability to produce the sort of substantive results which had been thought possible.²

The main reason for the failure of these approaches then lay in the absence of a direct and systematic examination of the nature of social phenomena - namely, the subjectively meaningful activities of people going about their everyday lives. This is the central issue for any form of sociology which aspires to penetrate further into social life than a mere behaviourism,³ and from it, of course, radiate a variety of associated difficulties. We saw in the previous chapter how Parsons' inability to come to

terms with the full implications of the problem of objectivity, which is inevitably linked to the study of action in the context of different values, beliefs and ideologies, was undoubtedly a major factor in the decline of the authoritativeness of his work. In this chapter we shall consider the more basic problem of the meaningful nature of social phenomena, and examine the extent to which the actions of other people can be understood and explained by their fellow participants in social life and, interpreted, though more tenuously, by the sociologist. Undoubtedly the work of Alfred Schutz has played the major role in the emergence of these issues in contemporary sociology and since the late 1960's his ideas have been increasingly influential as a resource for alternative perspectives which presuppose fundamental differences between social and natural reality, in other words, phenomenological and existential sociology,⁴ as well as ethnomethodology.⁵

Alfred Schutz's studies of the social world draw on a tradition of German scholarship which, until the contemporary period, constituted the one major exception to the naturalistic perspective. This tradition, associated with Dilthey's⁶ concept of understanding, the hermeneutic tradition,⁷ and drawing upon Windelband⁸ and Rickert's⁹ methodological distinction between two kinds of science - the natural and the cultural - was characterized by an analysis of social life which granted full recognition to the peculiarities of each culture, event and personality: in other words it emphasized their particular details and qualities. Inevitably, the result of this stress upon the specific was at the expense of the general, and the result was to reduce the scope and importance of generalization in the analysis of social reality - and this, of course,

served to emphasize its distinctiveness in relation to the natural science perspective where generalization has always been seen as the primary objective.

Undoubtedly the most impressive representation of this approach within the sociological tradition can be found in Max Weber's historical and comparative analyses of social institutions and the way in which they effect, and are affected by the actions of people, both individually and collectively.¹⁰ It is a perspective based upon the attempt to find a methodological balance between, on the one hand, the requirements of scientific knowledge and procedure, namely, generality, objectivity and testability, and on the other hand, the particular methods required to understand the subtle and sometimes contradictory meanings of peoples' actions, which are such a characteristic feature of social life.

Schutz's work stands in an intentionally close relationship to this tradition. He saw himself working essentially within the parameters of interpretive sociology as established theoretically, and practically through research, by Weber. He shared Weber's views on the distinctive nature of sociology as the study of subjectively meaningful action and, also, that it was possible to pursue such a study in a scientific manner. But he was critical in respect of what he identified as detailed omissions and ambiguities in the methodological foundations of Weberian sociology which he argued could be clarified with the help of some of the philosophical insights of Bergson¹¹ and in particular Husserl.¹² In The Phenomenology of the Social World,¹³ perhaps Schutz's most important publication, he described his project - which remained

essentially unchanged throughout his subsequent career¹⁴ in the following terms.

"... taking its point of departure from the questions raised by Max Weber ... it seeks to determine the precise nature of the phenomenon of meaning, and to do this by an analysis of the constituting function. Only after we have a firm grasp of the concept of meaning as such will we be able to analyse step by step the meaning structure of the social world. By following this procedure we shall be able to anchor the methodological apparatus of interpretive sociology at a far deeper point than Max Weber was able to do." ¹⁵

It is the relationship between the work of Schutz and that of Weber which is the focus of our attention here.

Curiously this relationship between the work of Schutz and that of Weber has received remarkably little critical attention, in fact until quite recently, this has also been true of Schutz's work in general.¹⁶ In spite of the enormous impact his ideas have had upon contemporary sociology discussions of Schutz's contribution to the subject have been essentially expository in nature.¹⁷ In effect it has been assumed that Schutz's criticism of Weber is valid,¹⁸ and that Schutz's work is necessarily the more important reference point for all those whose work falls under, what is today, the rather broad rubric of "interpretive sociology".

Indeed there are differences in the emphases of their respective inquiries which lend credence to this point of view: Schutz analyzed in great detail some of the philosophical assumptions of sociology which relate to the problem of meaning, whereas Weber only makes brief mention of these topics. But what has been even more important in creating the uncritical assumption of Schutz's "improvement" upon Weber has been Parsons' interpretation of Weber's role in the history of the discipline.

We have already seen how Parsons' argument that Weberian sociology constituted an indispensable element of the General Theory of Action, indeed of the whole eclectic synthesis, was widely accepted. The convergence thesis even came to be regarded as one of the major theoretical contributions of post-war sociology.¹⁹ However, it was a success which, as we have seen, owed a great deal to the ambiguity of some of Parsons' leading concepts as well as to the theoretical naivety of its audience, and with the passage of time the manifest inability of Parsons' Analytic and Systems Theory to study social action, namely, the meaningful activities of people in their everyday worlds has become clear. One result of this has been a degree of disenchantment with Weber's conception of sociology; a negative attitude fostered in particular by Parsons' argument that Weber's ideas on objectivity and value-freedom were incorporated into his own work.²⁰ In addition Parsons' selective emphasis upon Weber's most abstract and general typologies of actions and institutions, as the key to modern system oriented sociological thinking - despite Weber's rejection of certain features of this approach - left the impression of Weber as a gifted but ultimately muddled thinker whose work was fit more to serve as a source of concepts and discrete ideas on particular problems²¹ than to be looked at as a potentially coherent and systematic solution to the problems of a particular conception of sociological inquiry.

Herein, then, lies the secret of much of Schutz's appeal, for the radically different emphasis of his approach was seen to provide the basis for an alternative form of sociology, a return to the older interpretive tradition and a new start beyond the confines of the structural functionalist orthodoxy with its interminable yet

fruitless debates about order and control, consenses and conflict.

Given the extensive examination of Parsons' critique and "improvement" of Weber it may be useful to locate Schutz's analysis of Weber and his contribution to the development of phenomenological sociology in the context of this wider set of themes.

The relationships to Weber of the work of Parsons and Schutz exhibits two broad similarities: first, both of them considered that Weber had made a major contribution to the development of sociology, although for Schutz the contribution lay in the establishment of interpretive sociology, whereas for Parsons Weber's role had been to reintegrate the central feature of idealism, namely the emphasis upon values and meanings, within a more positivistic conception of science based upon general theoretical categories. Second, both set out to improve upon Weber: Schutz through the process of a phenomenological analysis of the philosophical assumptions implicit in Weber's interpretive sociology, and Parsons through the synthesis of the theoretical elements of Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber, within a more rigorous framework consistent with a general theory of action.

However, it is the differences in their relationships to Weber which are of particular interest here. Whilst Schutz' analysis began with the attempt to clarify and make secure certain underlying features of Weber's sociology which in general terms he considered to be entirely adequate, for Parsons, Weber was only ever one - admittedly very important²² - reference point for his subsequent theory. Hence Schutz's phenomenological approach to sociology must

be seen in terms of a good deal of compatibility with Weber's interpretive sociology. In more detail, then, it presupposes that Weber's emphasis upon interpretive understanding had clarified the nature of the subject matter, demonstrated the methods to be used in studying individual peoples' actions, and indicated, through his empirical investigations and typologies, the scope and possibilities of the discipline. In addition, Schutz and Parsons differ in their relationship to Weberian sociology because of the character of their respective interests; for Schutz the object of analysis lay in a purely theoretical and therefore philosophical consideration of the nature of the meaning of social action and behaviour, together with their implications for sociological research, whereas, despite the theoretical and occasionally extremely speculative elements of Parsons' work²³, his goal fell more strictly within the traditional boundaries of sociological inquiry in which the constituents of social phenomena were largely regarded as unproblematic and attention was concentrated - as befitting a general theory of action - upon the resultants of the actions of individuals and groups in the context of private and institutional life, in short, upon society.

Having established the general nature of Schutz's interest in Weber and the features of his sociological project it is now possible to consider some more specific issues. Schutz's most detailed critique and assessment of Weber's interpretive sociology is to be found in his The Phenomenology of the Social World.²⁴

In this study Schutz developed an analysis of the meaning structure of the social world which remained of fundamental importance throughout a career which exhibited a remarkable degree of thematic

unity.²⁵ Indeed this coherence is particularly noteworthy when it is considered that after leaving Europe and moving to the U.S.A., Schutz found himself in a rather different intellectual context with quite different traditions, assumptions and problems.²⁶ These circumstances, no doubt, strongly influenced the form of some of his most important essays, written in the 1940's, which were concerned with introducing the main features of a phenomenological analysis of the social world and using this as a framework for criticizing various aspects of American sociology. As a result, they were explicitly addressed to the methodological problems of sociology and social science. Towards the end of his life Schutz had been working on a major new study but it remained unfinished at his death although it has subsequently been edited and finalized by Luckmann. This too manifests the unity of Schutz's career,²⁷ as it is based upon the same assumptions as his first major study and seeks to extend the analysis of the structures of the life world into new areas. Significantly, although Schutz had planned a final chapter on the methodology of the social sciences, Luckmann²⁸ decided not to include it because it did not represent a significant advance in relation to his essay on "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action",²⁹ published in 1953.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Schutz's discussion of Weberian sociology is its very selective nature. This is, of course, quite consistent with Schutz's particular concern to clarify, by philosophical analysis, some of the basic assumptions of interpretive sociology. His detailed examination of Weber's work involves almost exclusively methodological issues and is

based upon the opening section of Economy and Society³⁰ including, in particular, Weber's definition of key concepts. Now Weber's methodological introduction to this immense study contains little reference to his early discussions of the methodological problems common to history and economics,³¹ or to the lessons to be drawn from his historical and comparative analysis, so that Schutz's decision to concentrate upon his statement is quite explicitly based upon a developmental interpretation of Weber's conception of sociology³² - a developmental view which bears a good deal of similarity to the one used by Parsons.

It is undoubtedly true that Weber refers explicitly to 'sociology' in Economy and Society and therein he outlines its scope and objectives, with the result that, like Parsons, Schutz infers that Weber's later formulations represent a major change from the earlier methodological analyses associated in particular with the character of the historical-cultural sciences. The nature of this change whether it be real or apparent is, of course, crucial to our study and will be examined in Chapter 5. Suffice it here to say that in our examination of Schutz's critique of Weber the validity of this developmental interpretation will be accepted as unproblematic in order to facilitate as clear an interpretation of Schutz's contribution as possible.

I. ACTION AND THE CONSTITUTION OF MEANING

In view of the length and complexity of Schutz's analysis of Weber's concepts and procedures let us be clear at the outset on the three areas of broad agreement between them. First, according to Schutz, Weber had developed a sociological approach in which the aim of describing social life took the form of reducing complex institutions and relationships to "the most elementary form of individual behaviour" in order thereby to understand the meaning intended by the actor for a particular act. This is the basis for Weber's conception of the aim of sociology:

"... to interpret the actions of individuals in the social world and the ways in which individuals give meaning to social phenomena." 33

Moreover, it is particularly significant for Schutz's purposes that this method advocated by Weber is similar to the way in which, according to common sense thinking, people going about their everyday lives comprehend the social world.³⁴

Second, Weber developed the ideal type, a theoretical concept which avoided the problems of descriptive empiricism and could be verified by using the empirical materials established by social science. Thus Schutz argues,

"By this method of constructing and verifying ideal types, the meaning of particular social phenomena can be interpreted layer by layer as the subjectively intended meaning of human acts. In this way, the structure of the social world can be disclosed as a structure of intelligible intentional meanings." 35

And thirdly, Schutz fully agreed with Weber's insistence upon the social sciences' avoidance of value judgements.³⁶

Against this background of agreement the areas of difference assume added significance and clearly indicate the

direction of Schutz's detailed analysis of Weber's work. His critique is based upon the view that Weber had not devoted sufficient attention to the nature of subjective meaning. For Schutz this was the most fundamental problem facing the social sciences, and he comments,

"As Weber left this concept, it was little more than a heading for a number of important problems which he did not examine in detail, even though they were hardly foreign to him. Almost all these problems are closely related to the lived experience of time (or internal time-sense) which can be studied only by the most rigorous philosophical reflection. Only when we have grasped the nature of the internal time consciousness can we attack the complicated structure of the concepts of the human sciences." 37

According to Schutz, Weber's entire programme for interpretive sociology is based upon a range of unexamined assumptions, and one of the reasons for this concerns Weber's preference for the problems of empirical research rather than the development of a secure philosophical foundation for his work. Indeed, according to Schutz, Weber only examines epistemological issues in so far as they are relevant to particular empirical issues. The limitations of Weber's strategy, therefore, are clear:

"He breaks off his analysis of the social world when he arrives at what he assumes to be the basic and irreducible elements of social phenomena. But he is wrong in this assumption. His concept of the meaningful act of the individual - the key idea of interpretive sociology - by no means defines a primitive, as he thinks it does. It is on the contrary, a mere label for a highly complex and ramified area that calls for much further study." 38

In more detail, then, Weber does not distinguish between an action in progress and a completed act, between the meaning of the action to the actor and to an observer; he says little about

the relationship between the actor and the other participants in a social relationship, the role of the interpreter in modifying meaning or the various kinds of directness of one's knowledge of others and for Schutz the weakness of interpretive sociology is to be explained simply by the fact that although Weber recognized the existence of many of these problems he only analyzed them as far as was necessary for his particular empirically orientated interests; ultimately

"He naively took for granted the meaningful phenomena of the social world as a matter of 'intersubjective agreement' in precisely the same way as we all in daily life assume the existence of a lawful external world conforming to the concepts of our understanding." 39

Schutz implies that Weber was misled by the fact that in the natural outlook of everyday life our actions are directly meaningful to ourselves, and we assume that other people's actions are as meaningful to them as they would be to ourselves if we were in their situation and, in addition, that our interpretations of the meaning of their experiences are broadly correct. Moreover, for Schutz this assumption obscures a fundamental issue because the interests of the social scientist are not consistent with the attitude of everyday life: for the sociologist,

"... the context of meaning in which he interprets this world is that of systematizing scrutiny rather than that of living experience. His data ... are the already constituted meanings of active participants in the social world. It is to these already meaningful data that his scientific concepts must ultimately refer." 40

Consequently, as a result of the fact that the purpose of sociology is to study social phenomena and these phenomena are at least partly made up of common sense concepts, Schutz argues that it is not possible for "sociology to abstain from a scientific

examination of these self-evident ideas."⁴¹

(a) The Presuppositions of Schutz's Phenomenological Analysis

Schutz's phenomenological examination of the philosophical assumptions of sociology is centred upon the discovery of the nature of meaning for the actor living within the life-world; and in the initial stages of his analysis he restricts the complexity of the problem by only considering how an experience becomes meaningful to a hypothetically isolated actor.

The key to this problem is the idea of "internal time consciousness", a concept developed both by Bergson and Husserl. Bergson distinguished between living within the stream of ones own experience and living within the world of space and time. In the former, the inner stream of duration, there is "... a continuous coming-to-be and passing-away of heterogeneous qualities",⁴² whereas in the latter, the world of space and time, we experience objects because the heterogenous qualities of raw experience have been "... spatialized, quantified and so made discontinuous".⁴³

Within the stream of consciousness, therefore, I do not reflect upon or consider life, rather I experience at this moment in time. Following Husserl, Schutz argues,

".. I live in my Acts, whose living intentionally carries me over from one Now to the next. But this Now should not be construed as a punctiform instant, as a break in the stream of duration, as a cutting-in-two of the latter. For in order to effect such an artificial division within duration, I should have to get outside the flow itself. From the point of view of being immersed in duration, the "Now" is a phase rather than a point, and therefore the different phases melt into one another along a continuum. The simple experience of living in the flow of duration goes forward in a uni-directional, irreversible movement, proceeding from manifold to manifold in a constant

running-off process. Each phase of experience melts into the next without any sharp boundaries as it is being lived through; but each phase is distinct in its thusness, or quality, from the next insofar as it is held in the gaze of attention." 44

In contrast to living within the stream of consciousness, Schutz suggests that whenever I attempt to reflect upon

"... my living experience, I am no longer taking up my position within the stream of pure duration, I am no longer simply living within that flow. The experiences are apprehended, distinguished, brought into relief, marked out from one another; the experiences which were constituted as phases within the flow of duration now become objects of attention as constituted experiences." 45

Consequently our intellectual faculties relate to the world of space, time and finite objects. On this basis Schutz argues that the act of reflection presupposes an already completed act, and this, of course, has major implications for the relationship between experience and meaningfulness. According to Schutz, experience in itself does not contain, or exhibit meaning rather the source of meaningfulness is to be found in the way in which the person regards their experiences, in other words, how they reflect upon them.

Meaning, therefore, is constituted by the attitude of the person to that part of the stream of consciousness which has already passed by.⁴⁶ This does not result in every experience becoming meaningful to the person because there is no pragmatic reason for reflecting upon each and every one of them. The mere fact of living through, or experiencing, does not by itself confer meaning; what is crucial, however, is the act of reflection based upon a decision to single out an experience or set of experiences from the total of lived experiences - and it is this decision which confers meaning.⁴⁷

Schutz develops the sociological implications of his analysis of the constitution of meaning in relation to the concepts of action and behaviour. For him the relationship between meaningful experience, action and behaviour takes this form: an actor lives within a stream of consciousness; a reflective glance identifies a particular lived experience and for this reason it becomes meaningful; if in addition there is an intentional reflection upon the prior spontaneous activity which produced the experience, then, it becomes meaningful behaviour;⁴⁸ and finally if the reflective glance goes further back to consider the project of the activity, in other words, the orientation to the future, "... the execution of a projected act ..." ⁴⁹, then, it constitutes meaningful action.⁵⁰ Hence for Schutz, turning attention to behaviour and to action are merely forms of the more general process of reflecting upon experience.

Schutz's conceptualization of action in terms of a future project has important implications for his use of the term motive which he considers to be ambiguous in everyday usage as a result of the conflation of two distinct types of motive, namely, the in-order-to and the because motive. The in-order-to motive refers to the future and is the object or purpose which is to be realised by the action.

"Interpreting the actors 'motive' as his expectations, we can say that the motivational context is by definition the meaning context within which a particular action stands in virtue of its status as the project of an act for a given actor. In other words, the act thus projected in the future perfect tense and in terms of which the action receives its orientation is the 'in-order-to motive' for the actor."⁵¹

In contrast the because motive refers to the past and "... explains the project in terms of the actor's past experiences."⁵² Thus the action is determined by the project which includes the in-order-to motive. The project is the intended act imagined as already accomplished whereas the in-order-to motive is the future state of affairs to be brought about by the projected action. Finally, the project as a whole is determined by the because motive, "... a lived experience temporally prior to the project...."⁵³ For Schutz therefore, whilst the meaning of an action is to be found in its relationship to a project with the result that the meaningfulness of the in-order-to motive is integral to the action itself, the because motive is not necessarily meaningful, indeed it only becomes so if the actor decides to reflect upon the relevant past for the pragmatic purpose of "self-explication".⁵⁴

In addition, Schutz argues that for each person the in-order-to and because motives are organized in complex subjective systems which provide coherence and continuity for their actions and do not, therefore, suddenly appear in the actor's consciousness on a random basis. For example, the system of in-order-to motives consists of vague plans and projects, hopes and values, which are refined into more specific plans for the year, month, day as well as the time before lunch, the next five minutes and so on. This is entirely consistent with a view of human beings based upon the assumption of free will and the potential for rational choice and action.⁵⁵

Having established certain basic propositions with regard to the nature of meaning constitution, the distinction between

action and behaviour and the clarification of two kinds of motive in the context of an analysis of an isolated individual, Schutz then considers the more complex situation of interaction in which the problem arises: How is it possible to interpret someone else's complex of meaning, someone else's in-order-to motives?

When we say that we understand another person's meaning and action, strictly speaking, we imply that we understand what is really going on inside the other person's head, yet the only evidence for such an understanding is the person's conversation, demeanour and bodily movements, in other words, purely external manifestations which indicate but do not necessarily reveal - even in a face to face situation - the other's subjective meaning.

Schutz indicates the complexity of the problem in this way:

the assumption

"... that I can observe the subjective experience of another person precisely as he does is absurd. For it presupposes that I myself have lived through all the conscious states and intentional Acts wherein this experience has been constituted my stream of consciousness would have to coincide with the other person's, which is the same as saying that I should have to be the other person." 56

This raises, for Schutz, the issue of determining a criterion by which we might distinguish between objective and subjective meaning. As a member of the social world I can observe and interpret other people's activities which present themselves to me as an indication of their consciousness, but the interpretation of such phenomena in effect gives them an objective meaning, and this is possible only by abstracting from the constituting process of a person's consciousness. The result is the formulation of objective meaning contexts for action which are of an anonymous

and standardized character in relation to the particular consciousnesses upon which they are based. In contrast, for Schutz, subjective meaning in the social world always refers to the constituting process in the consciousness of the person who produced the meaningful object. For this reason the world of subjective meaning is never anonymous, it depends upon and exists solely within the intentionality of the person's consciousness. Hence Schutz tells us that the intended meaning of another person "... remains a limiting concept even under optimum conditions of interpretation".⁵⁷

Schutz's definition of the two kinds of meaning are as follows:

"We speak ... of the subjective meaning of the product if we have in view the meaning-context within which the product stands or stood in the mind of the producer. To know the subjective meaning of the product means that we are able to run over in our own minds ... the Acts which constituted the experience of the producer".⁵⁸

In order to be able to refer to subjective meaning it is necessary, therefore, to be able to

"... keep in view the other person's lived experiences as they are occurring; we observe them being constituted step by step. For us, the other person's products are indications of those lived experiences. The lived experiences stand for him, in turn, within a meaning context. We know this by particular evidence, and we can in an act of genuine understanding be aware of the constituting process in his mind".⁵⁹

However, for the observer - whether in everyday life or for purposes of sociological inquiry - such a detailed and comprehensive accessibility of the person being observed is not usually available, with the result that concepts representing objective meanings are all that are possible. Schutz continues,

"Objective meaning ... we can predicate only of the product as such, that is of the already constituted meaning-context of the thing produced, whose actual production we meanwhile disregard". 60

Hence, in the formulation of an objective meaning context, the observer is unable to incorporate the detailed process of the creation of the product for the producer.

"Objective meaning therefore consists only in a meaning context within the mind of the interpreter, whereas subjective meaning refers beyond it to a meaning-context in the mind of the producer. 61

The objective meaning of such a product is universal, invariant and applicable to a very wide range of situations, as well as being abstract in relation to "... every subjective flow of experience and every subjective meaning-context that could exist in such a flow".⁶² This objectification of the meaning of a product results in its independence from the situation in which it developed and the consciousness of the actor who created it. Hence Schutz concludes,

"Objective meaning is merely the interpreter's ordering of his experiences of a product into the total context of his experience". 63

This formulation serves to reinforce the basic assumption of Schutz's approach that the attempt to interpret subjective meaning necessarily takes the activities of a particular person as its immediate point of reference, whereas, of course, concepts representing objective meaning presuppose a generalized and abstracted category of typical actors.

This completes our initial examination of the basic themes and categories used by Schutz in his analysis of the way in which meaning is constituted in the natural attitude of everyday life. In

the next section, utilizing the insights of this phenomenological analysis, we follow Schutz's identification of the problems and ambiguities implicit in Weber's approach.

(b) Critique of Weber's Categories of Interpretive Sociology

Two aspects of this critique may conveniently be distinguished; first, what is involved in Weber's idea of an actor attaching a meaning to behaviour; and, secondly, the problem of how the other self is meaningful to ego.

Action, Meaning and Behaviour

In the context of Schutz's distinction between meaningful experience, behaviour and action in terms of reflection upon the stream of consciousness, the activity which produced the experience and the future orientation of the project respectively - Weber's distinction between behaviour and action on the basis of the meaningless or meaningful nature of the conduct in question, appears imprecise. Moreover, he argues that Weber's concept of action was based upon the example of rational conduct oriented to a particular end and this explains the marginal nature of affectual and traditional action in Weber's inquiries, because such types of action specifically lack the level of conscious deliberation associated with a clear and precise purposive orientation,⁶⁴

A further problem is inherent in Weber's classification of the four types of action because it is based upon an assumed identity between the meaning of an action and its motive, but from Schutz's point of view, motives can be of two kinds, one with

a prospective reference and the other with a retrospective reference, and the meaning of an action is identified only with the in-order-to motive. Consequently Schutz argues that Weber had failed to distinguish between the meaning of an action and the extent to which the meaning is accessible to an observer; after all, the meaningfulness of one's experiences is related to the decision to reflect upon them.

"When I isolate them from the flux of experience and consider them attentively, I ... find them to be meaningful in the sense that I am able to find in them an underlying meaning. It is therefore wrong to use the criterion of meaningfulness in order to distinguish action from merely reactive behaviour if meaningfulness is thought of in the usual broad sense. Even my traditional or affectual behaviour has some kind of meaning ... it is useless to say that what distinguishes action from behaviour is that the former is subjectively meaningful and the latter is meaningless. On the contrary, each is meaningful in its own way." 65

The real issue for Schutz is that action is distinguished from behaviour by the fact that it represents the realization of a projected act, the bringing about of an action which is imagined as already completed, in other words, "the meaning of any action is its corresponding projected act."⁶⁶

In addition Schutz is unhappy with Weber's definition of social action as that form of conduct to which the actor "attaches" a subjective meaning. According to Schutz, as a result of a lack of clarity in Weber's concept of action, this formulation fails to take into account the differences in meaningfulness of an action in progress and a completed act. Hence it is necessary to distinguish between the action of the person and the acts they perform.

"An act is therefore always something enacted and can be considered independently of the acting subject and his experiences. Every act presupposes an action, but this by no means implies that reference to the action must enter into discussion of the act. In contrast to the act, the action is subject bound. Whereas the act is, so to speak, performed anonymously, the action is a series of experience being formed in the concrete and individual consciousness of some actor..." 67

In other words, the meaning of the action to the actor lies purely within the actor's stream of consciousness and Weber's failure to clearly distinguish, on the one hand, between a projected and completed act, and on the other hand, between the meaning of an action and its motive on the basis of an examination of ... "the formulation and structure of those lived experiences which give meaning to an action."⁶⁸ represents, according to Schutz, a serious limitation to his programme for sociology.

The Meaningfulness of Another Self to Ego

According to Schutz, Weber does not consider in any detail how another self is meaningful to ego, in fact, in his interpretation of other peoples' conduct the meaningful existence of the other self is largely presupposed. Yet, Schutz argues, there is no necessary symmetry between the meaning of an act to an actor and the meaning attributed to the act by an observer on the basis of perceptions of the actor's external behaviour; Schutz continues,

"Were another person's lived experiences as accessible to me as my own... then his experience, that is, the intended meaning of his behaviour, would be directly evident to me as I observed it. Even more, his behaviour could have for me only the meaning he subjectively attached to it; that it could have another meaning, an objective one, is obviously absurd." 69

For Schutz the problematic nature of Weber's basic categories is clearly revealed by his use of the concept of intended meaning.

"First, he is referring to the subjective meaning which the action has for the actor. According to him, this subjective meaning can be understood 'observationally', that is, it can be grasped by direct observation. But second, he is referring to the broader framework of meaning in which an action 'thus interpreted' (i.e., interpreted according to its subjective meaning) belongs. It is this broader context of meaning which is uncovered by motivational or clarifying understanding." 70

We observe someone's conduct and then place it within a wider context of meaning by giving the conduct the name associated with the particular kind of typical act. But, for Schutz, such observation has clear limitations:

"... this context of meaning need not, in fact cannot, be identical with the context of meaning in the mind of the actor himself." 71

This provides the justification for Schutz's distinction between the objective and subjective contexts of meaning: the objective context represents an interpretation of the other person's act which is based purely upon the observer's judgement that the actor had a particular intended meaning and it is a context of meaning which is inevitably different to the one in the mind of the actor. Consequently Schutz argues that motivational understanding cannot be achieved purely upon the basis of observation as, for

instance, in the examples given by Weber of understanding the acts of wood chopping and mathematical calculation.⁷² In such cases additional information is required of the actor's past activities and future hopes before a person's bodily behaviour can be placed within the broader context of meaning known as motive.⁷³

Schutz identifies a similar lack of clarity in Weber's use of the concept of motive, a usage which is not based upon an explicit recognition of the differences between past and future grounds of motive - between in-order-to and because motives - and leads Weber to assume that the intended meaning of an action is the same as its motive.⁷⁴

Looked at from the point of view of the observer Weber's concept of motivational understanding presents further difficulties because there can be no knowledge of motive unless the meaning of the action for the actor is clear and yet such knowledge remains with the actor.

"The observer lacks the self-evident starting point which is available to the actor. All he can do is start out with the objective meaning of the act as he sees it, treating this objective meaning as if it were without question the intended meaning of the actor. Weber sees this clearly enough when he says that motivational understanding must search for the context of meaning which is from our point of view appropriate (or which makes sense to us), into which the action, interpreted according to the intended meaning of the actor, fits. However, this so-called 'intended' meaning cannot give us any more information in motivational than in observational understanding. In neither case do we advance a step beyond the interpretation of objective meaning. Indeed, Weber's distinction between observational and motivational understanding is arbitrary and without any logical basis in his own theory. Both types of understanding start out from an objective meaning-context. The understanding of subjective meaning has no place in either." ⁷⁵

However, Schutz recognises some point in Weber's distinction between observational and motivational understanding. In everyday-life we experience other people's actions and regard them as an indication of their streams of consciousness, and this day-to-day, on-going, experiencing of others corresponds to Weber's concept of observational understanding. Whereas motivational understanding is not restricted to the direct experience of the world of contemporaries treating as its object accomplished acts, and it is this form of interpretive understanding which is characteristic of sociology.⁷⁶

Schutz's critique of Weber's interpretive concepts is, of course, based upon his distinction between the categories of objective and subjective meaning, which he clarifies by means of the following example: an actor (A) is observed by a friend (F) and a sociologist (S), and A's action makes sense to both F and S. For A the action has the intended meaning M1, to F who interprets the action on the basis of experience, it has the meaning M2, and to S who interprets the action through ideal type concepts, it has the meaning M3. Schutz continues,

"Whereas in Weber's terminology M1 would be the subjective or intended meaning which A attributed to his own act, M2 and M3 would constitute the objective meaning of this act. But after all, M2 is only the objective meaning relative to F, and M3 is only the objective meaning relative to S. Therefore to call M2 and M3 objective meaning-contents is merely to say that they are different from M1." 77

For Schutz this highlights the difficulty which lies in Weber's use of the concept motive to refer both to the subjective context of meaning for the actor and the observer's assumption about the meaning of the action for the actor.⁷⁸ In contrast,

Schutz argues, there is an irreconcilable gulf between the realm of subjective meaning, representing the "constituting processes of a meaning-endowing consciousness" and the world of objective meaning which is anonymous, abstract and invariant "with respect to every consciousness which has given it meaning through its own intentionality". Hence the possibility of an observer gaining knowledge of an actor's intended (or subjective) meaning remains elusive. Afterall, in everyday life the search for such knowledge is pursued only to the point necessary for our pragmatic interests and this is greatly facilitated if, as in the case of rational action, the conduct can be readily subsumed under an objective content of meaning.⁷⁹

The final issue to be dealt with in this section concerns the problem which arises in everyday life, and is also of particular relevance for sociological understanding, concerning the unity of an action. Frequently, for purposes of understanding, an action may be divided by the observer into goals and means on the basis of external observation, yet this results inevitably in an arbitrary decision as to where the action begins and ends.

Schutz comments

"Of what use is it to talk about the intended meaning of an action if one ignores that phase of the action which is relevant to the actor and substitutes for it as the interpretation an arbitrarily chosen segment of the observed performance - 'the facts'?" 80

In reality, therefore, the unity of an action remains subjective; the unity is derived from the project which the act will realize and it is on this point, Schutz suggests, that Weber's view of actors attaching a meaning to their action is without foundation,⁸¹

II THE SOCIAL WORLD AND THE NATURE OF SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

(a) Schutz: The Structure of the Social World

Having clarified these elementary features of Schutz's analysis of intersubjective understanding it is now possible to consider in more detail the different kinds of social relationship which affect the sort of interpretation which is possible. Some relationships are of a face to face nature involving those people Schutz calls consociates, whereas in other relationships our knowledge of the other person is indirect, we may not, be able to observe them, or not at the moments in question - these people are our contemporaries. In addition, he refers to predecessors, those people who have lived at earlier times in history, and successors, those who will live in the future, but it is unnecessary to consider these last two categories in detail because the sociologically relevant issues emerge in relation to the analysis of situations involving consociates and contemporaries.⁸²

The world of consociates is the realm of directly experienced social reality and for Schutz it is a relationship which presents certain unique features:

"In the living intentionality of the direct social relationship, the two partners are face to face, their streams of consciousness are synchronized and geared into each other, each immediately affects the other and the in-order-to motive of the one becomes the because motive of the other, the two motives complementing and validating each other as objects of reciprocal attention".⁸³

In the direct immediacy of a face to face situation the two participants may achieve a simultaneity of their respective streams of consciousness.⁸⁴ Discussing the example of two people watching the same event - a bird in flight - at the same moment in time,

Schutz makes the point that even in such a favourable circumstance I cannot say that my lived experiences are the same as yours even though there may have been temporal co-ordination of my experiences with yours.

Often the most that can be concluded is

"... a mere general correspondence between my perceived 'bird-in-flight' and your experiences. I make no pretense to any knowledge of the content of your subjective experiences or of the particular way in which they were structured. It is enough for me to know that you are a fellow human being who was watching the same thing that I was. And if you have in a similar way co-ordinated my experiences with yours, then we can both say that we have seen a bird in flight". 85

Within the face-to-face we-relationship each participant attempts to interpret the other's subjective contexts of meaning by starting with the words spoken and then proceeding to ask how the other person came to use these words. In this situation, the objective meaning of what is said - the general meaning of the words as they are typically spoken - is only a starting point for the understanding of the subjective meaning in the mind of the speaker.

"Within this picture I must interpret and construct your intentional Acts as you choose your words. To the extent that you and I can mutually experience this simultaneity, growing older together for a time, to the extent that we can live in it together, to that extent we can live in each other's subjective contexts of meaning". 86

But it is only as a result of the particular features of the face to face relationship that such interpretation may be possible, for example:

"... my biography is full of continuous lived experiences of you grasped within the We-relationship; meanwhile, you are experiencing me in the same way, and I am aware of the fact". 87

However the realization of the correct interpretation of another's subjective meaning forever remains problematic because of the potential for impression management as well as sheer ambiguity in interaction, a problem compounded by the fact that the further one goes from a we-relationship the less reliable our motivational understanding becomes.

Another type of social relationship which is of particular significance for sociology involves the indirect observation of another's action - a situation in which the actor is unaware of being observed. In this case the relationship is one-sided and lacks the reciprocal features so important to a face to face We-relationship, and the result is an inevitable reduction in the reliability of our motivational understanding. Allowing for the additional complications involved in the attempt to interpret the subjective meaning of actors involved in a social relationship in comparison with the interpretation of activities of one person, for Schutz the rule remains unchanged: the less direct the observation the more unreliable the interpretation, which has to be based increasingly upon my recollection of my own actions in similar situations, my knowledge of the actor's typical in-order-to and because motives, or the use of means-end analysis to deduce in-order-to motives from the overt actions.⁸⁸

Whilst this constitutes a major limitation for interpretive sociology it certainly does not result in the complete inaccessibility or meaninglessness of another's lived experiences to the observer, indeed Schutz argues strongly that the discipline remains possible as long as it is recognised that

"... the meaning I give to your experiences cannot be precisely the same as the meaning you give to them when you proceed to interpret them". 89

Sociology therefore remains committed to the attempt to interpret the other person's intended meaning and we do this by imagining how we might carry out the particular action. We project the other person's goal as if it were our own and imagine ourselves carrying it out.⁹⁰ Alternatively we may remember how we performed a similar action ourselves, in other words, we attempt to put ourselves in the place of the actor and identify our lived experience with theirs. There is, of course, an obvious limitation in this procedure because we are reading our own lived experiences into another's mind and in so doing merely discovering our own experience. Indeed, given that the intended meaning of an action is always subjective and inaccessible to the observer, we know that the other person's subjective experiences of their actions are in principle different from our imagined picture of what we would do in the same circumstances.⁹¹

For Schutz the transition from the realm of direct to indirect observation which is allied to the move from the world of consociates to contemporaries is crucial to the structure of the social world. The contemporary is someone who is not experienced directly and whose subjective meaning context can only be known - to the extent that it can be known by the observer at all - in terms of "... general types of subjective experience".⁹² In effect, therefore, the attempt to formulate the subjective meaning context of the actor or actors is replaced by the recognition that they can only be represented by an objective meaning context.

According to Schutz such a representation

"... has within it no intrinsic reference to persons nor to the subjective matrix within which the experiences in question were constituted. However, it is due to this very abstraction from subjective context of meaning that they exhibit the property which we have called their 'again and again' character. They are treated as typical conscious experiences of 'someone' and, as such, as basically homogeneous and repeatable. The unity of the contemporary is not constituted originally in his own stream of consciousness. Rather, the contemporary's unity is constituted in my own stream of consciousness". 93

This unity is based upon a synthesis of my experience of one or more individuals or typical people. The more that the contemporary is synthesized from a variety of objective meaning contexts, the more that the concept is abstract and anonymous in relation to particular people, and this is the basis for the categorization of such concepts as ideal types. There is no way in which the unique and unrepeatable lived experiences of specific actors can be combined into a more inclusive concept.

"The typical and only the typical is homogeneous, and it is always so. In the typifying synthesis of recognition I perform an act of anonymization in which I abstract the lived experience from its setting within the stream of consciousness and thereby render it impersonal". 94

Schutz advocates the creation of two different forms of ideal type of human action, the personal and the course of action types. The former represents an actor expressing himself in a particular way, the latter consists of the expressive process itself.

Beginning with the construction of a course of action type one proceeds to formulate the typical activities associated with a particular occupation. This construct is therefore an objective context of meaning and the next step is to imagine a subjective context of meaning, a personal ideal type representing the consciousness

of, for example, a postal clerk which corresponds to the course of action type. The essential point to note about this procedure is that the personal ideal type is derived from and purely dependent upon the course of action type.⁹⁵ According to Schutz the observer interprets an action

"... within an objective context of meaning in the sense that the same motive is assigned to any act that repeatedly achieves the same end through the same means. This motive is postulated as constant for the act regardless of who performs the act or what his subjective experiences are at the time. For a personal ideal type, therefore, there is one and only one typical motive for a typical act ... ideal-typical understanding, then, characteristically deduces the in-order-to and because-motives of a manifest act by identifying the constantly achieved goal of that act. Since the act is by definition both repeatable and typical, so is the in-order-to-motive. The next step is to postulate an agent behind the action, a person who ... typically intends this typical act - in short, a personal ideal type". 96

However, the context in which such a construct is formulated inevitably results in a very simplified content for the inferred subjective processes because the typical act is preordained to succeed, there is no possibility of choice between alternative projects, and no doubt that the typical act will be performed. The motive of the ideal-typical actor is always clear and precise; afterall, as Schutz remarks,

"... the in-order-to motive of the action is the completed act on whose definition the whole typification is based". 97

By this process it is possible to hypothesize an individual person whose subjective meaning context is identical to the objective meaning context of a typical action. However, the limitations of this procedure must never be overlooked: the

unity and coherence of the concept of the other person's act is derived from the interests, problems and perspectives of the observer,⁹⁸ consequently,

"... the personal ideal type is itself always determined by the interpreter's point of view. It is a function of the very question it seeks to answer. It is dependent upon the objective context of meaning, which it merely translates into subjective terms and then personifies". 99

However, the personal ideal type does not represent a real, living, person: one cannot discover from the construct how a person may act. The ideal type

"... 'lives' in a never-never temporal dimension that no-one could ever experience. It lives through just the minimum number of subjective experiences to qualify it as the author of the given act. To be sure, it must be pictured as 'free'; otherwise it could hardly bestow 'its own' meaning to the course of action in question. However, its freedom is only apparent, because the original act which the social scientist or the common sense observer takes as his datum already has ready made and unambiguous in-order-to and because motives built into it by definition ... anything the social scientist permits his ideal type to report about its actions is only a prophecy after the event." 100

Inevitably, the role of the observer in the construction of such ideal types is all-important. These constructions are limited by the observer's knowledge at that moment in time, a knowledge which is constantly subject to modification and change in direct relationship to the person's on-going experience of the social world.¹⁰¹ Consequently the ideal types themselves are constantly subject to revision and modification as a result of the changes to the observer's knowledge of the social world. According to Schutz,

"When such ideal types are being constructed, the selection of their fixed and essential elements depends upon the point of view of the observer at the moment of interpretation. It depends upon his stock of knowledge at hand and upon the modifications of his attention to his knowledge of the world in general and the social world in particular." 102

In everyday life we perform a great many actions based upon indirect relationships with contemporaries and our actions presuppose certain expectations about their conduct. What is of particular significance here is the fact that our comprehension of these contemporaries is not based upon them as real living people but as ideal types. In the case of face-to-face relationships the direct experience of each other means that faulty inferences about the other's subjective meaning can be reduced to a minimum, whereas in the case of the indirect relationships with our contemporaries there is the real danger that, in the interpretation of the conduct of another,

"... the observer will naively substitute his own ideal types for those in the minds of his subject ... the observer (may) be using the wrong ideal type to understand his subject's behaviour, but he may never discover his error because he never confronts his subject as a real person. Social observation thus tends to develop into second-order ideal-typical construction: the observed actor is himself an ideal type of the first order, and the presumed ideal type in terms of which the actor understands his partner is an ideal type of the second order. Both of these are logical constructions of the observer and are determined by his point of view". 103

For Schutz, this raises major implications for interpretive sociology which is inevitably dependent upon indirect observation of social actors. The construction of personal ideal types must be consistent with the types formulated of the actors by their partners in the interaction, hence the principle of meaning -

adequacy:

"... given a social relationship between contemporaries, the personal ideal types of the partners and their typical conscious experiences must be congruent with one another and compatible with the ideal-typical relationship itself". 104

In other words, social reality is pregiven to the social scientist, it is not directly experienced. In the attempt to clarify as much as possible of the social world in which people live sociology cannot escape the limitations of the fact that in the everyday world knowledge of one's contemporaries is only possible in terms of ideal types. Yet the construction of ideal types is dependent upon the knowledge and purposes of the observer and the interpretive schemes used by the observer to understand his contemporaries are inevitably different to those of the sociologist.

(b) The Implications for Sociology

Before beginning to consider the problematic features which Schutz identified in the sociological attempt to comprehend other peoples' actions, it is both possible and desirable to broaden our scheme of reference to include Schutz's later formulations. These essays which were written whilst he was living in the U.S.A. are not only fully consistent with his earlier¹⁰⁵ phenomenological analyses of the social world, but are also frequently addressed to the issue of the procedures to be used in sociology, and are therefore, most relevant to the present discussion. A brief overview of the main features of Schutz's work will provide an appropriate framework for the examination of the implications of his ideas for the practice of sociology.

Following Weber's identification of the broad outlines of interpretive sociology, Schutz naturally emphasizes the peculiarly meaningful nature of social phenomena and that, in contrast to the methods used by the natural sciences to comprehend their subject matters, the social sciences seek to understand social phenomena in terms of their location ... "within the scheme of human motives".¹⁰⁶ Stated more formally, the social sciences depend upon two unique assumptions: first, the postulate of subjective interpretation, which means

"... that we always can - and for certain purposes must - refer to the activities of the subjects within the social world and their interpretation by the actors in terms of systems of projects, available means, motives, relevances, and so on." 107

Second, the postulate of adequacy - the belief that

"Each term used in a scientific system referring to human action must be so constructed that a human act performed within the life world by an individual actor in the way indicated by the typical construction would be reasonable and understandable for the actor himself as well as for his fellow-men." 108

Between them these two axioms provide the guidelines for Schutz's more methodologically oriented analyses of the ways in which people organize their experiences in the everyday world.¹⁰⁹ Whilst the first proposition is consistent with Weber's approach, the second is specifically derived from Schutz's phenomenological study of action and meaning with its different levels which correspond to various human purposes - and it is this which has shaped his influence upon sociology.

In particular, Schutz's emphasis upon the common-sense world has been decisive. According to Schutz, it has been the experience of science that advances in knowledge have been closely

associated with the transformation of common-sense thinking about the world into specifically scientific conceptualization. However this raises a problem for social science because the social world

"... has a particular meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, thinking and acting therein. They have preselected and preinterpreted this world by a series of common-sense constructs of the reality of daily life, and it is these thought objects which determine their behaviour, define the goal of their action, the means available for attaining them - in brief, which help them to find their bearings within their natural and socio-cultural environment and to come to terms with it." 110

Unlike the natural sciences, therefore, which can readily dispense with common-sense thinking about the objects of their investigations and progress to a more precise and systematic terminology, the social sciences must follow a different procedure.

"The thought objects constructed by the social scientist in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men living their daily life. Thus the constructs of the social sciences are, so to speak, constructs of the second degree, that is constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene, whose behaviour the social scientist has to observe and to explain in accordance with the procedural rules of his science." 111

Moreover, within the everyday world we live confident of the realness, both for ourselves and for others, of the surrounding social phenomena. In practice we take for granted the intersubjective character of everyday life. However this belief is, in fact, dependent upon two implicit assumptions; first, the interchangeability of stand points (although I am here and you are there, a social object will have the same meaning for both of us); and, secondly, the congruency of each person's system of relevance - in other words, the assumption that our specific biographical circumstances which have given rise to differences

in personal perspectives can be safely ignored for the pragmatic purpose at hand. Hence the everyday world which people share and take for granted is based upon the "... general thesis of reciprocal perspectives",¹¹² and this facilitates a level of understanding which is sufficient for communication and interaction in daily life. But what may be unproblematic within the natural attitude of everyday life cannot be safely taken for granted by the sociologist who recognizes that people have a variety of purposes and systems of relevance, a circumstance which results in the same object having different meanings for different people.

Another crucial feature of the social world is, for Schutz, the dependence of our knowledge of others upon the process of typification. In daily life an actor's knowledge of a contemporary is inevitably fragmentary, which means it is based upon anonymous situations lacking face-to-face contact and, therefore, the means for checking the reliability of such interpretations. Even in the case of knowledge of consociates there are considerable variations in the levels of intimacy and directness of the relationship with the result that the subjective meaning of the other remains essentially private.¹¹³ However, in the common-sense world we are not beset by such doubts and queries concerning the meaning of other peoples' actions - it is sufficient to reduce their acts to typical motives for us to understand them, irrespective of whether they are, to use Schutz's examples, foreign statesmen or mail men. Indeed, he argues, to achieve this level of understanding

"... it is not even necessary to reduce human acts to a more or less well known individual actor. To understand them it is sufficient to find typical motives of typical actors which explain the act as a typical one arising out of a typical situation. There is a certain conformity in the acts and motives of priests, soldiers, servants, farmers everywhere and at every time. Moreover there are acts of such a general type that it is sufficient to reduce them to 'somebody's' typical motives in order to make them understandable." 114

The sociologist with a different system of relevances and set of purposes cannot afford to adopt the attitude of everyday life towards the phenomena which are the object of scientific investigation, especially when it is remembered that the sociologist deals almost exclusively with the anonymous and indirect world of contemporaries and predecessors, and experiences these categories of action in a relationship which has a large potential for misunderstanding.¹¹⁵ In everyday life we can only know contemporaries through the process of typification¹¹⁶ but they merely constitute part of our social world which is structured, probably more importantly, in terms of consociates.

We thus arrive at what is for Schutz the key problem facing the social sciences in general and sociology in particular, namely, if subjective meaning is essentially private and personal, how is it possible to formulate objective scientific knowledge of the meaning structures developed in everyday life?¹¹⁷ The solution lies in the procedure of typification whereby science replaces the thought objects of common-sense with new concepts; to be more precise the first order constructs which refer to unique events are replaced with a model of a specific part of the social world "... within which merely those typified events occur that are relevant to the scientist's particular problem".¹¹⁸

Schutz is therefore unable to overcome the subjective-objective antithesis, but this is only to be expected in view of the conceptual rigidity with which he separated the subjective meaning context from the objective meaning context in his phenomenological analysis of the constitution of meaning in the social world. Instead, he acknowledges that the data of the social sciences are different to the subjective meaning contexts we experience in everyday life. The social sciences are only concerned with the external features of action; consequently they are incapable of dealing with intended meanings, even in the most favourable circumstances of the action of an individual person, and it is for this reason that they are able to formulate objective meaning contexts which comprehend "... the typical subjective processes of personal ideal types".¹¹⁹ The justification for the procedure of typification lies in the fact that "... the interpretation of any human act by the social scientist might be the same as that by the actor or his partner".¹²⁰

The typification of course of action patterns is based upon the sociologist's observation and experience of social reality which equally facilitates the construction of models of ideal actors who have the appropriate consciousness for the action. Developing his views on the role of the sociologist in the construction of these types, Schutz continues,

"... it is a consciousness restricted so as to contain nothing but the elements relevant to the performing of the course-of-action patterns observed. He thus ascribes to this fictitious consciousness a set of typical notions, purposes, goals, which are assumed to be invariant in the specious consciousness of the imaginary actor model. This homunculus or puppet is supposed to be interrelated in interaction patterns to other homunculi or puppets constructed in a similar

way. Amongst these homunculi with which the social scientist populates his model of the social world of everyday life, sets of motives, goals, roles - in general, systems of relevances - are distributed in such a way as the scientific problems under scrutiny require." 121

These concepts are based upon the generalization and formalization of this fixed and invariant material and it is for this reason that they are "universally valid". According to Schutz,

"Such ideal types do not refer to any individual or spatio-temporal collection of individuals. They are statements about anyone's action, about action or behaviour considered as occurring in complete anonymity and without any specification of time and place. They are precisely for that reason lacking in concreteness." 122

Hence the theoretical concepts of economics are

"... a perfect example of an objective meaning-complex about subjective meaning-complexes, in other words, of an objective meaning-configuration stipulating the typical and invariant subjective experiences of anyone who acts within an economic framework." 123

It is important to clarify at this point that rational ideal types are preferred in interpretive sociology because they clearly state the end and the means of the action, are based upon a fixed in-order-to motive, and the entire construct is formulated so that the greatest degree of adequacy on the level of meaning can be achieved.¹²⁴ According to Schutz, although the rational types represent an objective context of meaning, in those cases where they have been formulated to represent very general situations they have the advantage of corresponding to subjective meaning contexts,¹²⁵ and by restricting the consciousness of the homunculi to a purely rational content of motives, relevances and so on, it is

possible, by imagining changes within which the model is to operate, to predict changes in the action to meet new circumstances.¹²⁶

Given Schutz's emphasis upon the importance of each person's system of relevances in the interpretation of the social world it is not surprising that he devotes a good deal of attention to the problem of eliminating the social scientist's personal idiosyncracies in order to maintain general standards of scientific practice. According to Schutz the scientific role can be assumed because the social scientist is not part of the observed situation and merely has a theoretical interest in it.¹²⁷ Also, the decision to pursue such an interest means that the scientist's personal biographical situation and corresponding system of relevances have been replaced by a scientific situation in which the solution of a problem :

"is determined by the actual state of the respective science ... in accordance with the procedural rules governing this science, which among other things warrant the control and verification of the solution offered. The scientific problem, once established, alone determines what is relevant for the scientist as well as the conceptual frame of reference to be used by him." 128

In other words, the scientific problem under investigation indicates the boundaries of relevance within which concepts must be consistent: raising the problem

"... creates a scheme of reference for the construction of all ideal types which may be utilized as relevant." 129

Indeed, Schutz argues that

"This ... is what Max Weber means when he postulates the objectivity of the social sciences, their detachment from value patterns which govern or might govern the behaviour of the actors on the social scene." 130

In this way it is possible to formulate sociological concepts with the following characteristics: first, they are objective in relation to the common-sense value systems of everyday life; second, they are meaningful and understandable to the actor in the everyday world (postulate of adequacy); and third, they are scientifically valid because their construction is consistent with the principles of formal logic and they formulate the conceptual framework "... with the highest degree of clarity and distinctness" (postulate of logical consistency).¹³¹

The most effective way to conclude this section upon the implications of Schutz's approach for sociological practice is by briefly examining his critique of the use of the concept of rational action in the conventionally oriented discipline represented by Parsons.¹³² He drew an analogy between the rationality of an action in everyday life and the cool and calculating attitude of a scientific observer precisely defining the objective and determining the most effective means for its realization. But for Schutz this approach demonstrates a confusion over different levels of the social world, namely the scientific or theoretical as opposed to that of every-day life.¹³³ As we have seen, the basis of the sociologists' understanding of the social world is different from the naive attitudes and interpretations of people in everyday life. Indeed

"The everyday actor has, in principle, only a partial knowledge of the world of his daily life, which he only partially understands. His propositions thus have but a very small range of applicability, namely within the concrete situation. They are not formed with the aim of being valid for the broadest possible sector of the empirical world, a principle common to all scientific thought." ¹³⁴

Consequently the concept of rational action which was developed at the scientific level of thought cannot be applied to the everyday level without fundamentally changing its meaning. In effect what Parsons does is to presuppose that in the action or actions under investigation, all the relevant elements involved have been clearly conceptualized by the actor and that the means chosen to achieve the particular ends are effective in terms of cause-effect relationships¹³⁵ - but, Schutz argues, this information cannot be available to the sociologist. There are two reasons for this: first, the intended meaning of an action remains subjective and, second, the social world is unlike the world of rational scientific models in which

"A total harmony has been pre-established between the determined consciousness bestowed upon the puppet and the preconstituted environment within which it is supposed to act freely, to make rational choices and decisions. This harmony is possible only because both, the puppet and its reduced environment, are the creation of the scientist." 136

According to Schutz, in everyday life we are all the centre of particular social worlds which we accept naively and unquestioningly, and their boundaries are populated by anonymous and typified actors. Our acts, the means to achieve particular projects, are based upon what Schutz calls "cook-book" knowledge of typical sequences which are sufficient for coping with the routines of daily life.¹³⁷ Everyday thought is characterized by what Husserl termed "occasional propositions" and, Schutz argues,

"... it is valid and understandable only relative to the speaker's situation and to their place in his stream of thought." 138

Thus Parsons' analogy between the rational act and the actions of the scientist is quite inappropriate for the study of

everyday life. The constructs of the social scientist cannot be imposed upon the social world without distorting the very reality which is the object of study as can be seen from the way in which the sociologist artificially isolates a specific act from out of the actors social world with its system of plans and projects of varying degrees of importance, in order to determine its rationality. For Schutz, concepts like rationality must be confined to the scientific level where the sociologist can construct theories made up of ideal types of typical actors with consciousness restricted in such a way that they "live" within systems of rational acts.¹³⁹

The implications of Schutz's critique of naturalistically oriented sociology largely centred upon the problems of how the sociologist's second order constructs can be made more receptive to the nature of everyday life and, thereby, more successfully incorporate the first order constructs of actors living their daily lives. By themselves these ideas merely represented a corrective to certain practices in sociology and it was only with the development of some of Schutz's ideas by Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists¹⁴⁰ that a more radical critique of conventional sociology was produced. To some extent this critique was implicit in Schutz's work,¹⁴¹ on the one hand, in the contrast between the natural attitude of everyday life and the quite different system of relevances used by the sociologist and, on the other, the general emphasis in his work upon the way in which an actor's subjective meaning context depends upon a unique system of relevances, biographical experiences and future projects. However, Schutz remained committed to a traditional conception of social science despite the difficulties he had illuminated for interpretive sociology and his rather impracticable

solution to them.¹⁴²

Garfinkel and his followers combined these ideas of Schutz with some themes drawn from linguistic philosophy to develop a view of social life in which meaning, understanding and communication were seen to be extremely problematic. Their inquiries were directed to showing how people involved in particular settings (members) made sense of the world to each other and themselves and focussed upon the practices members used to accomplish a sense of orderliness in their everyday interactions.¹⁴³ For the ethnomethodological perspective the meaning of action within situations was considered to be unique, occasional and specific to that particular setting, a view derived from Schutz's ideas on the subjective context of meaning together with the assumption of the indexical property of language.¹⁴⁴ In the context of this approach, major problems surround the possibility of formulating trans-situational meanings, generalizations and theories because they are based upon what is to the ethnomethodologist an extremely doubtful proposition: namely, that the sociologist's taken for granted assumptions about the social world are shared by those people in everyday life who are the object of the research.¹⁴⁵ Hence, sociological statements far from exhibiting the accuracy and reliability of natural science merely represent the occasional and reflexive expressions of a particular social setting whose members are sociologists. The result of this critique is the denial that social science can be anything more than an example of common-sense reasoning.¹⁴⁶

For our purposes, perhaps the most fundamental assumption of ethnomethodology, and certainly the one from which most of the

criticism of conventional sociology is derived, is that language and interaction has a meaning unique to specific occasions and uses but it is an assumption which, as many critics have noted, remains to be proven rather than illustrated.¹⁴⁷ Equally, there has been little success in formulating a language for reporting social interaction which overcomes the problems, so emphasized by ethnomethodologists, of reliance upon the common sense world and, in view of the fact that these considerations involve issues which go well beyond Schutz's formulations, it is unnecessary to pursue them further.

NOTES

1. See, for example, C.G. Hempel, Aspects of Scientific Explanation, (New York: Free Press, 1965), and E. Nagel, The Structure of Science, (London: Routledge, 1961).
2. For a level of optimism which remained unfulfilled, see Parsons, "The Prospects of Sociological Theory", op.cit.
3. E.g., B.F. Skinner, Science and Human Behaviour, (New York: MacMillan, 1953).
4. P. Berger and T. Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality, (London: Allen Lane, 1967).
5. Garfinkel, op.cit.; Circourel, op.cit., and Cognitive Sociology, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973); Garfinkel and Sacks, "On Formal Structures of Practical Actions", in McKinney and Tiryakian (Eds.), Theoretical Sociology, op.cit.
6. H.P. Rickman, Meaning in History: Wilhelm Dilthey's Thoughts on History and Society, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961).
7. For a general introduction, see Bauman, op.cit.
8. W. Windelband, History of Philosophy, (New York: MacMillan, 1901).
9. H. Rickert, Science and History, (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1962).
10. Particularly the researches in the series "The Economic Ethics of the World Religions", see the following chapter for details.
11. H. Bergson, Time and Free Will, (New York: MacMillan, 1910).
12. E. Husserl, The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).
13. Alfred Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, (Evanston: North Western University Press, 1967). The original German edition was published in 1932.
14. After moving to the U.S.A., Schutz phrased much of his work in terms of the perspectives of the philosopher William James, but this did not involve any fundamental changes in his approach. See Natanson "Foreword", in Grathoff (Ed). The Theory of Social Action, op.cit., xiii-xiv.
15. Schutz, op.cit., 13.

16. R.A. Gorman, The Dual Vision, (London: Routledge, 1977); R. Bierstadt, "The Common-Sense World of Alfred Schutz", Social Research, 26 (1959); G. Gummer, "A Critical Examination of Phenomenological Sociology", Sociological Analysis: A Discussion Journal 3, (1973).
17. Filmer et.al., New Directions in Sociological Theory, op.cit., Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, op.cit.; A. Gurwitsch, "The Common-Sense World as Social Reality - A Discourse on Alfred Schutz", Social Research, 29 (1962); M. Natanson, "Alfred Schutz on Social Reality and Social Science", Social Research, 35 (1968); and M. Natanson (Ed.), Phenomenology and Social Reality: Essays in Memory of Alfred Schutz, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970).
18. See, for example, H. Wagner (Ed.), Alfred Schutz on Phenomenology and Social Relations, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 10.
19. E. Shils, "The Calling of Sociology", in Theories of Society, op.cit., 1406- 7.
20. See in particular Gouldner, "Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of a Value-Free Sociology", op.cit.
21. This has been the predominant attitude in contemporary sociology and can be seen very clearly in Eisenstadt, op.cit.
22. See the examination of convergence in Chapter two.
23. E.g., Parsons, "The Human Condition", op.cit.
24. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit.
25. Schutz and Luckmann, The Structures of the Life World, (London: Heinemann, 1974), translated by Zaner and Engelhardt, xiv.
26. Grathoff, op.cit.
27. Although, as it was left unfinished by Schutz and was finalized for publication by Luckmann, one cannot rely upon it too heavily.
28. Schutz and Luckmann, op.cit., xvii.
29. Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", reprinted in his Collected Papers I, edited by M. Natanson, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967), 3-47.
30. M. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 1-22.

31. For the most detailed discussion of these issues see M. Weber Rosher and Knies: The Logical Problems of Historical Economics, (New York: Free Press, 1975).
The extent to which Weber's work moved on from these early assumptions and arguments is examined in detail in Chapter Five.
32. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 244, footnote 26 in which he suggests that Weber's thinking on ideal type concepts changed fundamentally between 1904 and 1920.
33. Schutz, op.cit., 6. C.f. Schutz, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World", reprinted in Collected Papers II, edited by A. Brodersen, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1964), 85; and Schutz, "Phenomenology and Social Science", Collected Papers I, op.cit., 138.
34. Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 25, and Schutz, "Concept and Theory Formation in Social Science", Collected Papers I, op.cit., 56-7.
35. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 7 C.f., "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World", op.cit., 81, and "Phenomenology and Social Science", op.cit., 138.
36. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 5, C.f., "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences", op.cit., 63.
37. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., xxxi.
38. Ibid., 7-8.
39. Ibid., 9.
40. Ibid., 10.
41. Ibid., 9. For a concise justification of the importance of phenomenology for social science, see his "Some Leading Concepts of Phenomenology", Collected Papers I, op.cit., especially 115.
42. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 45.
43. Ibid., c.f., 47.
44. Ibid., 51.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 69.

47. Ibid., 70.
48. Ibid., 57.
49. Ibid., 61.
50. Ibid., 71.
51. Ibid., 88.
52. Ibid., 91.
53. Ibid., 92.
54. Ibid., 95.
55. Schutz, "The Social World and the Theory of Social Action",
in A. Schutz, Collected Papers II, op.cit., 12.
56. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 99.
57. Ibid., 106.
58. Ibid., 133.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., 133-4.
61. Ibid., 134.
62. Ibid., 135.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., 18.
65. Ibid., 19.
66. Ibid., 61, C.f., 63, 144, 215.
67. Ibid., 39-40.
68. Ibid., 41, C.f., 215.
69. Ibid., 20.
70. Ibid., 25.
71. Ibid., 27.
72. Ibid., 26-27.

73. Ibid., 28.
74. Ibid., 29. See also 65-6 where Schutz argues that Weber's concept of intended meaning can only be made precise if the moment of interpreting is specified.
75. Ibid., 11.
76. Ibid., 30-31.
77. Ibid., 31-2. See also Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", in his Collected Papers I, op.cit., 24.
78. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 86.
79. Ibid., 37-8.
80. Ibid., 62. See also Schutz, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World" in his Collected Papers II, op.cit., 75.
81. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 62-3, 215.
82. Ibid., 142-3, 163-76, 214.
83. Ibid., 162. C.f., Schutz, "On Multiple Realities", in his Collected Papers I, op.cit., 219-20.
84. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 163.
85. Ibid., 165.
86. Ibid., 166.
87. Ibid., 172. Indeed, Schutz argues, that at best "... in common-sense thinking we have merely a chance to understand the Other's action sufficiently for our purpose at hand", see "Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 24.
88. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 174-5.
89. Ibid., 99.
90. Ibid., 174.
91. Ibid., 106.
92. Ibid., 181.
93. Ibid., 184.
94. Ibid., 186. C.f., "The Social World and the Theory of Social Action", op.cit., 13.

95. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 187.
96. Ibid., 188-9.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid., 193. The situation is additionally complicated in terms of the observer's knowledge of the social world, the use of particular interpretive schemes and the general problem of relevance.
99. Ibid., 190.
100. Ibid., 191, 241. C.f., "Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 4.
101. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 193. Schutz distinguishes between characterological and habitual types of action on the basis of increasing anonymization of typical acts. Characterological types refer to contemporaries one may meet whereas habitual types are defined in terms of performing a typical action and are, therefore, particularly narrow and abstract in relation to real people: see 196-7. Moreover, he differentiates between these two kinds of concept and concepts representing collective entities, such as the state, from which it is impossible to infer subjective meaning for behaviour because of their extreme level of anonymity: see 199.
102. Ibid., 222.
103. Ibid., 205-6.
104. Ibid., 206.
105. Luckmann and Schutz, The Structures of the Life-World, op.cit., xiv.
106. Schutz, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World", op.cit., 85.
107. Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 35. See also "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences", Collected Papers I, op.cit., 62 and, "The Social World and the Theory of Social Action", op.cit., 13.
108. Schutz, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World", op.cit., 85.
109. Schutz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences", op.cit., 58.

110. Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 6. C.f., "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences", op.cit., 58.
111. Ibid., 59.
112. Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 12.
113. Schutz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences", op.cit., 60.
114. Schutz, "The Social World and the Theory of Social Action", op.cit., 13. C.f., "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences", op.cit., 60.
115. Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 6.
116. Schutz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences", op.cit., 59-60.
117. Ibid., 62.
118. Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 36.
119. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 224. C.f., 227, 241-2, and "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 42.
120. Schutz, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World", op.cit., 86.
121. Schutz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences", op.cit., 64. Schutz provides three classic examples of such homunculi - "The Stranger", "The Homecomer", and "The Well Informed Citizen" all reprinted in his Collected Papers, II, op.cit.
122. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 244.
123. Ibid., 245.
124. Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 44-45.
125. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 240.
126. Schutz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences", op.cit., 64-5.
127. Ibid., 63.

128. Ibid., C.f., "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 36-8. See also, Schutz, "On Multiple Realities", Collected Papers, I, op.cit., 247-50.
129. Schutz, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World", op.cit., 83; "Equality and the Meaning Structure of the Social World", Collected Papers, II, op.cit., 236; and Schutz and Luckmann, The Structures of the Life-World, op.cit., Chapter 3, section B.
130. Schutz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences", op.cit., 63.
131. Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 43.
132. As we have seen, the concept of rational action was particularly important for Parsons in The Structure of Social Action, and it is upon this analysis that Schutz's critique is based.
133. Schutz, "The problem of Rationality in the Social World", op.cit., 64-7. He gives as examples of the different levels of the social world the way in which the same object may have different meanings to different people, e.g. the meaning of a city to a native, a foreigner, or a cartographer.
134. Schutz, "Parsons' Theory of Social Action: A Critical Review", in Grathoff (Ed.), The Theory of Social Action, op.cit., 27. The final section of this paper was published as "The Social World and the Theory of Social Action", in Collected Papers, II, op.cit.
135. Schutz, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World", op.cit., 79-80.
136. Schutz, "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 47.
137. Schutz, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World", op.cit., 73.
138. Ibid., 76.
139. Ibid., 82. C.f., "Common Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 44-5.
140. Harold Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology, op.cit., Garfinkel and Sacks, "On Formal Structures of Practical Actions", op.cit., A.V. Cicourel, The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice, (New York: Wiley, 1968); Cicourel, Cognitive Sociology, op.cit., J.D. Douglas (Ed.), Understanding Everyday Life, op.cit., P. Filmer, et.al., New Directions in Sociological Theory, op.cit.

141. A. Schutz, "Don Quixote and the Problem of Reality" reprinted in Collected Papers 11, op.cit., and "Multiple Realities", reprinted in Collected Papers 1, op.cit.
142. R.J. Bernstein, The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), 165-169; R. Gorman, The Dual Vision, (London: Routledge, 1977), 67-85; P. Lassman, "Phenomenological Perspectives in Sociology", in J. Rex (Ed.) Approaches to Sociology, (London: Routledge, 1974), 129-30; J. Rex, Sociology and the Demystification of the Modern World, (London: Routledge, 1974); A. Sahay, "The Importance of Max Weber's Methodology", op.cit., 79-81.
143. C.f., Garfinkel, op.cit.
144. Ibid.
145. Ibid. See also Filmer, et.al., op.cit.; T.P. Wilson, "Normative and Interpretive Paradigms in Sociology", and D.H. Zimmerman and M. Pollner, "The Everyday World as a Phenomenon", both in J.D. Douglas (Ed.) Understanding Everyday Life, op.cit.
146. M. Phillipson, "Theory, Methodology and Conceptualization", in Filmer, et.al., op.cit., 106.
147. C.f., E. Gellner, "Ethnomethodology: The Re-Enchantment Industry or the Californian Way of Subjectivity", Philosophy of Social Science, 5 (1975), 432-3; J.H. Goldthorpe, "A Revolution in Sociology", Sociology, 7 (1973), 449-462; G. Gummer, "A Critical Examination of Phenomenological Sociology", Sociological Analysis: A Discussion Journal, 3 (1973), 10-14; Lassman, op.cit., 136-142; B. McSweeney, "Meaning, Context and Situation", European Journal of Sociology, 14 (1973), 148-153.

CHAPTER 5

WEBER'S THEORY OF ACTION

In view of the fact that this is the pivotal chapter of the study it will be useful to preface the outline of its objectives with a brief sketch of its place within the wider context of our arguments as a whole. The study began with an examination of Parsons' interpretation and critique of Weber's contribution to sociology - an interpretation which largely determined the limits of the incorporation of these ideas within the contemporary discipline. In chapter two Parsons' extension and modification of some of Weber's categories and principles were considered, as well as their merger with assumptions and strategies from disparate sources. Chapter three dealt with the various stages of development of Parsons' General Theory of Action and the problems which this synthetic theoretical structure encountered, namely: its testability and general relevance to empirical phenomena, its objectivity given the emphasis upon normative order and shared values in society, and the incorporation of the Weberian subjective point of view. These doubts fuelled the growing "crisis" in sociology which was also sustained by the emerging phenomenological approach. In chapter four we examined Alfred Schutz's critique and extension of Weber's categories of interpretive sociology and sought to show how this phenomenologically inspired approach, which emphasized human meaning and individual action, gradually undermined the possibility of objective knowledge of social action. These two radically different "developments" of Weber's Theory of Action encountered major difficulties and, with the benefit of hindsight, it is now extremely

difficult to see the respective formulations of Parsons and Schutz as being in any way cumulative and productive extensions of Weber.

The aim of this chapter is to clarify Weber's theoretical and methodological characterization of sociology. This provides a basis both for assessing the interpretations of Weber's work by Parsons and Schutz and for indicating the relevance of his Theory of Action for contemporary sociology.

The need for a clarification of these issues has been largely shaped by the problematic character of some of the most influential commentaries upon Weber's work and, in this respect, our attention has been focussed upon the interpretations advanced by Parsons and to a lesser extent Schutz. It was shown that Parsons' interest in Weber was part of his convergence thesis with the result that his interpretation did not have as its primary objective the clarification of Weber's work.¹ Instead, it was an interpretation which attempted to demonstrate a convergence between - what subsequently became most important for sociology - the work of Durkheim and Weber. In this interpretation Parsons took particular comfort from Weber's use of general concepts and a rational, rather than intuitionist, form of understanding based upon means-end analysis, and attempted to present Weber as gradually moving away from his early intellectual context, shaped by idealism, historicism and Marxism, towards a hesitant and somewhat ambiguous acceptance of a new level of thinking about the scientific study of social action. Parsons identified a change from the analysis of the problems of historical knowledge to an ever increasing concern, towards the end of his life, with generalization. This process culminated in his immense, but unfinished, Economy and Society, which Parsons saw as an attempt to

systematically classify social structures through the development of a comprehensive set of ideal types. This process was not, however, without ambiguity given Weber's distinction between natural and cultural science, his emphasis upon value-relevance, and his use of ideal type concepts, but for Parsons these features of Weberian sociology could be forgiven, as well as forgotten, as a legacy of Weber's earlier intellectual milieu. Parsons was confident that certain features of Weber's work could be extrapolated in order to depict his thinking in his final years as being consistent with the belief in the utility of a general system of theory. Such an interpretation is far from explicit in Weber's own statements, but Parsons argued, the ideal types in Economy and Society were not a random collection of social structural and institutional types and involved a systematic theory based upon the conception of legitimate order and normative orientation.²

The detailed and systematic nature of this interpretation of Weber was the source of its authority, but it gained additional stature from Parsons' general influence within sociology with the result that his suggestion of distinct theoretical and methodological stages in Weber's thinking became widely accepted. Indeed, as an example of the way in which this interpretation remained influential, we may refer to the work of John Rex — by no means an enthusiastic supporter of Parsons in matters of sociological theory — who argued in 1971 that Weber's early discussions of the ideal type "... have little relationship to the way in which what are later called ideal types are actually used in ... Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft".³

One consequence of the apparent authority of Parsons' commentary upon Weber's work, especially its theoretical and methodological character, was that further studies of these issues were discouraged.⁴ The shift of interest from Weber's formal to substantive studies was marked particularly by Bendix⁵, who sought to present an overall view of the diverse empirical inquiries, and furthered by a series of translations of parts of the comparative studies of world religions⁶ and particular sections of Economy and Society.⁷

After the initial enthusiasm for Parsons' theoretical sociology began to decline, there was a gradual renewal of interest in the founding fathers of sociology and the studies by Aron⁸ and Fletcher⁹ are notable examples of this. Indeed, following the centenary discussions by the German Sociological Association¹⁰ Weber's work increasingly became a focus of attention in sociology, as can be seen from the volumes edited by Wrong¹¹, Eldridge¹², and most recently Runciman¹³, and symbolized perhaps by the complete translation of Economy and Society¹⁴, as well as the publication in English of Marianne Weber's biography¹⁵ of her husband. But what is of particular interest to this study is the way in which over the last 10 years there has been an unprecedented series of publications & partly stimulated by Schutz's analysis of Weber's categories of meaning and forms of understanding¹⁶ & which have focussed upon the theoretical and methodological aspects of Weber's approach. Among the more important of these studies are works by the following; Freund¹⁷, Bendix and Roth¹⁸, Bruun¹⁹, Runciman²⁰, Sahay²¹, Mommsen²², Berger²³, Roth and Schluchter²⁴, Marshall²⁵, and Tenbruck²⁶. On a more specialized level interest in Parsons'

convergence thesis, especially the similarities between Durkheim and Weber, also revived as can be seen from the studies by Bendix²⁷, Sahay²⁸, Butts²⁹, and Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope.³⁰

Our aim, therefore, is to utilize these new contributions to the understanding of Weber's work in the evaluation of the commentaries upon his Theory of Action by Parsons and Schutz. Both, it will be recalled, assumed that there were distinct breaks in Weber's thinking from an early concern with history to a later emphasis upon sociology - indeed Schutz rarely makes reference to Weber's work other than Economy and Society. Consequently, they were able to argue that some of Weber's theoretical and methodological views published between 1903 and 1907³¹ were irrelevant to his mature sociology. In contrast, however, we argue that there is a considerable degree of unity in Weber's thinking about the study of cultural phenomena and social action. Certainly he changed the label he gave to his researches from history to sociology, but the significance of this has been vastly overrated by both Parsons and Schutz. Weber saw a very close connection between history and sociology and Roth is undoubtedly correct when, in a discussion of this move from one discipline to the other, he argues,

"... intellectually this move meant for him a division of labour, not an antagonistic relationship between the roles of historian and sociologist. His methodological position is not well suited for the defense of vested interests in disciplinary boundaries." 32

Moreover, Roth³³ makes the point that Weber's ideas on the relationship between history and sociology did not change after 1903 - a view which has been steadily gaining ground in the commentaries as can be seen, for example, in the work of Aron³⁴, Freund³⁵, Bruun³⁶, Eldridge³⁷, Sahay³⁸, and Burger³⁹ - despite

Marianne Weber's contrary view of Economy and Society as the culmination of his life's work.⁴⁰ Unity can be seen in Weber's thinking after his illness if attention is concentrated upon the epistemological and methodological basis of his historical and sociological work which can be clarified by reference to the analyses of the philosopher Heinrich Rickert.⁴¹ For Weber the concepts of individuality, value-relevance, and understanding, remained of fundamental importance throughout what has been termed his most productive years and the recognition of this has been greatly facilitated by the recent translation of Weber's critiques of the economists Roscher and Knies.⁴² In addition, it is important to consider Weber's theoretical and methodological ideas in the context of his substantive inquiries into the effects of religious ethics upon economic life as well as examining the abstract definitions and typologies in terms of his stated goals and procedures for sociological work rather than seeing them, as Parsons does, as an indication of a fundamental change in his entire approach to the study of action.

In the last few years the importance, for Weber's work as a whole, of the historical and comparative studies of the world religions in terms of the theme of rationalization has been highlighted by Tenbruck⁴³ and Schluchter⁴⁴. By examining the chronology of Weber's work Tenbruck has identified certain misunderstandings about the dating of particular components of Weberian sociology which have served to emphasize Economy and Society as the final and most sophisticated level of his thinking. However, according to Tenbruck it was the studies of the economic ethics of the world religions which represented the dominant

theme of Weber's later years and that his main contribution to sociology lies in the generalizations drawn from these studies which can be found in the "Introduction",⁴⁵ "Intermediate Reflections: Theory of the Stages and Directions of the Religious Rejection of the World",⁴⁶ and "Author's Introduction"⁴⁷. Indeed Tenbruck argues that the realization of the significance of these essays has been hampered by editorial attempts to make Economy and Society more systematic by filling in various disjunctures (which after all may have been intentional) and this has served to perpetuate the view that it represents the culmination of Weber's scholarly activities.⁴⁸

The combination of a detailed analysis of Weber's own statements about the nature of the sociological discipline in the context of his views on the relationship between history and sociology together with a more accurate appreciation of the chronological development of Weber's work, definitively refutes the interpretations by Parsons and Schutz who identify distinct breaks between Weber's discussion of the problems of historical knowledge in the period 1903 to 1907 and the classificatory typologies which seemed to Parsons to foreshadow the kind of general theoretical system in sociology which he has done so much to promote. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that both Parsons and Schutz seriously misunderstood Weber's conception of sociology and, inevitably therefore, his contribution to the contemporary discipline - an issue which will be examined in the fourth part of the chapter.

Finally, before looking in detail at Weber's methodology of historical and sociological knowledge it will be useful to clarify

the structure of this examination of Weber's Theory of Action. It should by now be quite clear that our specific interest in Weber's theoretical and methodological views has been determined very much by the developmental interpretations of his work advanced by Parsons and Schutz.⁴⁹ Consequently this examination of Weber's work specifically addresses the issue of distinct periods in his thinking about the study of human actions and events; it begins by looking at (1) Weber's earlier statements on historico-cultural knowledge, (2) moves on to his later views on sociological knowledge, then (3) seeks to clarify the fundamental unity of his approach at these different points in his career and, finally (4) considers the misunderstandings and subsequent erroneous assessments of Weber by Parsons and Schutz together with their evaluations of the relevance of his Theory of Action for contemporary sociology.

The originality of Weber's approach to the character of the socio-cultural sciences and, therefore, his contribution to the development of sociology can be most clearly seen in terms of the debates in Germany about the nature of economics and the scientific study of society which lasted throughout the final quarter of the 19th Century and continued well into the 20th.⁵⁰ The debate or Methodenstreit took place in the context of opposing evaluations of the merits of abstract theoretical schemes or detailed and realistic studies, and was complicated by Dilthey's suggestion that the methods of the natural sciences were inappropriate for the study of human or spiritual phenomena.⁵¹ This perspective was given a more formal grounding by Windelband's distinction between generalizing sciences concerned with laws and individualising sciences based upon the intuition of human phenomena.⁵² This classification was subsequently revised by Rickert who distinguished two methodological procedures - nomothetic and ideographic - and two different realms of phenomena - nature and culture.⁵³ He argued that the most contrasting combinations of method and substance could be found in the disciplines of physics and history but between these two extremes there existed a whole range of mixed methods for the study of particular kinds of phenomena.⁵⁴

The importance of Rickert's work for Weber's methodology of socio-cultural science is quite clear, and is most

explicitly acknowledged in Weber's discussion of the work of Roscher and Knies in which he speaks of applying Rickert's ideas to economics.⁵⁵ The fact that this was Weber's first serious work after his illness demonstrates the importance of Rickert's approach for his entire mature work,⁵⁶ and this is confirmed in the opening remarks in Economy and Society.⁵⁷ There is some doubt about whether it was Rickert or Weber who first developed these epistemological and methodological ideas; Rickert claimed Weber as his pupil in these matters,⁵⁸ though Marianne Weber suggests a rather different relationship.⁵⁹ The issues have been studied in great textural detail by Bruun and Berger who concluded that despite certain basic similarities there were some divergencies between Rickert and Weber with regard to the objectivity of history and the nature of the values used in historical concept formation.⁶⁰ From our point of view, Rickert's work is particularly important for an appreciation of Weber's Theory of Action given the absense of a systematic statement by Weber of his views on the methodological character of the socio-cultural sciences.⁶¹ Indeed his most detailed analyses of these issues were frequently polemical critiques of other scholars or programmatic statements for very specific purposes.⁶² The implications of these features of his explicit methodological analyses are neatly stated by Roth;

"They do not spell out the ways in which he himself proceeded in his own empirical studies, although they do not conflict with his general position ... while I perceive no basic inconsistencies, I do consider Weber's methodological practice in need of explication." 63

Consequently, some analysis is required to present a coherent picture of Weber's theoretical and methodological views about the scientific study of action in view of the implicit nature of some of the assumptions in his own formal statements. In the work of Rickert we find a more systematic presentation of many of the principles and assumptions which lie behind Weber's own formulations, in particular, the concepts of value-relevance, individuality, understanding and ideal types.⁶⁴ Moreover, these issues gain added significance in view of the fact that Parsons' interpretation of Weber's Theory of Action is weak in these areas.

(a) Rickert's Epistemological Classification of the Empirical Sciences

Rickert's epistemological objective was to clarify the range of variation in the methods of concept formation used by the empirical sciences. He used the idea of concept formation to refer to the end product of scientific activity, the knowledge of the empirical world upon which the prestige of the sciences is dependent. For Rickert every scientific inquiry begins with the collection of data, but concepts are only developed at the point where this 'raw' information is organized in terms of a classificatory scheme, a causal sequence, or some other analytic device, which serves to aid our comprehension of empirical phenomena. Within empirical science concepts represent "... every idea comprising the scientifically essential constituents of a real entity".⁶⁵

The presuppositions of Rickert's inquiry are to be found in this theory of recognition and they can be most conveniently presented in terms of his rejection of a "copy" theory of scientific knowledge: namely, the belief that a transcendent world lies behind the one we perceive and experience. He argued that such a viewpoint was untenable on three grounds: first of all, because it is impossible to know anything beyond the "immediate" world; secondly, because a perfect copy of reality would only be the aim of science if that reality was not directly accessible to us; and thirdly, because a perfect "copy" of even a minute aspect of reality is quite unattainable.⁶⁶

According to Rickert, therefore, scientific cognition is not

"... a reflecting process by which 'phenomena' are faithfully transcribed, but ... a process of reconstructing the data of immediate experience; and ... it is always a process involving the simplification of the actual multiplicity of reality itself." 67

Consequently, selection is inevitable because our capacity to experience and observe phenomena, as well as the characteristics of the phenomena themselves, impose limitations upon human knowledge.

For Rickert empirical reality can be characterized by two principles: firstly, the "continuity of everything real" refers to the continuous nature of phenomena in space and time which results in the relatively arbitrary nature of distinctions between one phenomenon and the next; and secondly, the "heterogeneity of everything real" represents the fundamental uniqueness of all real phenomena.⁶⁸ But if empirical reality can be characterized by a "heterogeneous continuum", how is it logically possible for science to construct concepts which can deal adequately at one and the same time, with heterogeneity and continuity? Rickert's solution is as follows:

"The continuum can be conceptually mastered as soon as it is homogeneous; and the heterogeneous becomes conceivable when we make incisions in it, thereby transforming the continuum into a domain of discrete objects. Thus no less than two mutually opposed methods of concept formation are open to science. We transform the heterogeneous continuum in everything real into a homogeneous continuum or into a heterogeneous discretum. In so far as this is possible, reality itself can be called rational. It remains irrational only for the kind of cognition which aspires to portray it without reconstructing it." 69

All the empirical sciences attempt to form their concepts upon the basis of the heterogeneous discretum whereas, Rickert argues, mathematics conceptualizes phenomena in terms of homogeneous continua, or a realm of pure quantities. This is quite unreal in comparison with "... the world accessible to sensory perception (which) presents us only with qualitatively determined realities"⁷⁰, and the empirical sciences can only proceed by constructing

relatively arbitrary boundaries around what are conceptualized as discrete phenomena. Nevertheless, this imposes certain limitations on human knowledge:

"Everything in the content of reality that lies between the conceptual boundaries drawn in it is lost in the process ... we can do nothing more with concepts than construct bridges over the stream of reality, however small we may make the individual spans. No science of real existence will change anything in this regard." 71

Concentrating attention, therefore, upon the method of concept formation whereby the "heterogeneous continuum" is transformed into a "heterogeneous discretum", the question arises: How is it possible to reconstruct the data of experience in a careful and systematic manner? If arbitrariness is to be avoided, the sciences

"... need a principle of selection with respect to which they can separate the essential from the unessential in the given material". 72

In answering this question Rickert made a major contribution to epistemology and, more generally, to the methodology of the cultural sciences.

Rickert's analysis begins with the formal Kantian definition of nature, "... as the existence of things 'as far as it is determined according to universal laws'." ⁷³ This formal concept is not necessarily identical to the substantive concept of nature, in other words, to the natural world. Rather, for Rickert, formal knowledge of nature is gained by generalization. ⁷⁴ Whatever is general and common to a class of phenomena is essential for its conceptualization, whereas, the purely unique properties of a member of the class are of no significance to science unless of course, they could become the basis for a new class concept. The concentration upon the generality of a

phenomenon is, inevitably, a process of selection whereby the individuality of the object or event is omitted from its conceptualization but, for Rickert, the value of this approach is clear and it is only through the use of this method that mankind has been successful in comprehending the empirical world. This viewpoint is very important to Rickert's argument and he develops it unambiguously.

"We can predict only what is general in reality ... If the world were not simplified by way of generalization, we should never succeed in laying it open to calculation; or in controlling it ... with a concept having only individual content we should never be able to get beyond this one place and infer anything about other places and other times." 75

Consequently, it is in the context of the formal concept of nature, and in direct opposition to it, that Rickert develops the formal concept of history. This refers to the uniqueness and individuality of an object or event and represents, therefore, the antithesis of phenomena determined by general rules or laws. The need for an individualizing method is clear once it is realized that the procedure of generalization is incapable of representing a phenomenon in terms of its individuality.⁷⁶

In epistemological terms, therefore, Rickert formulates a distinction in the methods used for concept formation which is based upon the antithetical categories of nature and history. However, it is particularly important not to automatically identify this contrast with substantive issues and the distinction between natural science and historical science; for Rickert the formal categories of nature and history merely represent "... the same reality seen from two different points of view".⁷⁷ Formulated in a slightly different way, Rickert argues,

"Empirical reality becomes nature when we view it with respect to its universal characteristics; it becomes history when we view it as particular and individual." 78

For purposes of clarity Rickert develops the structure of his argument in terms of these two pure types of scientific procedure but he is well aware, as we shall see below, that these two types merely represent the extremes of a continuum which includes a wide range of mixed types of concept formation utilizing varying degrees of generalization and individualization.⁷⁹

From these purely epistemological issues Rickert then turns his attention to the more complex problem of the classification of the empirical sciences which, he argues, can be solved by combining the formal consideration of the method of concept formation with the substantive division between the natural and cultural objects dealt with by the empirical sciences. Rickert justifies the substantive dichotomy in this way:

"...nature is the embodiment of whatever comes to pass of itself, of what is 'born' and left to its own 'growth'. Culture ... comprises whatever is either produced directly by man acting according to valued ends or, if it is already in existence, whatever is at least fostered intentionally for the sake of the values attaching to it". 80

Relevance of an object to values, or the absence of this relevance, is what distinguishes, for Rickert, between objects of a natural scientific or a cultural scientific interest. However he recognizes that for certain theoretical purposes it is possible to suspend the relevance of a phenomenon to value and thereby conceptualize it in exactly the same way as natural object.⁸¹

According to Rickert empirical phenomena can be distinguished not only in terms of their origin and manner of coming into existence, but also, in terms of the way in which they are accessible to us.

Natural objects are known through sense perception, whereas, the meanings of cultural objects, are understood⁸² and in the case of a cultural object the meaning is derived from the values for which it was brought into existence or modified from the natural environment.

The combination of the formal and substantive categories of nature clarifies the character of the extreme type of natural science: to be precise, the study of natural objects which lack relevance to value by the method of generalization. Similarly the identification of the extreme type of cultural science requires the combination of the substantive concept of culture and the formal concept of history to produce the study of cultural objects which are relevant to value by the method of individualization. Thus, for Rickert, the "... concept of culture ... makes history as a science possible."⁸³

"Out of the enormous abundance of individual, i.e., discriminable objects, the historian first considers only those which either themselves, in their individual peculiarity as expressions of complexes of meaning, actually embody cultural values or stand in some relationship to them. And out of the enormous abundance of differentiable components constituting the singularity of every object, he then selects, in turn, those on which its cultural significance depends and in which historical individuality, as distinguished from mere discriminable differentness, consists." 84

In addition, it is only by conceptualizing a phenomenon in terms of the method of historical science that it is possible to represent its cultural importance:

"Viewed merely as part of the world of nature, i.e., as subsumed under universal concepts or laws, it would become an indifferent specimen exemplifying the generic features common to its class, which could equally well be replaced by any other of the same genre." 85

In other words, empirical phenomena which lack relevance to value are, in the majority of cases, only important to science as an example illustrating a general concept whereas phenomena which are relevant to values and have meaning are of interest to science because of their part in a particular sequence of events.⁸⁶

For Rickert the scope of an epistemological analysis lay in the clarification of the extreme types of concept formation which, incidentally, could be found in their purest form of development in the disciplines of physics and history. He argued that it was the task of the methodologist of the particular science to examine its particular mixture of methods of concept formation, and a brief reference to some of these examples may avoid a persistent misunderstanding of Rickert's position which tends to equate the distinction between generalizing and individualizing methods with the study of nature and culture respectively.⁸⁷ Rickert considers the use of an historical method in biology where non-recurring evolutionary sequences are studied, but he concludes that because the phenomena under investigation lack relevance to value their treatment is ultimately rather different from that of phenomena which fall strictly within the scope of the historical sciences dealing with cultural phenomena.⁸⁸ Moreover, he does not have any illusions about the absoluteness of the distinction between "individual" and "general", with the result that a great many concepts are formed which are, at one and the same time, relatively general and relatively historical. Indeed, Rickert argues, it is frequently the case, especially with concepts which refer to the interests and aims of large groups of people, that a generalizing or an individualizing method of concept formation will lead to very similar results although it must equally

be recognized that the content of a relatively historical concept need not necessarily coincide with the content of a general concept.⁸⁹ And within the area of the cultural sciences, Rickert considered that the greatest use of general concepts was to be found in those disciplines dealing with economic phenomena especially where the subject matter could be treated in terms of mass phenomena. In such cases what is scientifically essential frequently coincides with the content of a relatively general concept; for example, the concept of a peasant or factory worker at a particular time and place will correspond "... more or less exactly to the general concept that the natural sciences would form" ... on the basis of what is common.⁹⁰

There remains one aspect of Rickert's epistemological analysis which is still in need of clarification and it concerns the nature of the values to which cultural phenomena are related so that their scientifically essential character can be conceptualized. For Rickert, relevance to value is a theoretical principle and not a practical orientation to what is valuable in the present and the past.

"The validity of values is not, ... a problem for history and the task of the historian does not consist in making positive or negative value judgements." 91

Rather,

"... history treats values only in so far as they are actually accepted by subjects... Thus even though history deals with values, it is not a science that posits values". 92

Allowing for the fact that relevance to value enables the meaning and significance of a cultural phenomenon to be portrayed, the problem remains: How does the historian decide whether to concentrate upon a particular aspect of the inevitably many-sided meaning of the events or personalities in question? For Rickert, empirical reality is not related arbitrarily to any value, instead, the historian

"... takes it for granted that those to whom his work is addressed ... on the whole acknowledge or at least understand the worth ... of the general values embodied in religion, the state, law, custom, art, science, etc., with respect to which what is represented is essential. The fact that cultural values are universal in this sense is what keeps concept formation in the historical sciences from being altogether arbitrary and thus constitutes the primary basis of its 'objectivity'. What is historically essential must be important not only for this or that particular historian, but for all." 93

However, in claiming the universality of cultural values Rickert makes a far reaching assumption: in logical terms, it is of course quite correct that if historical knowledge is to achieve the same kind of objectivity as natural scientific knowledge, then, a generally valid set of cultural values would be required to provide a common reference point for concept formation - but Rickert does not investigate the empirical support for such an idea. He argued that within particular intellectual communities considerable agreement existed over the nature of the values which could serve as the principle of concept formation and in such a case it was possible to claim an "... historically limited objectivity."⁹⁴ This would mean, of course, that the objectivity of historical knowledge could not rival the

level attainable in natural science and so he outlined the need to identify a system of supra-historical values, to which the values of all cultures approximate, in order that a universally valid history would be possible. Hence:

"Fundamental progress in the cultural sciences with respect to their objectivity, their universality, and their arrangement in a coherent system, is dependent on progress in the development of an objective and systematically articulated concept of culture, i.e., on the approach to a knowledge of value based on a system of valid values". 95

According to Rickert, this could be achieved through a philosophy of history which would attempt to determine the "universally valid values" and ultimately they would guarantee the objectivity of a universal history.

Clearly such a system of universally valid values is a utopian ideal and if, as Rickert argued, the objectivity of the historical sciences dealing with cultural phenomena depends upon such a system then, its results will never match those of the natural sciences. However Weber held a somewhat different view on this issue, as we shall see in the following section, so that it is unnecessary to pursue the difficulties of Rickert's formulation any further. Our interest in Rickert's epistemology is largely a heuristic one, it is concerned with illuminating the presuppositions upon which many of Weber's more detailed methodological formulations were based. Indeed Rickert's clarification of the nature of the two extreme forms of concept formation, together with his analysis of value-relevance and individuality are all basic ideas which reappear in Weber's methodological discussion of the cultural sciences.

Having clarified, as will increasingly become apparent, the implicit assumptions of Weber's discussions of the methodological

character of historico-cultural knowledge it will now be possible to examine his own formulations upon these topics which, for the most part, were the result of work undertaken in the first few years, after recovering from his illness. The fact that most of Weber's explicit discussion of the methodological and theoretical character of natural and cultural science was published between 1903 and 1907 was crucial to Parsons' developmental interpretation of Weber.⁹⁶

In particular it meant that Weber's analyses of historical effectiveness, the principle of value relevance, the nature and purpose of ideal types, and the rejection of the idea that cultural reality could ever be deduced from a system of universal laws, could be represented as part of a critique of idealism which served to rehabilitate the use of general concepts in historical explanation. Parsons argued that increasingly toward the end of his life Weber became concerned with the nature of sociology as a generalizing science even though he did not explicitly free himself from the ambiguities of the concept of value-relevance or the problems of ideal type conceptualization.

The next stage of the argument, therefore, deals with Weber's views upon the kind of knowledge which it is possible to gain of cultural reality, the role of individual and general concepts, value-relevance and the rejection of a general theory, and the basis of the ideal type in the understandability of actions and events. The attempt will be made to present these views as an internally coherent solution to certain theoretical and methodological problems inherent in the study of cultural phenomena. Thus it will be possible to present a comprehensive statement of the formal character of Weber's approach which was undoubtedly utilized in his empirical inquiries concerning the social and economic influence of the

Protestant Ethic and this will serve to clarify the baseline from which, Parsons argues, Weber gradually moves towards voluntarism.

(b) Weber: The Nature of Scientific Knowledge

Weber does not systematically consider the nature of reality and how it is accessible to our senses, but his occasional references to the problem reveal a basic similarity to the detailed arguments advanced by Rickert. However Weber does examine the nature of scientific concepts and the contrast which can be drawn between two different forms of scientific work,⁹⁷ namely the method of the nomological sciences and the method of the sciences of concrete reality. It is of particular interest that in making this distinction, Weber explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to Rickert's epistemological analyses.⁹⁸

According to Weber, in the nomological sciences the aim is

"... to order an extensively and intensively infinite multiplicity of phenomena by employing a system of concepts and laws. In the ideal case, these concepts and laws are unconditionally and universally valid. The concrete 'contingent' properties of the 'things' and events perceptually given to us, the properties which make them objects of perception, are progressively stripped away... Their uncompromising logical commitment to systematic hierarchies of general concepts under other concepts still more general and their standard of precision and unambiguity commit ... (these sciences) ... to the most radical reduction possible: the qualitative differences of concrete reality are reduced to precisely measurable quantities." 99

This methodological ideal is most closely approached in pure mechanics where it has been possible to state causal relationships in terms of mathematical equations, yet the inevitable result is that as the concepts become increasingly universal in scope their

particular content is correspondingly reduced. Thus the formulation of these sciences becomes increasingly distant from empirical reality which, in so far as it is accessible to our perception always presents itself in terms of specific qualitative features.¹⁰⁰ Hence the concepts which represent the results of the nomological sciences,

"... are abstract relations of general validity (laws). Their domain is that set of problems in which the essential features of phenomena - the properties of phenomena which are worth knowing - are identical with their generic features. A problem, therefore, lies within this domain only if our theoretical interest in the empirically given individual case is satisfied as soon as this case can be classified as falling under an abstract concept." 101

The other group of sciences, which Weber examines are the sciences of concrete reality; they have as their aim, knowledge of empirical reality in its detailed particularity, and must use methods quite different to the nomological sciences to fulfill their objective. According to Weber the aim of these sciences is,

"... knowledge of concrete reality, knowledge of its invariably qualitative properties, those properties responsible for its peculiarities and its uniqueness. Because of the logical impossibility of an exhaustive reproduction of even a limited aspect of reality - due to the (at least intensively) infinite number of qualitative differentiations that can be made - this must mean the following: knowledge of those aspects of reality which we regard as essential because of their individual peculiarities." 102

We shall leave on one side, for the moment, the very pertinent logical question of why certain aspects of an individual phenomenon are regarded as essential and therefore worth knowing and why other aspects are considered to be un-important and, consequently, regarded as 'accidental' or 'meaningless'.¹⁰³ Hence the concepts formed by the sciences of concrete reality are the very reverse of the concepts developed by the methods of the nomological sciences,

and their richness of content is balanced by their restricted applicability. Such concepts are used,

"... wherever the essential features of phenomena - that is, those which we regard as worth knowing - are not exhaustively described by a classification of phenomena under some generic concept: that is to say, wherever concrete reality as such is the object of our interest." 104

Consequently, it is an error in logic to consider that concrete reality could ever be deduced from a system of laws. After all, the more general the concept the less its content, and the more difficult it would be to deduce from it the particularity of a concrete phenomenon.¹⁰⁵ This belief that reality can be deduced from laws is based upon the experience of astronomy which unlike almost all other sciences, natural and social, deals with quantitative aspects of phenomena - not qualitative features. But Weber argues, in the case of astronomy,

"... Every individual constellation which it 'explains' or predicts is causally explicable only as the consequence of another equally individual constellation which has preceded it... the reality to which the laws apply always remains equally individual, equally undeducible from laws." 106

Having reached a salient point in Weber's argument it may be useful to comment briefly upon the implications of this contrast between different kinds of scientific method. For Weber whilst these two extremes of concept formation can be found to be highly significant in pure mechanics and certain branches of history respectively, for the vast majority of the sciences, the aim of concept formation necessitates recourse to a mixture of these extremes. Indeed, like Rickert, Weber fully accepts that both natural and social phenomena can be studied by methods which seek to subsume them under increasingly general concepts and by methods which

attempt to represent their uniqueness; in short there are no intrinsic properties of empirical reality which determine the use of particular methods of concept formation.

In a reference to the study of cultural phenomena by the methods of the nomological sciences, which do not depend upon value relevance as the basis of their scientific interest, Weber makes the point that,

"... the real question is whether the generally valid laws which may eventually be discovered make any contribution to the understanding of those aspects of cultural reality which we regard as worth knowing." 107

And speculating about the utility of the attempt to know natural phenomena in their individuality, he continues:

"That we do not attempt this sort of thing in the natural sciences is not a consequence of the objective nature of natural phenomena. It is rather a consequence of the logical peculiarities of the theoretical goals of the natural sciences." 108

For Weber, therefore, the differences in the actual use of particular methods by the sciences is a function of what the disciplines have set as their ideal form of knowledge and this is related both to the nature of the subject matter and to socially valued goals.

In particular there is nothing in Weber's analysis which can be taken to mean that he was opposed to the use of generalization in the study of social and cultural phenomena on the grounds that the subject matter - human action - was specifically inaccessible to such concepts. Indeed Weber rejected the view, common to some branches of idealism that the "freedom" of action curtailed generalization and prediction. Rather, Weber argues that the apparent discrepancies between the accuracy of prediction in natural and socio-cultural science is based upon the goals of the disciplines and not upon the

incalculability of action versus the "determination" of nature.¹⁰⁹

According to Weber,

"The 'calculability' of 'natural processes' in the domain of 'weather forecasting', for example, is far from being as 'certain' as the 'calculation' of the conduct of a person with whom we are acquainted. Regardless of the completeness of our nomological knowledge, it is still not susceptible to the same degree of certainty. The same holds whenever the concrete uniqueness of a future 'natural process' - as opposed to specific, abstracted relations - is at issue." 110

He explicates this argument in terms of an analysis of the fall of a boulder from a cliff and its shattering into fragments on the ground below. Whilst a great many features of this sequence can be causally explained in terms of the laws of mechanics there are many other aspects, such as the number of fragments and their shape, which would not be explained because a "complete" causal explanation would be both pointless in terms of the goals of the relevant discipline and impossible because the complex of causal sequences has been lost. So long as all of these features were consistent with our nomological knowledge, scientific interest would be satisfied.¹¹¹

The causal explanation of specific human acts involves exactly the same logical or formal problems.

"...its result would reveal a number of possibly relevant causal factors which 'could be made larger than any given number, no matter how large'. This is because the event, like every individual event, no matter how simple it may appear, includes an intensively infinite multiplicity of properties - if, that is, one chooses to conceive it in this way. It follows that no matter how complex a course of human 'actions' may be, 'objectively' it is in principle impossible for it to include more 'elements' than could be identified in this simple event in the physical world." 112

However, for Weber the goals of the socio-cultural sciences are different to the goals of the natural sciences and encourage the formulation of an entirely new kind of knowledge. This brings the analysis to the consideration of the substantive differences between the natural and the socio-cultural sciences. According to Weber, the socio-cultural can be considered as a coherent group because they share one vital and distinguishing feature: the ability to understand their subject matter: "... both the course of human conduct and also human expressions of every sort are susceptible to a meaningful interpretation." 113

In the case of the explanation of human action it is possible to set

"... at least in principle ... the goal not only of representing it as 'possible' - 'comprehensible', in the sense of being consistent with our nomological knowledge. We can also attempt to 'understand' it: that is, to identify a concrete 'motive' or complex of motives 'reproducible in inner experience'." 114

Weber gives as an example the possibility of explaining the actions of Freidrich 11 in 1756, i.e., a specific concrete situation. In this case it is possible to formulate an explanation which is consistent with our nomological knowledge in exactly the same way as the breaking of the boulder, but in addition, such an explanation

".. is also 'teleologically' rational. Not in the sense that we can establish, as a result of the ascription of causes, a statement of necessity. But rather in the sense that his conduct has an 'adequate cause', I.e. given certain intentions and (true or false) beliefs of the monarch, and given also a rational action determined thereby, a 'sufficient' motivation can be identified". 115

Indeed with this kind of interpretation it is possible, Weber argues, to see that action is more calculable than natural processes.

It is particularly important to realize that the formulation of laws and generalizations of extreme applicability do not contribute in any way to the understanding of action, in the sense of interpreting its motive. On the basis of a hypothetical example in which Weber supposed that it had been empirically discovered that people always reacted in certain ways in certain situations, and that this phenomenon could be expressed in terms of unqualified generality (nomological knowledge), he argued,

"... even an ideally comprehensive empirical-statistical demonstration of the regular recurrence of a reaction will still fail to satisfy the criteria concerning the kind of knowledge which we expect from history and those 'socio-cultural sciences' which are related to history in this respect". 116

Hence for Weber the coherence of the cultural sciences is derived from the meaningfulness of cultural phenomena. The cultural scientist can understand the meaning of people's actions by relating their acts to their stated, or hypothesized, goals. As a principle for distinguishing substantively between natural and cultural objects, it is somewhat different to Rickert's criterion of relevance to value. Whilst Rickert's formulation inevitably implies that human action is involved in the phenomena of culture, for Weber, the distinction between natural and cultural objects can be stated in a less ambiguous and qualified manner by bringing the understandability of human action to the forefront.¹¹⁷

By combining the method of the sciences of concrete reality with the substantive criterion of the understandability of human conduct Weber arrives at the distinctive feature of the method of the cultural sciences - on which knowledge of empirical reality in its uniqueness depends. It is their attempt to

"... analyze the phenomena of life in terms of their cultural significance. The significance of a configuration of cultural phenomena and the basis of this significance cannot however be derived and rendered intelligible by a system of analytic laws, however perfect it may be, since the significance of cultural events presupposes a value-orientation towards these events. The concept of culture is a value-concept. Empirical reality becomes 'culture' to us because and insofar as we relate it to value ideas. It includes those segments and only those segments of reality which have become significant to us because of this value relevance." 118

In other words, the interest of the cultural scientist is focussed upon a small portion of reality which, because of its relevance to a particular value, becomes significant and worth knowing in its individuality. The principle of relevance to value facilitates the identification of those specific features of an individual event, process, or personality, which constitute its uniqueness and on this basis they become essential for its scientific conceptualization.

In addition, there are no intrinsic properties of phenomena, such as effectiveness or its importance for subsequent developments, which provide a basis for distinguishing between the essential and the unessential features of cultural life.

"On the contrary ... the meaning we ascribe to the phenomena - that is, the relations which we establish between these phenomena and 'values' - is a logically incongruous and heterogeneous factor which cannot be 'deduced' from the 'constitutive elements' of the events in question." 119

Indeed for Weber there are distinctly creative undertones to the way in which aspects of cultural reality are illuminated for us through their relevance to certain values;

"... from the point of view of our 'conception' of historical reality, the causal course of events is susceptible to intensional and extensional variations in meaning. In other words, the interplay of these values in which our historical interest is anchored sometimes generates trivial results from the infinitude of causal-components which, from a purely logical point

of view, are of no historical significance or interest. In other cases, however, the interplay of these values produces results of great significance: that is results which arouse our historical interest and are coloured by it. We 'see' the latter case as involving the establishment of new axiological relations which did not exist before". 120

This serves to reinforce Weber's argument that the character of a specific cultural event could never be deduced from a system of general categories.¹²¹

For all of these reasons, therefore,

"We cannot discover ... what is meaningful to us by means of a 'presuppositionless' investigation of empirical data. Rather perception of its meaningfulness to us is the presupposition of its becoming an object of investigation. Meaningfulness naturally does not coincide with laws as such, and the more general the law the less the coincidence. For the specific meaning which a phenomenon has for us is naturally not to be found in those relationships which it shares with many other phenomena". 122

Turning now to the problems of causal explanation, Weber argues that it is only possible to have knowledge of a specific historical phenomenon after it has been decided to concentrate scientific attention upon a limited aspect of the "... infinite variety of phenomena".¹²³ Even a hypothetically perfect knowledge of laws would be insufficient to provide the basis for a causal explanation of a particular historical event, in the sense of representing its uniqueness in comparison with everything else, because

"... a description of even the smallest slice of reality can never be exhaustive. The number and type of causes which have influenced any given event are always infinite and there is nothing in the things themselves to set some of them apart as alone meriting attention." 124

For Weber then, the solution to this problem of historical knowledge lies in the reduction of our interest to that which is significant because of its relevance to values, and this makes it possible to

know something in its individuality. In effect, "We select only those causes to which are to be imputed in the individual case, the 'essential' feature of an event",¹²⁵ And as we have seen, the essential characteristic of an event, its individuality, cannot be represented by laws but only in terms of its particular developmental sequence. Consequently,

"Wherever the causal explanation of a 'cultural phenomenon' - an 'historical individual' is under consideration, the knowledge of causal laws is not the end of the investigation but only a means. It facilitates and renders possible the causal imputation to their concrete causes of those components of a phenomenon the individuality of which is culturally significant. So far and only so far as it achieves this, is it valuable for our knowledge of concrete relationships. And the more 'general', i.e. the more abstract the laws, the less they can contribute to the causal imputation of individual phenomena and, more indirectly, to the understanding of the significance of cultural events". 126

For Weber, therefore, there are two reasons why laws are only of heuristic value in the cultural sciences: first, general concepts are abstract vis a vis the content of reality with the result that their use cannot reveal concrete features of an empirical phenomenon and, second,

"... knowledge of cultural events is inconceivable except on a basis of the significance which the concrete constellations of reality have for us in certain individual concrete situations. In which sense and in which situations this is the case is not revealed to us by any law; it is decided according to the value-ideas in the light of which we view 'culture' in each individual case. 'Culture' is a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which human beings confer meaning and significance," 127

At this point let us briefly summarize Weber's methodological arguments about knowledge of empirical reality; he believed that scientific knowledge could be formulated in two logically distinct ways, by generalization and individualization; the two extremes being represented by the nomological sciences and the sciences of concrete reality respectively. He considered that reality, both natural and socio-cultural, was equally amenable to these contrasting methods of study.¹²⁸ The fact that the method of generalization was to be found in its purest form of development in pure mechanics and the method of individualization was developed most fully in history, could be explained in terms of the goals which are set by society for these particular disciplines. The aim of the study of natural phenomena has become one of control because of the socially valuable possibility of technical mastery of nature. The study of socio-cultural phenomena, in contrast, has as its aim knowledge of their unique and particular features because they are important for our values. Indeed it is only through the relevance of these phenomena to values that the individuality of a socio-cultural phenomenon becomes logically feasible through the provision of a criterion for selecting the essential aspects of a phenomenon which constitutes its individuality. However, for Weber the methods of the nomological sciences are not as important as the methods of the sciences of concrete reality in the study of socio-cultural reality because increasing conceptual generality inevitably results in decreased content. Hence the desire to know reality in its individuality is likely to be furthered much more successfully by an examination of the causal sequence which has produced such a phenomenon. The

relative unimportance of generalization in these sciences is not, therefore, a result of the "irrationality" of human conduct and its aversion to uniformity and predictability. In fact Weber argues the very opposite point of view: the ability to interpretively understand human action means that the possibility of predicting courses of action is enhanced well beyond the level attained by natural science in predicting particular developments upon the basis of nomological knowledge. Consequently, allowing for their different emphases upon the unifying principle of the cultural sciences,¹²⁹ it is clear that Weber is in full agreement with Rickert on the nature of cultural individuality and the methodological problems which are involved in the conceptualization of a unique socio-cultural phenomenon.

In our examination of Weber's position so far, the nature of value-relevance and, in particular, the origin, validity, or representativeness of these values within a certain culture has not been clarified. However, the concept is crucial to his methodological analysis of the cultural sciences and in particular to the possibility of knowledge of specific cultural phenomena. Hence, the clarification of these issues is the task of the following section which is concerned, in addition, to identify the differences in the use of the concept of value-relevance by Weber and Rickert.

(c) Value-Relevance and the Science of History

Value-relevance is Weber's methodological criterion for the procedure of reducing attention in socio-cultural reality to that range of facts about an individual event, personality or development which can be practically explained. This procedure has the effect

of making reality, in the sense of those aspects which are of interest to the historian, forever potentially new in character. Consequently in the scientific study of culture, reality is not a fixed or static entity - unless, of course, for some extraordinary reason, the values which constitute the basis of historical interest were themselves to become fixed and static.¹³⁰ However, for the purposes of clarifying the role and implications of value-relevance it is necessary to distinguish the concept from two other procedures, namely value-analysis and value judgement.¹³¹

Value analysis makes possible the understanding of the intellectual, psychological, and motivational content of a cultural phenomenon and suggests "... various possible relationships of the object to values".¹³² which may or may not be pursued because in principle there is no limit to the kinds of evaluative attitudes generated by the value interpretation of a cultural phenomenon.¹³³ This form of interpretation is quite distinct from the practical evaluation of an object, i.e. a value judgement, and Weber consistently emphasized the irreconcilability of the scientific analysis of culture and practical evaluation.¹³⁴

What, therefore, is the purpose of such an interpretation?

Weber answers this question as follows: the

"... type of 'interpretation' which we have alone called 'value analysis' functions as a guide for ... 'historical' i.e., causal 'interpretation'. The former type of analysis reveals the 'valued' components of the object, the causal 'explanation' of which is the problem of the latter type of analysis. The former creates the points of attachment from which there are to be regressively traced the web of causal connections and thus provides causal analysis with the decisive 'viewpoints' without which it would indeed have to operate, as it were, without a compass on an uncharted sea." 135

For Weber the role of value analysis in scientific work must be strictly separated from the establishment of facts which form part of a causal sequence and from the heuristic use of such facts as an aid in the explanation of a causal sequence. In contrast, its task is to help us to understand the relationship of a phenomenon to values.¹³⁶ This can be clarified by examining the methodological role of value analysis in the construction of an historical individual; in other words, the conceptualization of the unique phenomenon reconstructed from the data available in history which constitutes the object of a causal explanation. According to Weber the logical character of this procedure is as follows:

"... in constructing historical individuals I elaborate in an explicit form the focal points for possible 'evaluative' attitudes which the segment of reality in question discloses and in consequence of which it claims a more or less universal 'meaning' - which is to be sharply distinguished from causal 'significance'." 137

Consequently, value analysis serves to identify the characteristic features of a socio-cultural phenomenon,

"...it aids in the formation of historical concepts and indeed from the point of view of its logical role, it functions either as an auxiliary in so far as it aids in the recognition of the causally relevant components of a concrete historical complex as such; it functions, conversely, as a source of guidance and direction, insofar as it 'interprets' the content of an object ... with respect to its possible relations to values. In doing the latter it presents 'tasks' for the causal work of history and thus is its presupposition," 138

Once the possible connections of a phenomenon to different values has been discovered by these means (i.e. the clarification of its potential range of relevance to values), then, the historian decides which of the various values or points of view will constitute the presupposition of the inquiry. In this way it becomes logically possible to construct a historical individual which constitutes a unique problem for causal explanation. However, before the detailed methodology of such explanations can be examined, it is necessary to consider the implications of the notion of value relevance for the objectivity of history and the socio-cultural sciences in general.

Weber argues that there can be no knowledge of cultural reality, in its particularity and detail, unless it is knowledge from a certain point of view. The points of view used in value analysis and value-relevant conceptualization are inevitably subjective, in other words, they are not shared equally within society, or between societies, and they do not remain the same over time.

"The 'points of view', which are oriented toward 'values', from which we consider cultural objects and from which they become 'objects' of historical research, change. Because, and as long as they do, new 'facts' will always be becoming so in a new way ... This way of being conditioned by 'subjective values' is, however, entirely alien ... to those natural sciences which take mechanics as a model, and it constitutes, indeed, the distinctive contrast between the historical and the natural sciences." 139

The conclusions which Weber draws from this argument raise the most serious questions about any cultural-scientific enterprise.¹⁴⁰

According to Weber,

"There is no absolutely 'objective' scientific analysis of culture - or put perhaps more narrowly but certainly not essentially different for our purposes - of 'social phenomena' independent of special and 'one sided' viewpoints according to which - expressly or tacitly, consciously or unconsciously - they are selected, analyzed and organized for expository purposes," 141

Indeed for Weber the inevitable failure of the economic interpretation of history, the attempt to explain "... everything by economic causes alone.." is merely an example of this general rule about knowledge of socio-cultural phenomena.¹⁴²

Whilst the dependence of historical inquiry upon value relevance in the construction of an historical individual entails the presence of an inevitably subjective element, Weber argues

"... it obviously does not follow from this that research in the cultural sciences can only have results which are 'subjective' in the sense that they are valid for one person and not for others. Only the degree to which they interest different persons varies. In other words, the choice of the object of investigation and the extent or depth to which this investigation attempts to penetrate into the infinite causal web, are determined by the evaluative ideas which dominate the investigator and his age. In the method of investigation, the guiding 'point of view' is of great important for the construction of the conceptual scheme which will be used in the investigation. In the mode of their use, however, the investigator is obviously bound by the norms of our thought just as much here as elsewhere. For scientific truth is precisely what is valid for all who seek the truth".¹⁴³

It is particularly significant, therefore, that Weber excludes from this element of subjectivity "... the determination of the historical 'causes' for a given 'object' to be explained.." and argues that it is possible to achieve completely valid knowledge of the causes of a phenomenon even though the object of the historical inquiry has been constructed in accordance with the principle of value relevance.¹⁴⁴

Accordingly, an individual socio-cultural phenomenon can be conceptualized in several ways, none of which would be objectively valid for all cultures, all periods of history and all points of view, but each of them could be adequate representations in terms of relevance to particular values. In each case the adequacy of the

conceptualization depends upon the range and accuracy of the data from which the historical individual has been synthesized in accordance with a particular viewpoint.¹⁴⁵ Thus, Weber argues, description or the determination of the object of causal explanation can never be more than relatively valid in the historico-cultural sciences¹⁴⁶: in these disciplines unconditionally valid knowledge can only consist of causal relationships.

In comparison with Rickert's use of the term value relevance Weber's approach allows for a subjective or arbitrary role in the construction of historical individuals whilst, at the same time, the objectivity of causal knowledge is defended. On Weber's part this represents a recognition of the diversity of points of view which can be used in historical investigations in the formation of the objects of such inquiries. This constitutes a decisive break with Rickert who argued for a philosophy of history to discover the supra-historical values, valid for all points of view, which could serve as the basis of the construction of historical individuals possessing an objectivity comparable to the concepts used in natural science.¹⁴⁷

Having examined Weber's use of the principle of value-relevance in the construction of an historical individual it is now possible to consider the more methodological problems which are involved in an individual causal explanation of a socio-cultural phenomenon. Once a historical individual has been constructed it is possible to analyze the preceeding events in order to identify the causally relevant factors. However this is dependent on an estimation of the importance of particular events for a variety of potential outcomes:

"It involves first the production of ~ let us say it calmly ~ 'imaginative constructs' by the disregarding of one or more of those elements of 'reality' which are actually present, and by the mental construction of a course of events which is altered through modification in one or more 'conditions'." 148

Such an alteration of the sequence of events requires abstraction and mental isolation. On this basis judgements of possibility are constructed in which certain conditions are changed in order to see what "would" happen under these new circumstances.¹⁴⁹ In doing this,

"... we so decompose the 'given' into 'components' that every one of them is fitted into an 'empirical role'; hence, that it can be determined what effect each of them, with others present as 'conditions', 'could be expected' to have, in accordance with an empirical rule." 150

If the general knowledge of what usually happens is reliable, then, there is a secure basis for the imputation of causal responsibility to a particular component of the complex of events. But Weber does not regard this generalized knowledge, which can be expressed in an empirical rule, as a scientific law: it is merely based upon our experience and knowledge of other people's conduct. Although such knowledge has many limitations it is indispensable for causal imputation and the interpretive understanding of historical events and contemporary actions.¹⁵¹ This general kind of knowledge consists of

"...adequate causal relationships expressed in rules and with the application of the category of 'objective possibility'. The establishment of such regularities is not the end but rather the means of knowledge. It is entirely a question of expediency, to be settled separately for each individual case, whether a regularly recurrent causal relationship of everyday experience should be formulated into a 'law'. Laws are important and valuable in the exact natural sciences in the measure that those sciences are universally valid. For the knowledge of historical phenomena in their concreteness, the most general laws, because they are most

devoid of content are also the least valuable :..
 In the cultural sciences, the knowledge of the universal
 or general is never valuable in itself." 152

In the examination of the importance of value-relevance
 for historical explanation the object of analysis, namely the
 meaningful and therefore understandable phenomena of human action,
 received little attention. This is remedied in the following
 section which focusses upon Weber's analysis of meaning and, in
 particular, its accessibility to the scientific observer.

(d) Intuition, Empathy and Meaning

Weber's analysis of the concept of meaning took place
 against the influential belief that human actions could be studied
 reliably on the basis of intuition and empathy. The absence of such
 procedures in natural science was seen to be an important part of
 the rejection of the use of general concepts in the study of socio-
 cultural phenomena. In Roscher and Knies: The Logical Problems
 of Historical Economics,¹⁵³ Weber devotes considerable attention
 to claims which had been made for intuition and the certainty of
 immediate experience in the explanation of human action.¹⁵⁴ For
 Weber such experience can attain a level of unrivalled certainty
 only under very specific conditions: namely, that a distinction
 is drawn between "our own experience" and the experience of anyone
 else, that the concept of experience is defined broadly enough to
 include the psychical and physical worlds "immediately given to us
 at a specific moment", and that

".. the 'object of immediate experience' is not a product
 of reality as constituted by science.. It is rather
 constituted by the totality of our 'perceptions' in
 connection with the undifferentiated 'feelings' and
 'desires' that are associated with them." 155

According to Weber, therefore, the object of a scientific proposition, for example, the explanation of a set of empirical facts, is fundamentally and irreconcilably different to an object of our immediate experience.

"... what we really experience can become accessible to 'interpretation' only after the 'experience' itself has elapsed. In which case, what is experienced can become the 'object' of a proposition. The content of this proposition is no longer 'experienced' in inchoate stupor. On the contrary; it is recognized as 'valid'. This 'recognition' ... is concerned with the validity of propositions, both first person and third person." 156

And for Weber "... the immediate, but inchoate, experience" ... does not possess the level of certainty which is associated with logical and mathematical propositions, once their assumptions have been recognized as true.¹⁵⁷ Indeed Weber views the object of empathy, like the object of immediate experience, as a means to knowledge: as the raw material from which knowledge can be constructed. Discussing an illustrative examples used by Lipps, Weber argues:

"Whoever 'empathizes' with Lipp's acrobat 'experiences' neither what the acrobat 'experiences' on the tightrope nor what he would 'experience' if he were on the tightrope. What he 'experiences' does not even have any unambiguous, imaginative relationship to the experience of the acrobat. And, most importantly, it follows that it not only fails to qualify as 'knowledge' in any sense of this word. It also fails to constitute the object of 'historical' knowledge. For in the present case, the object of 'historical' knowledge would be the experience of the acrobat, not the experience of the empathizing historian." 158

Thus, it is fundamental to Weber's thinking that scientific knowledge is dependent upon concepts which are based upon a selection from the world experienced and the world open to experience, from our own immediately given world and the world external to us. Weber comments,

"When empirical science treats a given manifold as a 'thing', and therefore as an 'entity' - e.g. the 'personality' of a concrete historical person - then ... this object is only 'relatively determined'. I.e., it is a conceptual construct which always includes aspects that are empirically 'intuited'. But ... it is a thoroughly synthetic construct. Its 'unity' is constructed by the selection of those aspects which are 'essential' from the point of view of specific theoretical goals. It is ..., a product of thought, which bears only a 'functional' relation to the 'given'." 159

For Weber, therefore, knowledge of the empirical world is established through the use of clear, precise and communicable research procedures within a guiding framework of a particular point of view - there are no short cuts via intuition or personal experience.

According to Weber, the meaning examined by cultural science can be of two kinds: in the context of the interaction of two or more people, it is possible to understand the meaning of what is spoken and it is also possible to understand the respective speakers - the motives for speaking or acting in a certain way.¹⁶⁰

Human beings have the ability to interpretively understand other people's "motives" because it is possible to empathize with the other's situation and goals and imaginatively reconstruct them as elements of the content of "... our own inner experience."¹⁶¹

However, the limitations of interpretive understanding are a result of starting from

"... the empirical fact that processes of a specific kind in practice occur linked mentally with a certain 'meaning' which is not thought through clearly in detail but is just a vague notion." 162

We attempt to understand empirical actions by constructing one or more conceptually clear and unambiguous but inevitably hypothetical, motivational sequences. Consequently, for Weber the fundamental limitations of such interpretation cannot be avoided

because the real meaning of the event to the actor π and there may have been no consciously explicit meaning at all π can be very different.¹⁶³ Interpretive understanding, therefore, can only serve to formulate hypotheses which can be used in one of the following ways: in the analysis of a particular phenomenon in socio-cultural reality, in the construction of general concepts which may have a heuristic role in analysis, or as part of an attempt to formulate clear and unambiguous concepts.¹⁶⁴ In each case, Weber argues, there are considerable benefits in terms of the self-evidence of the interpretive understanding if the constructions are developed upon the basis of a rational means-end relationship.¹⁶⁵

(e) Ideal Type Concepts and the Role of Theory

- Weber's analysis of ideal type concepts, and theoretical abstractions more generally, takes place very much in the context of the practices of historical economics. This can be explained in terms of two reasons. First, at this point of his intellectual career, and prior to his use of the concept of sociology, he defined the subject matter of his inquiries in terms of the realm of economically relevant and economically conditioned phenomena, so it is only to be expected that his methodological discussion of concepts would deal with the ones most familiar to him. Second; there was a widespread acceptance that the theoretical scheme of economics, with its abstract and general concepts, represented the most sophisticated form of scientific analysis available at that time for the study of human conduct.

These concepts are central to an appreciation of Weber's methodological analysis of the study of historico-cultural reality, but in view of the confusion and lack of clarity over the nature and purpose of these concepts which exists in the secondary literature¹⁶⁶, it is necessary to consider his account of them exhaustively.

Perhaps Weber's best known characterization of an ideal type concept is the example of the 'idea' of the commodity market.

"It offers us an ideal picture of events on the commodity market under conditions of a society organized on the principles of an exchange economy, free competition and rigorously rational conduct. This conceptual pattern brings together certain relationships and events of historical life into a complex, which is conceived as an internally consistent system. Substantively this concept in itself is like a utopia which has been arrived at by the analytical accentuation of certain elements of reality. Its relationship to the empirical data consists solely in the fact that where market-conditioned relationships of the type referred to by the abstract construct are discovered or suspected to exist in reality to some extent, we can make the characteristic features of this relationship pragmatically clear and understandable by reference to an ideal type." 167

These concepts are utopian not because they are based upon the selection of elements taken from concrete reality - although the construction of an historical individual based upon the essential facts for a particular point of view, may be the first stage in the construction of an ideal type - but precisely because they involve the accentuation of the elements selected from reality. Continuing the reference to the exchange economy, Weber argues, therefore, that the ideal type

"...is not a description of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description...It is thus the 'idea' of the historically given modern society". 168

However, according to Weber, ideal type concepts have frequently been seen to have a descriptive function and the result has been a confusion of the strict logical difference between the content of an ideal type and the content of empirical reality. In particular, it was suggested that ideal types represent the 'essence' of concrete reality or that the ideas which the concepts express constitute the driving force behind history. Weber argues that a good deal of this problem can be explained by the need to include illustrative empirical material in ideal types in order to make the accentuated meaning as clear and relevant to the particular research task as possible. Moreover, the potential mixture of history and theoretical concepts is most likely to occur when ideal type developmental sequences are formulated.¹⁶⁹

It is a fundamental presupposition of Weber's approach that all knowledge of individual concrete socio-cultural phenomena is knowledge based upon particular points of view or values which represent the arbitrary starting points of the inquiries. Hence the "reality" from which the ideal type is developed by a process of accentuation and synthesis of traits is already a value-relevantly conditioned selection from the potentially almost infinite amount of information available. Ideal type concepts therefore do not escape the limitations which have already been referred to in the case of the construction of historical individuals in accordance with relevance to a particular value. Consequently, Weber argues, when an ideal type of capitalistic culture is being constructed - and it is important to note that Weber does not refer to the one ideal type of this phenomenon - we

".., accentuate certain individual concretely diverse traits of modern material and intellectual culture in its unique aspects into an ideal construct which from our point of view would be completely self-consistent. This would then be the delineation of an 'idea' of capitalistic culture". 170

However, the diversity of points of view or values which can form the starting point for particular inquiries means that a corresponding diversity of different "utopias" representing different "ideas" of capitalistic culture can be formed and none of them could be observed in empirical reality. However,

"Each of these can claim to be a representation of the 'idea' of capitalistic culture to the extent that it really has taken certain traits, meaningful in their essential features, from the empirical reality of our culture and brought them together into a unified ideal-construct. For those phenomena which interest us as cultural phenomena are interesting" to us with respect to very different kinds of evaluative ideas to which we relate them... In as much as the 'points of view' from which they can become significant for us are very diverse, the most varied criteria can be applied to the selection of the traits which are to enter into the construction of an ideal type view of a particular culture". 171

In addition to the variety of standpoints within a society at any one time Weber also recognizes that the guiding value ideas change with time, consequently, there can be no "definitive historical concepts."¹⁷², all ideal types are transitory and will inevitably be replaced by new ones. In the cultural sciences there is Weber argues, a "... perpetual reconstruction of those concepts through which we seek to comprehend reality."¹⁷³ But for Weber it is precisely because the content of these concepts is transitory that the need to achieve clear and precise concepts is increased. Indeed, it is only in this way that the specific value relevant significance of a socio-cultural phenomenon can be established.¹⁷⁴

Weber is equally insistent that the 'ideal' nature of the ideal type refers to a perfection of a logical, not an ethical, kind and does not involve any evaluative judgements.¹⁷⁵ Moreover the concepts are formulated in a particular way,

"it is a matter ... of constructing relationships which our imagination accepts as plausibly motivated and hence as 'objectively possible' and which appear as adequate from the nomological standpoint." 176

In other words, the usefulness of the utopian construct is to be judged in terms of objective possibility - our knowledge of what generally occurs in particular kinds of relationship. The significance of this, of course, is that the construction of ideal types, even of a particular historical phenomenon, cannot proceed in isolation from some generalizing activity.¹⁷⁷

Given that Weber regarded ideal types as clear and precise concepts expressing the characteristic 'idea' of a particular phenomenon, the question to be asked now is, How are they used in empirical research? For Weber the role of these genetic and historically oriented concepts follows from the fact that they have,

".. the significance of a purely ideal limiting concept with which the real situation is compared and surveyed for the explication of certain of its significant components." 178

Indeed, Weber argues, their usefulness to science is to be judged solely in terms of their,

"..success in revealing concrete cultural phenomena in their interdependence, their causal conditions and their significance. The construction of abstract ideal types recommends itself not as an end but as a means." 179

Ideal types then are constructed as an aid in the testing of hypotheses and the selection from those causes which are possible, in terms of nomological knowledge, the cause of the specific historial event.¹⁸⁰

Finally, let us briefly examine Weber's views on the difficulties associated with the attempt to explain actions in terms of ideals which are current in a particular society, a problem of direct relevance to his study of the effect of the Protestant Ethic upon economic life. Weber insists upon a clear logical distinction between the ideas which govern peoples' actions and the selection of elements drawn from the empirical world from which the corresponding ideal type is constructed. According to Weber, the

"... 'ideas' which govern the behaviour of the population of a certain epoch i.e., which are concretely influential in determining their conduct, can ... be formulated precisely only in the form of an ideal type, since empirically it exists in the minds of an indefinite and constantly changing mass of individuals and assumes in their minds the most multifarious nuances of form and content, clarity and meaning." 181

Only through ideal types can the religious beliefs of diverse groups of people, at a certain time in the middle ages, be included within coherent concepts because the ideas and values which people had about spiritual affairs - assuming of course that in its complete particularity and diversity it were still accessible to us - would inevitably be "... a chaos of infinitely differentiated and highly contradictory complexes of ideas and feelings."¹⁸²

For this reason, Weber argues, we construct an abstract, utopian and analytic construct which is,

"... a combination of articles of faith, norms from church law and custom, maxims of conduct, and countless concrete interrelationships which we have fused into an 'idea'. It is a synthesis which we could not succeed in attaining with consistency without the application of ideal type concepts." 183

However, he cautions, it is necessary to remember that despite the logical coherence of an ideal type presentation of ideas "... empirical-historical events occurring in men's minds must be understood as primarily psychologically and not logically conditioned."¹⁸⁴ Of course, it is only to be expected, given the various tasks required of concepts and the diversity of empirical phenomena, that the number of different kinds of relationship between concrete reality and the ideas of it that are presented in a logically consistent way are potentially large. The relationship is straightforward in those cases where a set of ideas based upon a limited number of principles is the object of conceptualization but the character of the synthesis of a set of ideas which are diffuse, inconsistently developed, and lack an integrated set of principles, is much more obviously ideal typical and a product of our own creativity.¹⁸⁵

In view of the length and detailed nature of our examination of Weber's methodological ideas on the character of the historico-cultural sciences it will be useful, at this point, to summarize the main themes of his essays published between 1903 and 1907.

Weber argued, in a manner very similar to Rickert, that scientific reasoning could be divided into two logically opposed methodological strategies. The nomological sciences sought to formulate laws of unqualified generality and the sciences of concrete reality attempted to know phenomena in their uniqueness. Indeed it was because of the logical opposition of these two methods that Weber rejected the possibility of ever deducing the character of particular phenomena from the conjunction of abstract concepts. According to Weber, the only reason why this form of deduction

appeared possible in astronomy was because its subject matter had been quantified in a manner unrivalled by any other empirical science. In this Weber is in full agreement with Rickert and his principle of the "heterogeneous continuum" of reality. Whilst it is possible, in logic, to distinguish between these two contrasting methods in practice almost all the sciences use a mixture of the two. The combination of the different methods in particular sciences is not, for Weber, to be explained in terms of the intrinsic properties of empirical phenomena which determine the use of one kind of method rather than the other. For Weber, it is the nature of the socially approved goals, set for each discipline, which determines the use of specific methods. The close relationship between the discipline's goals and its subject matter can be seen, for example, in the case of the socio-cultural sciences which deal with the understandable actions of individual people. Such understanding, Weber argues, is not achieved through the application of nomological methods but requires an entirely new procedure, a systematically controlled form of empathy.

As a result of the fact that people act in pursuit of values and interests, and in so doing create institutions and traditions embodying these values, a knowledge of these phenomena in their uniqueness becomes a goal for us. According to Weber, the basic epistemological problem confronting the realizations of such a goal is this;

".. how in general is the attribution of a concrete effect to an individual 'cause' possible and realizable in principle in view of the fact that in truth an infinity of causal factors have conditioned the occurrence of the individual 'event' and that indeed absolutely all of those individual causal factors were indispensable for the occurrence of the effect in its concrete form." 186

This problem of a starting point is solved, Weber argues, by our value conditioned interests which provide the criteria for distinguishing between those features of a particular phenomenon which are essential to its conceptualization as a unique event, and those which are not. In this way a historical individual - a unique synthesis of data - is constructed which becomes the entirely practicable and realizable object of a causal explanation. It is quite fundamental to Weber's approach that knowledge of a historico-cultural phenomenon in its individuality is only possible as a result of selection. The attempt to achieve a complete causal explanation of such a phenomenon, conceptualized from all points of view, is epistemologically misconceived because it presupposes, as its aim, the reproduction of empirical reality.¹⁸⁷ However, it is equally fundamental to Weber that, although the value conditioned starting point of individual causal explanation involves a degree of arbitrariness, the discovery of causes can attain the same level of objectivity as natural scientific work because causal imputation is governed by a set of rules quite independent of values and points of view.

Weber's analysis of the substance of the historico-cultural sciences emphasises that the understanding of the meaning of social actions can proceed in two rather different ways; on the one hand, an observer can understand what is spoken by an actor and on the other, an observer can understand the speaker - the motivation for a particular action. But the understanding of a persons motivation is beset by problems. According to Weber, empathy and sympathetic re-experiencing do not lead to the re-creation of another person's experience and motivation but merely to what we imagine their meaning

to have been. Consequently, an observer can only gain knowledge of another person's motivation through the selection and synthesis of the available information, in other words, through the formation of concepts. In the majority of cases, therefore, such understanding remains hypothetical, and it is very much in the context of these problems that Weber developed the ideal type concepts which had as their goal the depiction of courses of action with the highest level of clarity and precision possible. Such concepts are ideal because of their clarity and precision, properties which may not have been present in the mind of the relevant actors whose meaning, anyway, may not have been very accessible to the observer. For Weber, it is only by accentuating reality, the disparate beliefs, viewpoints and interests of various individual actors, that is possible to achieve unambiguous concepts which are, of course, a prerequisite for communicable scientific research. But for Weber these concepts do not represent knowledge because they are based upon a value-relevant selection from empirical reality which is then accentuated to achieve a degree of logical coherence unlikely to be found anywhere in empirical reality. Consequently, for Weber, ideal type concepts are an aid to be utilized in the discovery of historico-cultural knowledge.

II

WEBER: THE NATURE OF SOCIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

In the first part of the chapter the attempt was made to present a coherent picture of Weber's methodology of the historico-cultural sciences based upon his work published between 1903 and 1907 which is now available in English. In this, the second part of the chapter we turn our attention to Weber's much briefer methodological discussion of sociological categories which constitute the opening section of the first chapter of Economy and Society. Given the interpretations of Weber's Theory of Action by Parsons and Schutz, who emphasize that this immense study represents a culmination of both Weber's analyses of social life and his reflections upon the nature of sociology, our interest is focussed upon the alleged differences between his early and late positions. In the case of Parsons' interpretation, it is explicitly stated that Economy and Society represents a move by Weber toward the acceptance of a general theoretical system and, therefore, a rejection of some of the methodological views expressed in his earlier analyses of historico-cultural knowledge. In the case of Schutz's interpretation, the concentration upon the categories of interpretive sociology is based upon a similar belief that Weber had moved from an early concern with the nature of historical inquiry to a final interest in sociology - a developmental perspective which had major implications for Schutz's appreciation of the nature of interpretive sociology.

(a) Action and Subjective Meaning

One of the most distinctive features of Weber's conception of sociology is that social reality is understandable in a sense quite distinct from the way in which natural science makes nature intelligible to us; he defines sociology as

"... a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences. We shall speak of 'action' in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behaviour - be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is 'social' in so far as its subjective meaning takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course." 188

However, Weber argues that in practice it is not always possible to distinguish between meaningful action and 'reactive behaviour', a form of conduct which lacks subjective meaning. Consequently, the interpretation of action must face the problem that "... understandable and non-understandable components of a process are often intermingled and bound up together."¹⁸⁹ Although understanding the subjective meaning of action is the keynote of Weber's definition of sociology he is very well aware that the interpretation of a course of action must take account of many phenomena which lack subjective meaning in themselves but which, nevertheless, constitute the conditions of action.¹⁹⁰

According to Weber, therefore, sociology as the study of the subjectively understandable orientation of conduct can only take as its object of study the actions of one or more individual people. Although, it is sometimes necessary for legal or practical purposes to consider organizations and institutions as if they were individual actors, in sociology it is vital to avoid the connotation of an acting "collective entity". Weber continues,

"... for the subjective interpretation of action in sociological work these collectivities must be treated as solely the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons, since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action." 191

Whilst such collective concepts may be analyzed in terms of their functional relationships with other aspects of society, for Weber, this is merely a preliminary step in sociological inquiry.¹⁹²

Placing the understandability of action at the centre of attention, Weber argues that in history and sociology,

"We can accomplish something which is never attainable in the natural sciences, namely the subjective understanding of the action of the component individuals. The natural sciences on the other hand cannot do this, being limited to the formulation of causal uniformities in objects and events, and the explanation of individual facts by applying them. We do not 'understand' the behaviour of cells, but can only observe the relevant functional relationships and generalize on the basis of these observations. This additional achievement of explanation by interpretive understanding, as distinguished from external observation, is of course attained only at a price - the more hypothetical and fragmentary character of its results. Nevertheless, subjective understanding is the specific characteristic of sociological knowledge." 193

(b) Understanding, Interpretation and Explanation

In a prefatory note to the conceptual exposition,¹⁹⁴

Weber refers to the discussion of understanding by Jaspers and a brief examination of his main arguments undoubtedly serves to clarify Weber's assumptions about the character of understanding and the implications this raises for sociological reasoning,

Jaspers distinguishes between two quite separate methods for gaining knowledge of psychic life.¹⁹⁵ On the one hand, it is possible to formulate causal explanations which are based upon the discovery that in reality a certain number of phenomena are regularly

linked together, whereas on the other, through empathy it is possible to understand how one psychic event develops from another.

"Attacked people become angry and spring to the defence, cheated persons grow suspicious. The way in which such an emergence takes place is understood by us, our understanding is genetic." 196

In elaborating the procedures for understanding meaningful connections Jaspers states that the evidence

"... for genetic understanding is always something ultimate. When Nietzsche shows how an awareness of one's weakness, wretchedness and suffering gives rise to moral demands and religions of redemption, because in this roundabout way the psyche can gratify its will to power in spite of its weakness, we experience the force of the argument and are convinced. It strikes us as something self-evident which cannot be broken down any further. The psychology of meaningful phenomena is built up entirely on this sort of convincing experience of impersonal, independent and understandable connections. Such conviction is gained on the occasion of confronting human personality; it is not acquired inductively through repetition of experience." 197

However, the self-evidentness of a meaningful connection does not, on its own, prove in a specific case that the connection is responsible for the development or event in question. He argues that in Nietzsche's example although a general ideally typical understandable connection is established between weakness and morality its application to the individual case, in other words, the origin of Christianity, may be incorrect. For any specific phenomenon, the correctness of a meaningful connection must be determined through reference to the facts of the situation as well as the self-evident character of what has been understood. But in many cases the facts of the situation — people's actions, gestures, statements, as well as the cultural traditions within which these take place — may not be fully known with the result that our understanding of the particular event remains only an interpretation.

In addition to this kind of empathic understanding Jaspers also refers to rational understanding. Thoughts and propositions may be understandable because they have been developed in accordance with certain logical rules and in such a case it is a simple matter of the rational understanding of deductions from a set of assumptions. In this way Jaspers argues we can understand what is said or written, but when we attempt to understand how thoughts and ideas arise from a person's aims, fears, or moods, it is a question of empathy and the genetic understanding of the speaker.¹⁹⁸ Jaspers is very much aware of the limitations of understanding based purely upon the self-evidentness of a meaningful connection: a particular connection may be convincing to us but it remains a hypothesis in need of testing because a number of interpretations may be equally understandable.

Weber's discussion of these issues in Economy and Society closely follows the points emphasized by Jaspers. For Weber, the meanings with which sociology deals can be of two kinds: firstly, the actual meaning of an action to a particular actor, or the average and approximate meaning for several actors; secondly, the theoretically conceived pure type of meaning for a hypothetical actor or actors in a certain type of situation.¹⁹⁹ According to Weber, there are two quite different bases according to which the sociologist can become convinced that meaning has been correctly understood; on the one hand, there is rational understanding which can be further subdivided into logical and mathematical kinds, and on the other, emotionally empathic or artistically appreciative. Action is rationally evident, Weber argues, primarily.

"... when we attain a completely clear intellectual grasp of the action elements in their intended context of meaning, Empathic or appreciative accuracy is attained when, through sympathetic participation, we can adequately grasp the emotional context in which the action took place." 200

For Weber, the highest degree of certainty that the meaning of an action has been correctly understood occurs in those situations where an individual attempts to achieve an end by selecting means which, in terms of general knowledge derived from experience, are appropriate for the attainment of the end. A similar degree of understanding is possible with logical and mathematical propositions because their meaning is precise and intelligible.

"With a lower degree of certainty, which is, however, adequate for most purposes of explanation, we are able to understand errors including confusions of problems of the sort that we ourselves are liable to, or the origin of which we can detect by sympathetic self-analysis." 201

A further complication arises, Weber argues, in the case of action oriented towards values which are very different from our own and whilst we may be able to comprehend such values and their associated actions intellectually such phenomena constitute a serious limitation for our capacity to comprehend actions motivated by these values.²⁰² However,

"The more we ourselves are susceptible to such emotional reactions as anxiety, anger, ambition, envy, jealousy, love, enthusiasm ... and appetites of all sorts, and to the 'irrational' conduct which grows out of them, the more readily can we empathize with them." 203

According to Weber, in the analysis of empirical actions and the identification of causally important factors in the development of a particular phenomenon, it is very useful to formulate purely rational types of action.

"The construction of a purely rational course of action in such cases serves the sociologist as a type (ideal type) which has the merit of clear understandability and lack of ambiguity. By comparison with this it is possible to understand the ways in which actual action is influenced by irrational factors of all sorts, such as affects and errors, in that they account for the derivation from the line of conduct which would be expected on the hypothesis that the action were purely rational." 204

The problematic and hypothetical character of the understanding of someone else's actions can be seen to lie behind Weber's distinction between observational and motivational understanding. The distinction serves to emphasise the difficulties involved in progressing from a superficial observational understanding of both rational acts (shutting a door and chopping wood) and irrational emotional reactions (an outburst of anger "... manifested by facial expression, exclamations or irrational movements..."²⁰⁵) to a more secure explanatory understanding which is attained when we understand "... what makes (the person) do this at precisely this moment and in these circumstances".²⁰⁶ Explanatory understanding is possible of both rational and irrational courses of action and is achieved when

"... the particular act has been placed in an understandable sequence of motivation, the understanding of which can be treated as an explanation of the actual course of behaviour." 207

Indeed Weber reserves the term "intended meaning" for the subjective meaning of an action which can be placed within such an interpretive framework, irrespective of whether the action is rational or not.²⁰⁸

Weber argues that whilst all attempts at understanding attempt to achieve certainty so long as the interpretation depends exclusively upon the self-evidentness of a meaningful connection it cannot be regarded as a causal explanation, but remains merely a

possibility. Weber states in some detail the reasons for this view.

"In the first place the 'conscious motives' may well, even to the actor himself, conceal the various 'motives' and 'repressions' which constitute the real driving force of his action. Thus in such cases even subjectively honest self-analysis has only a relative value ... Secondly, processes of action which seem to an observer to be the same or similar may fit into exceedingly various complexes of motive in the case of the actual actor. Then even though the situations appear superficially to be very similar we must actually understand them or interpret them as very different, perhaps, in terms of meaning, directly opposed ... Third, the actors in any given situation are often subject to opposing and conflicting impulses, all of which we are able to understand. In a large number of cases we know from experience it is not possible to arrive at even an approximate estimate of the relative strength of conflicting motives and very often we cannot be certain of our interpretation. Only the actual outcome of the conflict gives a solid basis of judgement." 209

Consequently, it is necessary to examine historical and contemporary processes, which are as similar as possible to the one being studied with the exception of the motive, in order to test the various plausible motives. But Weber argues, there are considerable problems involved in finding suitable comparative examples and often the sociologist must resort to imaginary experiments and inevitably hypothetical results.

It is for this reason that Weber contrasts the meaningful and the causal adequacy of an interpretation of a course of action. Adequacy on the level of meaning is achieved when an interpretation of a coherent course of action is

"... subjectively adequate ... in so far as, according to our habitual modes of thought and feeling, its component parts taken in their mutual relation are recognized to constitute a 'typical' complex of meaning." 210

An interpretation is causally adequate when there is a probability in terms of empirical generalizations drawn from experience, that

the action will always occur in that particular way. Hence sociology's specific contribution to social scientific knowledge as distinct from that of history, is as follows:

"A correct causal interpretation of a concrete course of action is arrived at when the overt action and the motives have both been correctly apprehended and at the same time their relation has become meaningfully comprehensible. A correct causal interpretation of typical actions means that the process which is claimed to be typical is shown to be both adequately grasped on the level of meaning and at the same time the interpretation is to some degree causally adequate." 211

But, Weber argues, for both historical and sociological explanation, without adequacy on the level of meaning a uniform process remains an incomprehensible statistical probability and without evidence that a process usually takes place in a certain way a meaningfully adequate interpretation has no causal significance.²¹²

The particular character of sociology is a result, Weber argues, of the attempt

"... to formulate type concepts and generalized uniformities of empirical process. This distinguishes it from history, which is oriented to the causal analysis and explanation of individual actions, structures and personalities possessing cultural significance. The empirical material which underlies the concepts of sociology consists to a very large extent, though by no means exclusively of the same concrete processes of action which are dealt with by historians. An important consideration in the formulation of sociological concepts and generalizations is the contribution that sociology can make to the causal explanation of some historically and culturally important phenomenon. As in the case of every generalizing science the abstract character of the concepts of sociology is responsible for the fact that, compared with actual historical reality, they are relatively lacking in fullness of concrete content. To compensate for this advantage, sociological analysis can offer a greater precision of concepts. This precision is obtained by striving for the highest possible degree of adequacy on the level of meaning ... In all cases, rational or irrational, sociological analysis both abstracts from reality and at the same time helps us to understand it, in that it shows with what degree of approximation a concrete historical phenomenon can be subsumed under one or more of these concepts." 213

Weber was well aware that the attempt to give precise meaning to ideal type concepts formulating courses of action which were fully adequate at the level of meaning inevitably led in the direction of a form of logical perfection which served to increase the distance between the ideal type concept and real phenomena. In addition such concepts are ideal in relation to the subjective processes of the individual actor because the formulation of concepts which are completely adequate at the level of meaning proceeds on the basis of the assumption that the actor is explicitly aware of the subjective meaning of the action. Yet Weber argues,

"The ideal type of meaningful action where the meaning is fully conscious and explicit is a marginal case. Every sociological or historical investigation, in applying its analysis to the empirical facts, must take this fact into account. But the difficulty need not prevent the sociologist from systematizing his concepts by the classification of possible types of subjective meaning." 214

Our review of Weber's outline of the character of interpretive sociology²¹⁵ reveals a great deal of consistency between this and the theoretical and methodological views stated in the period 1903-1907. The only evidence of a change of thinking lies in his explicit distinction between history and sociology but this change in terminology can be interpreted in different ways. For Parsons and Schutz it symbolized the gradual movement away from history to the recognition of sociology as a generalizing science of social action and, in particular, for Parsons it represented a transcending of the idealist legacy of Weber's earlier work, with its reliance upon the concept of value-relevance, the distinction between natural and cultural science, and the emphasis upon disparate ideal types in opposition to the use of a general theoretical system. But it can also be argued, and with far more justification, that Weber's

views on the relationship between history and sociology remained basically unchanged after his illness and exhibit a fundamental continuity of approach to the methodology of the cultural sciences - a concept broad enough to include generalizing sciences and sciences of concrete reality.²¹⁶ The evidence for this viewpoint will be examined in the third part of the chapter in terms of Weber's historical and comparative studies of the world religions and his use of ideal type concepts but, before moving on to these issues, it will be useful to precisely establish the continuity of Weber's theoretical and methodological statements about sociology in Economy and Society and his discussion of the nature of historico-cultural science in his earlier work.²¹⁷

There are five main features of Weber's discussion of interpretive sociology which are either identical or very similar, to his earlier formulations, together with several additional points which are more detailed developments of arguments implicit in the essays on the methodology of the historico-cultural sciences. Taking, in each case, the views advanced in Economy and Society first, they are:

- 1) The subject matter of sociology is the understandable motivations of individual actors, or groups of actors. This understandability constitutes the distinctive feature of the subject matter and distinguishes it from natural phenomena which are studied by disciplines attempting to formulate causal uniformities and, thereby, explain individual events in these terms. In addition, natural phenomena cannot be understood in the manner of the subjective meaning of peoples' actions. This perspective is fundamental to Weber's early and late statements about the nature of

the historico-cultural sciences and sociology.²¹⁸ In Economy and Society we find two new formulations which are entirely consistent with the earlier assumptions, namely: the argument which regards functionalist analysis as a preliminary method before the attempt at causal explanation, and the distinction between four types of action. For Weber end-rational and value-rational action are fully understandable whereas traditional and affectual action represent the margins of the subjectively understandable.

2) Weber's distinction between two different ways in which we become convinced of our understanding of a meaningful connection, namely the rational and the emotionally empathic, is closely related to his earlier distinction between understanding what is spoken and understanding the speaker.²¹⁹

3) In the systematization of concepts which deal with subjectively meaningful phenomena Weber distinguishes between, on the one hand, the actual meaning of an action to the actor or the average meaning to a group of actors, and on the other, the pure type of theoretically conceived meaning. This distinction between an actual and a pure type of meaning was equally intrinsic to Weber's discussions in the period 1903-1907.²²⁰

4) Weber's recommendation of the use of rational ideal types as an important aid in the understanding of a course of social action is identical to his earlier position.²²¹

5) His distinction between observational and motivational understanding and between meaningful and causal adequacy can be seen, in terms of the early recognition of the problems inherent in the understandability of self-evidently meaningful connections, as the development of procedures to minimize the risks of

misunderstanding the subjective meaning of particular courses of action.²²²

Whilst this examination clearly demonstrates a most important level of consistency in Weber's thinking at these two points in his career, it does not conclusively establish the unity of his views on the relationship between the historico-cultural sciences and sociology because the issues raised in Economy and Society are only a selection of the points discussed in his very extensive early methodological essays. In particular, in the statement of the nature of interpretive sociology Weber does not explicitly refer to value-relevance, value judgement, or objectivity, and these topics are clearly very important to the question of the unity of his work. To discover Weber's views on these issues towards the end of his life we must consider his substantive researches together with some brief methodological formulations. This is the task of the next part of the chapter which begins with the attempt to place Economy and Society in the context of Weber's contribution to sociology.

III THE UNITY OF WEBER'S THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL VIEWS (1903-1920)

It is important to begin by confronting the issue of the chronology of Weber's later works: from Schutz and Parsons to Bendix and more recently Roth²²³ it has been generally assumed that Economy and Society represented Weber's principal work. This, of course, suited Parsons' view of Weber gradually moving to a "modern" conception of the scientific study of action because the general definitional ideal types appeared to be much more "theoretical" than his historical and comparative researches. However the fact that the book was published posthumously in 1922, and was unfinished at Weber's death, does not necessarily mean that it contained a new level of thinking about a theoretical and generalizing study of social action. Indeed, whilst it has been widely known that part two of Economy and Society was written between 1911 and 1913²²⁴ under the projected title of "The Economy and the Normative and De Facto Powers", and uses the terminology of Weber's essay "Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology" published in 1913,²²⁵ and that only part one was written or substantially revised between 1918 and 1920,²²⁶ the significance of this time-scale has only recently been identified by Tenbruck.²²⁷ In the intervening period Weber produced his series of essays on the economic ethics of the world religions. They were as follows: the "Introduction" ("The Social Psychology of the World Religions"), the studies of Confucianism and Taoism, the "Intermediate Reflections" ("Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions") which were all published in 1915; the studies of Hinduism and Buddhism published in 1916 and 1917; the study of ancient Judaism published between 1917 and 1919; and the "Author's Introduction" to the Collected

Essays in the Sociology of Religion. In addition to the above mentioned studies, this collection includes a revised and enlarged version of 1906 essay "The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism" and a brief, but highly significant, insertion into the 1904 essay "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" and, Tenbruck suggests, both of these changes were made in 1920 in order to make them more consistent and, therefore, more relevant to the later studies.²²⁸

Consequently, to consider the two parts of Economy and Society as a new stage in Weber's thinking given that it sandwiches the historico-comparative researches in the sociology of religion under the guiding theme of rationalization and the disenchantment of the world, which are clearly developed from Weber's earlier inquiries into the distinctively Western spirit of capitalism and unambiguously utilize a methodological approach stated in the essays of 1903 to 1907, requires some extraordinarily persuasive arguments. However, the justification for such an interpretation is not compelling; it involves two elements, first Marianne Weber's assessment of the place of Economy and Society in her husband's work which did not take into account his projected studies²²⁹ and, second, Parsons' prior commitment to abstract systems of theory, following the model of economics, led him to see in Weber's abstract definitions a legitimation for his own views on the nature of a scientific study of social action. Nevertheless, these interpretations have been very effective and this has led to the view that there is a discrepancy between Weber's discussions of methodology, his substantive researches, and his typologies based upon an alleged theoretical system which represent his really important contribution to sociology.

In direct contrast Tenbruck argues, in a discussion of the unity of Economy and Society itself, that the study

"... can only be understood if one continually bears in mind that sociology cannot be and ought not to be enclosed within a system of concepts ... This gives rise to the doubt whether one ought to explain Economy and Society exclusively as the principal work of an author who on his side regarded the sociological instrumentarium as a means to the end of knowledge of historical reality and, above all, historical causes." 230

For Tenbruck, it is Weber's essays on the economic ethics of the world religions, which were hurriedly serialized between 1915 and 1919 together with the "Author's Introduction" (1920) and the revisions to the two early essays on Protestantism which represent, despite some imperfections,

"... the cohesive report ... on the findings obtained from the preceeding major studies on universal history ... the work in which Weber laboured most persistently, in which he felt free to define his own problems and issues, and in which he finally attained a degree of resolution of his studies." 231

Unfortunately there has not been sufficient attention devoted to the chronological development of Weber's historical and comparative studies which began in 1904 with the publication of "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" and ended in 1919 with the publication of the final part of "Ancient Judaism", and the result has been a great deal of unnecessary confusion.²³²

In the process of conducting his inquiries, Weber's objective gradually widened from the explanation of the origin of the "spirit" of economic activity in the Western world to the more inclusive context of the disenchantment of the world based upon a particular kind of logic - the "... irresistible drive towards the rationalization of religious ideas."²³³

According to Tenbruck the extent of this change is demonstrated by Weber's insertion of the following sentence

into his original 1904 essay on the Protestant Ethic - an essay which dealt exclusively with the historical relationships between religious doctrine and the "spirit" of modern western capitalism:

"That great religious historical process of disenchantment of the world, which disavows all magical ways to salvation as a superstition and sacrilege, found its conclusion here." 234

Clearly Weber was not in a position in 1904 to identify the significance of the Protestant Ethic for world-historical developments and could only make this statement as a conclusion to his comparative studies of the economic ethics of the world religions. The same perspective is to be found in his "Author's Introduction" but it is a matter of regret that the significant widening of Weber's problem was not appreciated until quite recently.²³⁵

Tenbruck's analysis has served to bring the substantive studies back to the centre of attention and this has immediate consequences for our appreciation of Weber's conception of sociology. Weber defined the goal of sociology as the formulation of "type concepts and generalized uniformities of empirical process"²³⁶ and whilst Parsons and Schutz emphasised the construction of ideal types of actions, the other objective remained relatively obscure.²³⁷ However, once the view of disunity in Weber's work is rejected the notion of "generalized uniformities of empirical process" acquires a distinct meaning in terms of the generalizations Weber drew from his studies of the economic ethics of the world religions and it is the statements contained in the "Introduction", "Intermediate Reflections", and "Author's Introduction", which represent for Tenbruck the "... summa of Weber's inquiry into the processes of rationality..."²³⁸

The most important of these sociological generalizations is made by Weber in the context of the different forms which can be taken by the idea of redemption:

"Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest." 239

According to Tenbruck this means that historical events are not determined by the

"... power of ideas through their persistence but the dynamic of their own logic makes them the switchmen in history. Certain ideas under the compulsion of an inner logic develop their rational consequences and thereby effect universal-historical processes." 240

Although we have rejected the idea of disjunction in Weber's work on the basis of an analysis of his discussions of the understandability of social action and the nature of the procedures to be used in its investigation, together with Tenbruck's investigation of the significance of particular studies within the overall context of Weber's later work, there remain two issues yet to be clarified which can help to establish even more securely the idea of a fundamental continuity in his approach to the study of social action. In particular, Weber's thinking on value-relevance, value-judgement, and objectivity in his later work and the implication of his distinction between history and sociology need to be explored. These issues are examined in the following section in the context of Weber's most distinctive methodological innovation - the ideal type concept.

(a) Weber's Ideal Typical Conceptualization of Empirical Reality

Following Parsons' interpretation of Weber it was widely accepted that the ideal type was a concept developed specifically to deal with the problems of the historico-cultural sciences, in particular, the construction of "historical individuals" on the basis of a selection from the data available in empirical reality in accordance with relevance to a particular point of view or value. This is the methodology outlined in his essay "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy" and applied in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,²⁴¹ The implications of this methodology are that the descriptive representation of a phenomenon can never be the end of scientific research, but only a means to knowledge because such concepts are only useful and appropriate in terms of particular rather than universal values or points of view. Moreover, the provisional nature of such concepts is reinforced by the fact that as social values change over time different features of reality become of interest to us and result in the construction of new concepts to be used in the understanding of reality. The role of value-relevance in concept formation represents the involvement of an inevitably arbitrary element in the establishment of the object to be explained by the research which, nevertheless, can attain objectivity for the causal explanation of a value-relevant historical individual. According to Weber, therefore,

"In the empirical sciences ... the possibility of meaningful knowledge of what is essential for us in the infinite richness of events is bound up with the unrelenting application of viewpoints of a specifically particularized character, which, in the last analysis, are oriented on the basis of evaluative ideas. These evaluative ideas are for their part empirically discoverable and analyzable as elements of meaningful human conduct, but their validity can not be deduced from empirical data as such. The 'objectivity' of the social sciences depends rather on the fact that the empirical data are always related to those evaluative ideas which alone make them worth knowing and the significance of the empirical data is derived from these evaluative ideas. But these data can never become the foundation for the empirically impossible proof of the validity of the evaluative ideas." 242

This passage demonstrates how Weber sees knowledge of individual phenomena to be dependent upon evaluative ideas which give research a starting point from which objective explanations can be constructed, but the essential point is that value-relevance is entirely different to value-judgement. For Weber, value-judgement involves the evaluation of a phenomenon as good, bad, or indifferent.²⁴³ They cannot be avoided by making a compromise between different value-judgements or seeking to derive value standards from scientific analysis.²⁴⁴ There is, Weber argues, a clear logical distinction between the establishment of facts and their evaluation²⁴⁵, and without this separation science cannot exist; but he does not consider that an attitude of moral indifference is necessarily associated with the scientific attitude and the avoidance of value judgements.²⁴⁶ Weber's whole approach is based upon the axiom that values are necessarily involved in the study of socio-cultural phenomena and his thinking on this issue did not change even when he became more concerned with a generalizing form of research rather than, in the earlier part of his career, when he was involved rather more with the historical explanation of specific

events. In "The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality in Sociology and Economics"²⁴⁷ published in 1917 we find Weber continuing to emphasize the principle of value relevance.

"The problems of the empirical disciplines are ... to be solved 'non-evaluatively'. They are not problems of evaluation. But the problems of the social sciences are selected by the value relevance of the phenomena treated. Concerning the significance of the expression 'relevance to value' I refer to my earlier writings and above all to the works of Heinrich Rickert.... It should... be recalled that the expression 'relevance to values' refers simply to the philosophical interpretation of that specifically scientific 'interest' which determines the selection of a given subject matter and the problems of an empirical analysis.

In empirical investigation, no 'practical evaluations' are legitimated by this strictly logical fact. But together with historical experience, it shows that cultural (i.e. evaluative) interests give purely empirical scientific work its direction ... these evaluative interests can be made more explicit and differentiated by the analysis of value judgements. These considerably reduce ... the task of 'value-interpretation'." 248

Consequently, there is no justification for the viewpoint that whilst value-relevant concept formation is necessary for the attempt to gain knowledge of the individuality of phenomena once the generalizing procedure of sociology is adopted, then, these problems are automatically transcended because the selection of features for conceptualization is made on the basis of the formula - whatever is general to the class of phenomena is essential to their conceptualization.²⁴⁹ Sociology, for Weber, is not primarily concerned with the most abstract and general methods because its goal - knowledge of actions and events - is more likely to be furthered by the use of relatively general and relatively individual methods. Both Rickert and Weber agree that the most generalizing methods can only be used successfully upon "mass" sociological

phenomena, and they merely constitute part of the discipline's subject matter.²⁵⁰ Thus whilst Weber sees the goals of history and sociology to diverge he considers that their methodological practice exhibits major similarities. His views on the relationship between the two disciplines are neatly summarized in a letter to the historian von Below in 1914: history is concerned with the establishment of what is unique about, for example, the medieval city, but it is impossible to know what is unique to this phenomenon unless it can be compared with Islamic or Chinese cities.²⁵¹ According to Weber, therefore, history attempts to causally explain the unique features of actions and events which can only be identified with the help of sociology.

In a comment upon this comparative method which he used in The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations Weber argues that its objective is not the construction of general schemes of development based upon analogies with other phenomena. Rather, the goal is,

"... to identify and define the individuality of each development, the characteristics which made the one conclude in a manner so different from that of the other. This done, one can then determine the causes which led to these differences. It is also my assumption that an indispensable preliminary to such a comparative study would be the isolation and abstraction of the individual elements in each development, the study of these elements in the light of general rules drawn from experience, and finally, the formulation of clear concepts without these preliminary steps no causal relationships whatever can be established." 252

Weber's recognition that the uniqueness of a phenomenon could only be established through comparison is the reason for his reluctance, at the beginning of his essay on the relationship between the ethics of Protestantism and the Spirit of Capitalism, to start by presenting a definitive historical individual of this "spirit".

According to Weber, such a concept could only be formulated gradually, "the final and definitive concept cannot stand at the beginning of the investigation, but must come at the end."²⁵³

In contrast, sociological knowledge is based upon the individual causal explanations of history, presented in an abstract and general form, with the result that for Weber sociological and historical explanations are for practical purposes, inseparable: the explanation of an individual event presupposes a knowledge of the causes of other similar phenomena and a general or typical explanation presupposes a knowledge of particular causal sequences. This is the precise meaning of Weber's distinction in Economy and Society between history and sociology.²⁵⁴

Consequently, Weber's use towards the end of his career of the label of sociology for his work merely represents a more explicit acknowledgement of a division of labour of which he was fundamentally aware from the start of his examination of the particular causes of the spirit of modern western capitalism. The fact that it does not represent the discovery of some new method or goal for a different kind of generalizing activity in the socio-cultural sciences is highlighted in a letter he wrote in 1920 to Liefman, a critic of the emerging discipline of sociology, in which he states his reasons for accepting one of the first German chairs in Economics and Sociology.

"If I now happen to be a sociologist according to my appointment papers, then I become one in order to put an end to the mischievous enterprise which still operates with collectivist notions. In other words, sociology, too, can only be practiced by proceeding from the action of one or more, few or many, individuals, that means, by employing a strictly 'individualistic' method." 255

In the examination of Weber's use of concepts in the historico-cultural sciences and, more particularly, in sociology we have dealt with concepts which are used as part of a causal explanation. For such concepts the accuracy of their "fit" with empirical reality is, of course, at a premium but, according to Weber, they remain "ideal" as opposed to "real" for two reasons. First of all, on epistemological grounds such concepts are based upon a selection from the data available in empirical reality - a selection which can only aspire to be adequate in terms of relevance to a particular point of view or value and not to be objectively valid for all points of view.²⁵⁶ Secondly, such concepts are "ideal" because they represent the values and attitudes of many different people but they can only do this by presenting a coherent and consistent meaning which may be different from the motivations of particular actors.²⁵⁷ However, Weber's explicit discussions of the ideal type concentrates upon an additional element, which certainly is related to the problem of representing different people's meanings but which goes considerably further, namely: the intentional accentuation of reality in accordance with objective possibility in order to produce a pure type of meaning, a utopia.²⁵⁸ In his 1917 discussion "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics" Weber describes the purpose of the pure theoretical form of ideal type in exactly the same way he had in his earlier essay "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy".

"Its function is the comparison with empirical reality in order to establish its divergencies or similarities, to describe them with the most unambiguously intelligible concepts, and to understand and explain them causally,"²⁵⁹

The advantage of using rationally accentuated ideal types of motivational sequences lies in the fact that such concepts are precisely understandable, and this is a distinct advantage in the attempt to discover the causes, in terms of motivations, of a particular event. Moreover Weber's conception of the relationship between reality and the accentuated form of ideal type and, consequently, the status of these concepts as knowledge of empirical reality remains equally unchanged.²⁶⁰

"Theoretical constructions never do more than assist in the attainment of a knowledge of reality which they alone cannot provide, and which, as a result of the operation of other factors and complexes of motives which are not contained in their assumptions, even in the most extreme cases, only approximate to the hypothesized course of events." 261

Granted that the theoretically conceived pure type of meaning is used, as an aid in the understanding of empirical reality, the question which remains is this: Why are such concepts needed to help us understand social actions and events? Weber's answer is related to his distinction between two quite distinct forms of meaning which are used in sociology. According to Weber,

"'Meaning' may be of two kinds. The term may refer first to the actual existing meaning in the given concrete case of a particular actor, or to the average or approximate meaning attributable to a given plurality of actors; or secondly, to the theoretically conceived pure type of subjective meaning attributed to the hypothetical actor or actors in a given type of action." 262

This distinction in the types of meaning corresponds to the contrast Weber draws between explanations which are causally adequate and explanations which are adequate at the level of meaning and shows the consistency of his approach to the investigation of potentially self-evident meaningful connections. Weber's conception of scientific understanding avoids a reliance upon the intuition of the meaning

of particular relationships by emphasizing the hypothetical and heuristic nature of the pure types which can only be used as a means to the understanding of the empirical world.

Weber's explicit discussion of the ideal type is confined to the accentuating form of the concept and, undoubtedly, this is responsible for some of the confusions which have developed about them and, as a result of this, about the sort of conceptualization which is the goal of interpretive sociology. Indeed, as Aron suggests, the concept of ideal type is a generic name used by Weber to include all the different kinds of concept used in the study of social action.²⁶³ Thus it is necessary to refer, like Parsons, to the work of von Schelting whose identification of the logical basis of four different kinds of ideal type is summarized by Sahay:

"These are, if we take the individualizing forms first (1) the ideal type which makes the characteristics of a unique action or event explicit and (2) the ideal type which makes the ideas of an action clear and consistent.

Then, the generalizing forms of the ideal type, which are similarly distinct: (1) the ideal type which organizes correlated facts to allow imputation of a causal relationship between them; (2) the ideal type which conceptualizes the basic, general characteristics of a social action in its pure form." 264

This classification utilizes two separate bases of division, the distinction between individual and general and between causal and acausal & in the latter case the difference is between a conceptualization of an event or development as part of a causal sequence and the representation of a pure type of ideally meaningful action which can be abstracted from empirical reality.²⁶⁵ Acausal ideal types are used, therefore, to conceptualize the motivation for a course of action which is completely adequate at the level of

meaning, in other words, they represent

"... the subjective interpretation of a coherent course of conduct when and in so far as, according to our habitual modes of thought and feeling, its component parts taken in their mutual relation are recognized to constitute a 'typical' complex of meaning." 266

Such a conceptualization represents an explanation which is completely plausible in terms of our general understanding of social life; it is possible to imagine someone acting in this way even though there may not be any evidence to show that the plausible but hypothetical motive was effective in the case of a particular empirical action or event. To go beyond these limitations it is necessary, Weber argues, to formulate an interpretation which is causally adequate. This requires the demonstration of a probability, in terms of general empirical rules, that the action regarded as meaningfully adequate always occurs in that particular way.

How Weber proposes to achieve this can best be seen from a detailed examination of the role of each of the four ideal type concepts. The actual meaning for a particular individual, or the average meaning for a group of people, is represented by the individual causal ideal type - also called the historical individual. This is a value-relevant description of a course of action including both overt behaviour and subjective meaning which establishes the problem to be causally explained.²⁶⁷ However, Weber's use of the concept "actual meaning" requires some comment. He is very well aware that enormous difficulties surround the attempt to gain knowledge of the subjective meaning of another person's actions. The best that can be hoped for is an approximation to such a meaning achieved through the use of means-ends analysis of material gained

from a variety of sources. For a nominalist like Weber the concept of "actual meaning" can have no other implication.²⁶⁸ The other individual ideal type does not face these difficulties because it is acausal in character. An example taken from the "Introduction" ("Social Psychology of the World Religions") to his series of essays on the economic ethics of the world religions may serve to clarify the nature of such a concept. Weber, discussing the various types of rationalization process, comments:

"...the author must take the liberty of being 'unhistorical', in the sense that the ethics of individual religions are presented systematically and essentially in greater unity than has ever been the case in the flux of their actual development... the features that to the author are important must often be presented in greater logical consistency and less historical development than was actually the case." 269

Bearing in mind that limitations are set by the concept of objective possibility²⁷⁰ in the formulation of a rationally systematized "idea" of a particular set of values, and that only purely logical consequences for the actions of believers in such ethics can be drawn²⁷¹ Weber, nevertheless, found these concepts indispensable for identifying meaningfully adequate, but hypothetical, explanations. The next step in causal explanation involves the comparative analysis of these hypothetical explanations which, as Sahay has shown, requires an experimental framework,²⁷² or more precisely, a norm of comparison.²⁷³ Weber makes this point when he clarifies what is compared in the studies of the economic ethics of the world religions.

"The features of religions that are important for economic ethics shall interest us primarily from a definitive point of view; we shall be interested in the way in which they are related to economic rationalism." 274

Nothing precise could have been achieved in the comparative studies if Weber had not had a specific objective: namely, the comparison of the level of economic rationalism logically implied by the religious ethics with the hypothetical, but meaningful, explanation of the origin of modern western capitalism which focussed upon the effect of Luther's and Calvin's doctrines on the rationalization of the actions of the believer. In other words, the desire for salvation became inextricably linked to practical actions and in the pure case economic activities became the means to a religious end. Only after comparing this norm with the relationship between everyday actions and the hope for salvation in the world religions was Weber able to conclude that particular forms of Protestantism represented the highest level of the rationalization of this connection between religious belief and action.²⁷⁵ On this basis, together with the results of his comparison of the levels of material development in the particular civilizations at the relevant periods, Weber concluded that certain Protestant religious doctrines caused the spirit of modern western capitalism.²⁷⁶ The fourth kind of ideal type is both general and acausal and consists of Weber's definitional concepts of typical courses of action, from the most simple level of social actions to the most complex institutions. However these definitions remain of hypothetical status and can serve only as a means to knowledge though, of course, an indispensable one. They are hypothetical because they are constructed on the basis of an amalgamation of a variety of value-relevant historical individuals and then the accentuation of the characteristics to produce a more rationally coherent, and, therefore, a more precise and unambiguous concept.²⁷⁷

In the third part of the chapter we have been concerned with the unity of Weber's theoretical and methodological views which can be found in his substantive inquiries. Value-relevance and individual causal explanation have been shown to be central to Weber's Theory of Action and the nature of the different kinds of ideal type concept have been clarified in terms of distinguishing between the problems of the self-evident understandability of a meaningfully adequate representation of a course of conduct and a causal explanation which seeks to determine the relevance of the pure-type of meaningful connection between values and actions to the social-psychological motivation for a particular course of action in a specific empirical setting. Finally, in view of the importance of Weber's distinction between the tasks of history and sociology it is, perhaps, appropriate to conclude our analysis of the unity of Weber's thinking about the study of social action by summarizing his conception of these issues. In Economy and Society Weber defines the goals of sociology as the formulation of "... type concepts and generalized uniformities of empirical process."²⁷⁸ Our examination of the different kinds of ideal type concept which are used by Weber clarifies the meaning of this statement. Sociology is concerned with comparing varieties of social actions and cannot, therefore, proceed without the abstract definitional types which have merely a heuristic value in terms of knowledge of empirical reality. In contrast, its claim to objectivity depends upon the generalizations which can be made from the individual causal explanations which are produced by historical research²⁷⁹. However, the essential point about Weber's conception of the relationship between history and sociology is that, despite

differing goals and consequently some differences of procedure
neither historical nor sociological research can proceed in isolation
from the other.

IV AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PARSONIAN AND SCHUTZIAN INTERPRETATIONS OF WEBER

Having clarified the nature of Weber's Theory of Action as a result of a detailed examination of his work and, where necessary with the aid of the arguments of various commentators it is now possible to consider the accuracy of the interpretations of his approach which were formulated by Parsons and Schutz. This provides a basis for examining, in the conclusion of the study, the implications they drew from their analyses about the contemporary usefulness of Weber's methodological and theoretical ideas for sociology.

(a) Parsons: Value-Relevance, Understanding and the Ideal Type

It has been emphasized throughout that our interest in Weber's work is focussed upon his theoretical and methodological conception of the scientific study of social action and inevitably, therefore, the accuracy of Parsons' interpretation of Weber is to be judged here in terms of its treatment of these issues. No attempt is made to present a balanced perspective on Parsons' introduction to an English speaking audience of Weber's substantive studies which, in many respects, is a valuable piece of work. However, the same cannot be said of Parsons' treatment of the formal side of Weber's sociology which is, in important respects, misleading.

We have established that Parsons regarded certain features of Weber's methodology favourably because they supported his convergence thesis through their similarity with his positivistic conception of the social scientific enterprise, namely: the

separation of value judgement from scientific research, the necessity of using general categories which pointed in the direction of "theory",²⁸⁰ the abstractness of such concepts, the emphasis upon the subjective aspects of action, and the use of a comparative method. In addition, Parsons correctly saw that Weber did not differentiate between the logic of natural and socio-cultural science, but he rejected Weber's emphasis upon substantive differences between the two groups of sciences and the implications Weber drew from this which served to limit the role of generalization in the study of action. Parsons, as we have seen, discerned a gradual movement away from this position in Weber's later formulations which culminated in Economy and Society. On the basis of an analysis of this work Parsons identified an implicit structural outline of action systems in Weber's work which represented an "elementary" theory based upon the classification of types of social relationship, the four types of action and the normative orientation of action.²⁸¹ Parsons was also critical of Weber's use of separate ideal type concepts for each typical course of action, or complex of such actions, because it raised difficulties for the treatment of social process and the transition between types. Moreover, it represented an unnecessary duplication of effort when each typical action could be reduced to a more basic set of analytic elements. In addition, Parsons objected to the "fictional" nature of Weber's ideal type concepts because they represented a misunderstanding of the proper nature of scientific abstraction. Certainly ideal type concepts, such as the statements of economic theory, do not account for the full complexity of empirical reality but according to Parsons they can accurately state

relationships between analytic elements in a system of theory. Finally, we have seen how Parsons rejected the relegation of functional analysis to a preliminary role in sociology because according to Weber, it could not provide a basis for understanding the subjective meaning of action. For Parsons there is no conflict between a functional analysis of a system of action and the understanding of the motivation of a particular actor, or group of actors. He suggests that Weber advanced these views partly because of the weakness, at that time, of functional accounts of developmental processes and partly because Weber focussed exclusively upon individual actions rather than actions within systems which was a pre-requisite for a more systematic, general, and therefore scientific analysis of social action.

Parsons' assessment of Weber's methodology for the socio-cultural sciences has been very influential with the result that only some of the Weberian principles and assumptions have been incorporated into contemporary sociology and, what is particularly important, is the fact that in the process of incorporation the original meaning of the concepts has been changed. The main features of this process are as follows: commitment to both the value-freedom of sociology²⁸² and the belief that objective sociological research can be attained has been enthusiastically adopted by functionalist sociologists as a basic principle of their programmatic statements, but the practices of such writers as revealed with the passage of time has made these ideas appear to be hopelessly utopian, and in the sceptical response which has been generated we can see the source of the currently fashionable notion of reflexivity; the related concept of value-relevance has

been used to support an emasculated principle of epistemological selectivity and what were seen to be residual elements were consigned to the "mysteries" of idealism; the distinctiveness of Weber's views on subjective meaning and on understanding as a special method for sociology have been dissipated in the overwhelmingly Durkheimian ethos which has pervaded sociology until recently²⁸³ and "seemingly" have been made redundant by the substantively different concerns of interactionism and the phenomenologically inspired distinctions of Schutz and other writers; the concept of ideal types has been assimilated into the realm of speculation which so characterizes the "theoretical" component of today's sociology, with the result that in contemporary usage it is indistinguishable from models, theories and analytic constructs; and last, but not least, Weber's notion of rationality and the crucial role of this concept in means-ends analysis has been obscured by the Parsonian concepts of unit act, systems of action and common values.

Let us consider each of these issues in more detail beginning with value-relevance and objectivity. For sociology to be value free it must be capable of presenting objective, rather than distorted, partial or inaccurate analyses. Within the Parsonian approach this is achieved by adopting the role of the scientist with its associated prescriptions about the use of evidence and making inferences and generalizations. There is of course a degree of selection inevitably involved in the conceptualization of phenomena and for this reason Parsons emphasises the importance of the action frame of reference for concentrating a sociological inquiry onto the relevant aspects of

a phenomenon, which may also be investigated by a natural science utilizing a quite different frame of reference. Parsons considered this to be the permanently valid element in Weber's concept of value-relevance: once the frame of reference had been chosen, then, objective description and analysis was possible. But value-relevance is a more complex principle for Weber relating to epistemological problems only experienced in the socio-cultural sciences in which the value-relevant conceptualization of historical individuals meant that there could be no balanced overall description or explanation of contemporary or historical phenomena. To clarify these issues we must refer to the conflicting arguments in some detail.

According to Parsons, Weber views relevance to value in this way: the common human basis for interest in natural phenomena is control, and this is made possible through the natural sciences formulating general concepts. The situation is different in the social case, here a value attitude is taken towards the phenomena because the objects of study are actions and cultural achievements which embody human ideals and values. In this case, our interest in the phenomena focusses upon their individuality because of their relevance to values which the scientist actually shares, or are in some way significant to him.²⁸⁴

Parsons concedes that there is some merit in this formulation for it makes explicit the unavoidable degree of relativism in science which follows from the fact that knowledge is always selective, and the basis for this selection is not to be found in the facts, but in the subjective interest of the scientist; in Parsons' terms, observation is always in terms of a conceptual

scheme,²⁸⁵ Parsons is impressed by the way in which Weber admits values to a role in science whilst carefully circumscribing this role in a manner acceptable to modern science. In particular, Weber does not capitulate to relativism because of the distinction he draws between motives of scientific interest and the entirely separate issue of the validity of scientific statements. However, Parsons argues that Weber is mistaken in two ways for identifying a difference in principle between the subjective directions of the scientist's interest in natural and social science. First of all, whilst Parsons accepts that the motive of control is important for natural science he, nevertheless, argues that it is more significant in social science than Weber believed. Secondly, according to Parsons there is no reason why a value interest rather than a control interest should give rise to a concern with individual rather than general concepts. Consequently,

"... there seems to be no basis for a radical distinction in principle between the natural and social sciences with regard to the roles of individuality and generality. Quantitative differences of degree there may be, but these are not sufficient to justify such a distinction. The principle of value relevance helps to explain the element of relativism, in scientific methodology, but it is applicable to both groups of sciences, not to one alone." 286

On this basis Parsons formulates his rather different conception of the relationship between individual and general concepts in a classification of the sciences based upon the distinction between the analytic and the historical which is quite independent of the natural and social science division. According to Parsons in physics, economics, and sociology, systems of analytic theory are developed which can be used in the explanation of a wide range of objects whereas in history, geology,

and meteorology, attention is concentrated upon a specific group of phenomena and the attempt is made to explain their particular historical development. Hence the distinction between two kinds of scientific procedure - the development of general systems of analytic theory or the explanation of unique historical individuals - does not coincide with the classification of real phenomena into natural and social. For the same reason, Parsons rejects the idea that the division between a scientific interest in control and in the value-relevant individuality of an empirical phenomenon is confined, respectively, to natural and social science.

In the detailed analysis of Weber's methodological assumptions about the nature of the historico-cultural sciences two points emerged which cast doubt upon the accuracy of Parsons' understanding of these issues. First of all, Weber emphasized that there were no logical differences between the procedures of natural and social science; natural and social phenomena are neither more nor less intrinsically amenable to a generalizing or an individualizing method of study. For Weber, the fact that one method was used predominantly to study certain phenomena was to be explained by the goals set by society for the scientific investigation of a particular aspect of reality. The goal set for the study of social phenomena is a detailed knowledge of actions and events because their unique features are of interest to us - and this certainly does not mean that generalizations cannot be formed about these phenomena. In contrast the goal of natural science is mastery of natural phenomena, and this objective can only be achieved through generalization. For Weber these differences in the practices of the sciences are to be explained in

terms of the nature of the subject matter together with the socially approved goals which are set for these inquiries.

Parsons not only has little sympathy with Weber's restriction of the role of generalization in the study of action but also fails to clearly see the reasoning behind Weber's distinction between natural and socio-cultural science. According to Parsons it was the value-relevance of social phenomena which constituted the basis, in Weber's argument, for distinguishing them from natural objects. Of course, Weber considered social phenomena to be value-relevant, but this was not the most fundamental basis for the separation of all phenomena into two groups, rather, for him the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of phenomena was the most fundamental criterion. We can understand the meaning of social actions and events in terms of the motivations which lead people to act in certain ways in pursuit of specific values and interests, whereas, natural objects have no meaning in this sense even though we may gain knowledge about such phenomena by subsuming them within general concepts.

For Parsons value-relevance referred to the role of the scientist's values in the determination of the problem to be studied and, he goes on to argue, that this subjective direction of interest is a common feature of both natural and social science.²⁸⁷ Committed as he was to a positivistic unity of science he could do little more than consign Weber's argument that knowledge could only be gained of social phenomena on the basis of value-presuppositions to the mysteries of an idealist legacy which Weber had been unable to fully exorcise. However, for Weber, the concept of value-relevance refers not only to the inherent selectivity of different

scientist's interests in reality but goes beyond this to a problem quite unique to the socio-cultural sciences, namely: the formation of historical individuals representing particular social phenomena. The facts of social life are, at the same time, values - the hopes and fears of the participants in the various actions. The problem for both history and sociology which Weber recognized and attempted to solve concerns the irreconcilability of the diverse values inherent in the facts of social life. Let us consider, for example, a set of actions and events. On the basis of value-analysis the constituents of two contrasting historical individuals can be identified which represent when synthesized into concepts, on the one hand, the actions of a terrorist and, on the other, the actions of a freedom fighter. In each case value-analysis clarifies the range of information relevant to the particular point of view or value-presupposition. The difference between the two analytic descriptions lies in their relevance to quite different values which can be used as the basis of an examination of these features of empirical reality.²⁸⁸ There is nothing in the actions and events themselves which can suggest that the facts be related to one set of values rather than another. For Weber, there is an inescapably arbitrary element at the start of any socio-cultural research: a point of view has to be adopted which enables us to approach reality and select the relevant from the irrelevant. Hence a descriptive representation of a particular phenomenon cannot be objective for all points of view, it cannot present a "balanced" or overall description because this would depend upon an arbitrary evaluation of the significance of particular value-presuppositions. At best, it can be valid for a

particular point of view. Objective sociological knowledge remains possible for Weber within the confines of this choice of point of view because analysis and explanation are subject to the rules of scientific reasoning. It is partly because of value-relevance and partly because general concepts cannot reveal the details of concrete reality that Weber rejected the attempt to formulate a general system of theory in sociology. Instead, Weber developed precise but accentuated general definitional concepts which were to be used as an aid in the understanding of concrete reality and, thereby, its causal explanation. The fact that Parsons criticised that strategy of formulating pure types of action as a mosaic theory of history demonstrates that he completely failed to appreciate the significance in Weber's Theory of Action of the distinction between meaningfully and causally adequate statements.

Parsons' failure to appreciate the basis of this distinction can be explained in terms of his ambivalence toward Weber's concept of understanding. A brief review of the contexts in which both Parsons and Weber developed their respective positions on this issue may help to clarify the extent of the divergence between them.

Parsons has consistently maintained that the subjective point of view is a defining characteristic of the General Theory of Action because it establishes the boundaries of the relevance of the Action Frame of Reference. Parsons developed his perspective at a time in the history of American social science when behaviourism was sufficiently strong for him to regard his emphasis upon the subjective point of view as a radical step which needed

to be justified and, certainly, could not be taken for granted.²⁸⁹ In this, he was strongly influenced by the practice of economics which combined reference to a particular kind of rational motivation with a legitimately scientific study of action and behaviour. In contrast, Weber formulated his approach within a very different perspective in which the subjective meaning of action was taken to be the defining characteristic of the socio-cultural sciences. Hence his concern was not so much to legitimate its place within social science, but to limit the potential dangers of a dependence upon intuitive understanding.

Their contrasting attitudes towards the theoretical concepts of economics clearly reveals the extent of the differences between them. For Weber these concepts were fictional theoretical constructions based upon simplified assumptions which meant that apart from in very specific circumstances the concepts did not state generalizations about empirical reality. The subjective reference contained within these concepts was limited to the motivation of simplified models of actors and there was no attempt to refer directly to the motivation of real people in empirical situations.²⁹⁰ However, for Parsons these concepts accurately stated the relationships between the analytic elements of particular systems of theory. As we have seen, Parsons' strategy was to identify the basic constituents of phenomena and the way in which different kinds of object were formed by particular combinations of elements.²⁹¹ He originally argued that the intrinsic and symbolic means-end relationships contained structural properties of action systems (ultimate ends and means, and intermediate sector, normative orientation, and effort) and within this

framework he envisaged the formation of a system of analytic theory applicable to all the substantive areas of the sciences of action whereby all conduct - from the simple acts of a few people to the complex existence of modern large-scale organisations - could be explained in terms of particular combinations of these analytic elements. At this point in his thinking, subjective reference consisted of fixed, i.e. rational, relationships between means and ends for hypothetical actors who were envisaged as linked together in interactive systems by common values.²⁹² But for Parsons these constructions stated analytically real relationships between theoretical elements and he emphatically rejected Weber's characterization of them as fictional ideal types.

As Parsons' work moved away from analytic theory, with its emphasis upon rational means-ends relationships, towards the functional analysis of systems of action, he maintained the combination of conditional reasoning and normative orientation, though in a somewhat different context. The "motivations" for social actions were no longer given priority instead, consistent with a functional orientation, the effects of complexes of interactions upon the social system became the centre of attention. However, from a Weberian point of view a functionalist method of analysis is inconsistent with understanding the subjective meaning of particular actors and it is in terms of Parsons' adoption of this approach that his most fundamental assumptions about subjective reference are most clearly revealed. Indeed, it is at this point that any superficial similarities between the subjective point of view and interpretive understanding disappear. The debate about the extent to which Durkheim and Weber converged into a common

acceptance of a voluntaristic position has, of course, always centred upon this issue. Indeed, Parsons recently claimed that voluntarism was essentially the same kind of phenomenon as the self-regulating properties of living systems which are studied in biology.

This perspective would have been totally unacceptable to Weber who considered that the understandability of social action was something unique.²⁹³ In comparison with natural science this gave the social sciences a distinct advantage because they could explain actions and events in terms of the motivations of the participants, although the advantage was balanced, to some extent, by the fragmentary nature of the results. This accounts for Weber's relegation of the functionalist method of analysis, developed in the study of meaningless natural phenomena, to a preliminary role in sociological inquiry because for him, only individual actions could be understood. In comparison with Weber, Parsons dehumanizes subjectivity by reducing it to "analytic" components. According to Weber, understanding is an indissoluble entity even though it can take a rational or empathic form. Moreover, Weber's distinction between action and behaviour, when compared with the Parsonian approach, is particularly revealing. For Weber, action represented behaviour together with the intended meaning for the actor whereas behaviour consisted of conduct which lacked conscious motivation. Weber's Theory of Action deals particularly with action which approximates to the ideal type of value-rational action because such kinds of action are the most susceptible to causal explanation in terms of an understandable motivation linking values, interests, and conduct.²⁹⁴

Parsons' General Theory of Action deals only with behaviour, i.e. it lacks any real attempt to explain empirical actions in terms of its subjective meaning, and is content to present models of systems of interaction in which the relationships between values, interests, and conduct is not empirically investigated, but is fixed arbitrarily in accordance with conditional reasoning and normative orientation.²⁹⁵

For Parsons, understanding does not represent a unique characteristic of social science and for this reason he fails to appreciate Weber's use of different kinds of ideal type concept as part of a strategy of dealing with the problematic nature of understanding. As we have seen, Weber argues that in sociology two different kinds of meaning can be utilized. On the one hand, there are the real²⁹⁶ empirical values and beliefs which people attempt to realize through their actions and, on the other, there are ideal meanings which are constructed from empirical meanings into a more logically coherent and unambiguous "idea" of a particular phenomenon or group of phenomena. Such concepts present meanings clearly and precisely and this greatly facilitates the task of understanding. However, Parsons identifies the abstractness and artificiality of these concepts, which in their general form constitute Weber's definitions of the major types of social action as part of a theoretical project which implicitly concerns the structure of social action. But for Weber these concepts are only a means to understand a reality which necessarily can only approximate to one or more unreal ideal types because of the complexities and ambiguities of actual subjective meaning. The

acausal ideal types are accentuated, in terms of objective possibility, to form rationally coherent possible meanings of action and, for this reason, can only serve a heuristic purpose. They do not state generalized uniformities of empirical process they do not reveal the most basic properties of action, and they do not establish the most fundamental types of social relationship, rather, they constitute a means to the understanding of action. Indeed for Weber, it is the other kind of ideal type which is designed to represent the subjective meaning of particular actions, the variety of meanings for complexes of action, or compare the motivations for similar kinds of actions, which occupy the central place within his Theory of Action because they make possible the causal explanation of action and, thereby, the formation of objective sociological knowledge.

In the attempt to formulate such explanations the concepts of the means-ends relationship are indispensable for Weber. In analysis, the rational connection between means and ends reveals whether or not the actions (means) are directly and exclusively caused by the person's values (ends). If this is the case, then, a complete sociological explanation has been provided of an action, or set of actions, in terms of the subjective meaning for the actor. However, Parsons does not use these concepts to analyze empirical reality, instead, he sees them to represent an actual property of the structure of action itself.

This brings to a close the examination of Parsons' misunderstanding of certain crucial features of Weber's Theory of Action, and we turn next to consider the accuracy of Schutz's commentary upon Weber's interpretive sociology.

(b) Schutz: Meaning, Intersubjectivity and Ideal Types

Schutz's analysis and critique of Weber's interpretive sociology is conceived within the context of a developmental perspective. According to this viewpoint, Economy and Society is seen to represent the most valuable elements of Weber's thinking about the study of social action because it explicitly focusses upon the nature and task of sociology in contrast to the rather different problems of historical research. As a result, Schutz's detailed examination of Weberian sociology is based overwhelmingly upon the opening section of that study where Weber provides a brief definition of the concepts and procedures to be used in interpretive sociology.²⁹⁷

However, in view of the unity we have demonstrated between Weber's early and late work, it has become clear that Economy and Society does not represent a new stage in his thinking about social action but, rather, a project which became much larger than originally intended because of the responsibility of being editor of the series Outline of Social Economics.²⁹⁸ Moreover, by seeing this massive study both in the context of his substantive researches and his explicit discussions of theoretical and methodological issues, it is possible to reach a much more accurate assessment of its place in Weber's conception of sociology. Afterall, whilst Weber explicitly recognizes two objectives for sociology "... to formulate type concepts and generalized uniformities of empirical process",²⁹⁹ in Economy and Society only one of these goals is attempted,³⁰⁰ Consequently, ideal type definitional concepts representing precise, though accentuated, meanings of typical forms of action are for Weber an indispensable means to knowledge of socio-cultural phenomena. The second and more important

feature of sociological work is the formulation of generalizations which, in his work, are based upon the causal explanation of the role of religious ethics in economic life. They represented explanatory knowledge of social life and for Weber such knowledge of concrete reality is the primary justification of both history and sociology.

The difficulty with Schutz's almost exclusive reliance upon the definition of categories and methodological procedures follows from the fact that the briefness of Weber's treatment of these issues inevitably means that some of them remain ambiguous. However it should be emphasized, that the ambiguity is not so much a result of fundamental confusion in Weber's arguments and assumptions as a lack of space which prevents a more complete exposition. In particular this has led to difficulties for the appreciation of the nature of understanding, the role of ideal type concepts in sociological analysis and the problems involved in the interpretation of other people's actions.³⁰¹ In fact, Weber's presentation of the categories of interpretive sociology at the start of Economy and Society is merely a summary of the relevant features of a much wider body of work³⁰² which provides an introductory orientation to the sets of acausal ideal types contained in that study. Although Weber's methodological essays do not present a systematic view of his Theory of Action, they do provide a good deal of background material which can be used to clarify the categories of his interpretive sociology. Hence, Schutz's decision to base his analysis of Weber's approach to the scientific understanding of action upon about 30 pages taken from the total work, which very inadequately reflects his substantive researches, almost guarantees

the identification of ambiguities and problems in the foundations of Weber's interpretive sociology.

Another consequence of this very narrow focus upon Weber's later work and, within that his formal definitions, concerns the strategy for achieving objective, i.e., value-free, results in sociology. For Schutz, this seems to involve little more than the professionalization of the sociologist and the intentional avoidance of value-judgements. Indeed, by largely ignoring the earlier methodological discussions, Schutz fails to appreciate the nature of Weber's conception of the objectivity of sociological statements which depend not only upon causal relationships but upon the value-relevant description and establishment of data.³⁰³

Having clarified the manner in which Schutz's interpretation of Weber's work is hampered by his decision to concentrate upon a very specific part of Weberian sociology, we may now consider Schutz's more critical and evaluative comments. It is important however, to remember that the critical issues raised about Weber's work are very much intended as detailed comments within a framework of agreement with Weber's overall strategy for interpretive sociology which Schutz regarded as a decisive contribution to social science.

It will be helpful to begin by briefly reviewing the main criticisms Schutz makes of Weber's approach upon the basis of what he sees to be omissions and ambiguities in Weber's work. According to Schutz, Weber does not sufficiently clarify his interpretive terminology with respect to the need to distinguish between the following issues: an action in progress and a completed act, the meaning for the producer of a social object and the object itself, the meaning of my action and someone else's action, and the

understanding of myself and of another person. In addition, Schutz argues that Weber fails to consider the following features of the social world, namely: the ways in which an actor's meaning is modified for those with whom he interacts and for an observer, the unique character of the relation between one person and another, and the different levels of anonymity and directness in which we are able to know other people.³⁰⁴

Such criticism appears at first sight to constitute a major problem for an approach to the study of human action which claims as its distinguishing feature the understanding of social action. But, Schutz immediately qualifies his indictment by arguing that Weber undoubtedly "... saw all these problems".³⁰⁵ This qualification leaves the exact status of Schutz's criticisms somewhat ambiguous but, in fact, Weber is not only aware of these problems, but formulates his methodological strategy in such a way as to solve them. As a result of our examination of Weber's earlier methodological essays it is clear that Weber recognizes the possible differences between an action in progress and a completed act³⁰⁶, that he distinguishes between the meaning for the producer of a social object and the meaning of the object produced,³⁰⁷ and that he takes into account the problems involved in understanding one's own actions and those of another.³⁰⁸ Moreover, Weber is fully aware of the ways in which the meaning of an action is modified differently by the actor's fellow participants and by an observer. Certainly Weber does not consider the detailed processes and structures which Schutz identifies in the modification of meaning, but it is, after all, the basis for his development of

acausal ideal types of possible meanings which are formulated as hypotheses to help overcome the particular difficulties of understanding another person's actions. Indeed the same arguments can be applied to Schutz's analysis of the relationship between different people and their level of directness and anonymity of their knowledge of each other.

Consequently, Schutz is wrong when he argues that Weber "... naively took for granted the meaningful phenomena of the social world as a matter of intersubjective agreement".³⁰⁹ Such a comment ignores all the difficulties which Weber emphasizes about understanding the meaning of other people's actions, as well as one's own, and this applies as much in the routines of everyday life as to the sociologist's observations of the social world. The fact that Weber does not constantly doubt and scrutinize the intersubjectivity of the social reality he is investigating does not mean that he assumes a precise, complete, and shared intersubjectivity between social actors going about their everyday lives, or between the sociologist and the actors who are the object of inquiry. Weber undoubtedly assumes the existence of some level of common understanding amongst people for particular purposes, and in specific contexts. Afterall, this is not only a prerequisite for the existence of society and social action but also for any form of sociology which aspires to be more than a literal behaviourism. What is important about Weber's approach to these issues is that he makes no assumptions about the extent or completeness of this intersubjectivity. For Weber it remains an empirical question to be settled by inquiry and not

a priori speculation.³¹⁰

Schutz develops his critique from the assumption that because Weber does not distinguish the world of everyday life and the world of scientific inquiry then, inevitably, his interpretive sociology cannot adequately incorporate the common-sense constructs used in daily life which partly constitute social phenomena. Thus according to Schutz, Weber is not aware of the problems involved in building sociological concepts upon the concepts used in everyday life and, in particular, of the limitations of attempting to understand the social world in terms of concepts, such as rational action, which have been developed at the scientific level. However Schutz does not present a detailed argument showing how Weber's omission of this distinction necessarily results in his failure to consider the meaning of action for people going about their everyday lives. Again, Weber's development of the ideal type set of concepts is relevant to this issue. For Weber the subjective meaning of an action for the acting person constitutes the empirical reality which sociology attempts to understand and explain. However, given the difficulties which Weber frequently associates with the attempt to understand the meaning of someone else's action, it remains a goal more often approached than fully realized. The construction of unambiguous, accentuated and, therefore, merely hypothetical meanings of action are clearly a means to help the sociologist to approximate as closely as possible to empirical reality. However, as we have seen, Schutz does not appreciate this part of Weber's methodological strategy and he associates all the ideal types used by Weber with the acausal kind - and these

are clearly open to the criticism that in using them sociologists are imposing their own meanings upon someone else's course of action.

No doubt Schutz was encouraged in this interpretation by the apparent social structural level of Weber's substantive researches which dealt with very large groups of people, if not entire societies, in terms of the effects of religious beliefs upon action.

Undoubtedly, Weber concentrates upon large scale analysis but it is a basic principle of his approach that only the action of particular people can be understood and this means that in attempting to interpret the actions of large numbers of people the conceptualizations used remain subjectively and objectively ideal.³¹¹

For Weber the differences between small and large scale analysis are matters of degree rather than principle. The decision to focus upon the actions of large groups of people is inevitably made with full awareness that the sociologists ability to accurately represent the meaning of these actions is potentially very limited but, of course, the limitations are not removed, even though they may be on a smaller scale, when the actions of small groups of people are being studied. Hence there is no necessary opposition between studying the everyday life of a few people and studying large groups of actors.³¹²

However, as a result of Schutz's analysis of Weber it has become widely accepted that his criticisms are valid and that Weber's Theory of Action was grounded on ambiguous foundations. In contrast, by examining Weber's definition of the categories of interpretive sociology in the context of his earlier methodological essays it has been possible to show that Schutz greatly overestimated

the differences between his approach and that of Weber. Certainly different concepts are used which are based upon different assumptions but up to this point no fundamental and irreconcilable positions have been identified.

Turning aside from the detailed criticisms of Weber let us now focus more upon how Schutz developed his phenomenological analysis of the social world and the implications this has for Weber's interpretive sociology. We begin by considering his position on the nature of meaning and intersubjectivity and then move on to what is, perhaps, the most fundamental difference of all between Schutz and Weber - the ideal type.

At the heart of Schutz's analysis of meaningful experience in the social world lies his examination of the stream of consciousness which is intended to provide a secure foundation for sociological work. Paradoxically, however, the accounts of how empirical reality is accessible to us by Rickert and Weber, bear a remarkable similarity to this perspective. Hence Weber's distinction between the reality we experience and the way we can incorporate these experiences into an objective scientific conceptualization exhibits some similarities with the assumptions which lie behind Schutz's account of how the decision to reflect upon past experiences makes them meaningful.³¹³ The differences can be explained in terms of their respective orientations; for Weber the aim is to explicate the epistemological issues involved in scientific knowledge whereas for Schutz the goal is to present a descriptive phenomenology of the meaningfulness of the social world. The extent of this different orientation emerges over

Weber's distinction between action and behaviour in terms of the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of conduct. In contrast, Schutz argues that all experience can have meaning if it is reflected upon, that behaviour refers to the spontaneous activity producing the experience, and action consists of behaviour together with its project.³¹⁴

In effect, Weber's discussion of the problem of understanding is based purely upon the sociological problem of how a scientific observer can interpret and understand another person's course of action. From this viewpoint it may or may not be true, as Schutz argues, that all behaviour has meaning for the actor but, either way, it is not really important for Weber's approach because the most accessible kind of subjective meaning for an observer is action which in Weberian terms is defined in terms of a choice ("overt or covert, omission or acquiescence"³¹⁵) of means to achieve a particular end. Indeed the way in which Weber defines action and behaviour is symptomatic of his concern to identify the most accessible kinds of meaningful criteria whereas, behaviour is a residual concept. Rather similar considerations apply to Schutz's suggestion that Weber fails to distinguish between future and past (in-order-to and because) orientations in his conception of motive. In his substantive researches the two elements are not clearly distinguished though Weber frequently identifies circumstances from the past with the actor's situation which is used to explain why a particular person, or group of people, holds certain values.³¹⁶ As we have seen the whole emphasis of Weber's approach is upon a rational form of

understanding whereby clear and precise hypotheses are formulated as means to the understanding and explanation of action which link particular values (ends) and acts (means). These understandable, though hypothetical, motivational sequences are used to compare with empirical actions for the purpose of attempting to gain as accurate an interpretation of a course of action as is possible within the limitation that, for the reasons emphasized by Weber, the subjective meaning of an action is likely to remain private.³¹⁷

The distinctiveness of their respective projects is similarly apparent in Schutz's argument that Weber equates the meaning of an action with its motive, - the person's reason for acting. According to Schutz this is clearly revealed in Weber's distinction between four categories of action and, in particular, the affectual and traditional kinds which are on the borderline between action and behaviour. The types of conduct which fall into these two categories are marginal to action because they lack a sufficiently conscious and deliberate motivation to achieve particular goals. Accordingly, Schutz argues,

"When Weber talks about meaningful behaviour, he is thinking about rational behaviour ... This kind of behaviour he thinks of as the archetype of action." 318

However, this interpretation is incorrect: Weber does not regard rationality as the defining characteristic of action.³¹⁹ After all, he distinguishes between rational and empathic understanding, he emphasizes the problems involved in understanding other people's actions, and develops the acausal ideal types as a means to overcome these problems. For Weber's sociological work the use of rational constructions has distinct methodological advantages.³²⁰

"The construction of a purely rational course of action ... serves ... as a type (ideal type) which has the merit of clear understandability and lack of ambiguity. By comparison with this it is possible to understand the ways in which actual action is influenced by irrational factors of all sorts, ... in that they account for the deviation from the line of conduct which would be expected on the hypothesis that the actions were purely rational." 321

For Schutz, another crucial problem in Weber's approach concerns the lack of distinction between the meaning of an action and the extent to which it is accessible to an observer. This is entirely reasonable from Schutz's phenomenological perspective on the way in which experience is meaningful to the actor but its philosophical, rather than empirical, origin should not be forgotten.³²² To argue, as Schutz does, that all experience can become meaningful if it is reflected upon merely presupposes a model of an actor with a clarity of purpose, single-mindedness and availability of time which bears more resemblance to the traditionally denigrated armchair theorist than to the typical member of the social world going about their everyday life.³²³ In contrast, Weber presupposes a rather different model of an actor possessing a considerable degree of ambiguity and confusion over purposes and motives. Weber starts from the assumption of the difficulties of understanding and develops a methodology to try and overcome these problems. His strategy involves breaking into the subjective unity of an actor's life-world in order to isolate particular acts so that they can be analyzed in terms of the connection between means and ends. In this way it is possible to discover whether or not particular values have been the motive for specific courses of action. Undoubtedly, Weber recognizes that taking elements from a person's subjective world introduces some

distortion and arbitrariness but, from his point of view, if knowledge is to be discovered about empirical reality at all, then, a beginning has to be made somewhere.³²⁴

Similar considerations are relevant to Schutz's critique of the concept of rationality. This concept is derived from the theoretical level of analysis and is, according to Schutz, inappropriate for the depiction of everyday life. At this level, he argues, people rely on routines and on "cookbook" knowledge to cope with social life rather than follow the model of the scientist and precisely clarify the nature of the situation, consider all the available alternatives and calculate the appropriate means to achieve a particular end.³²⁵ Schutz's opposition to the use of purely theoretical (second order) concepts to describe everyday life (first order) concepts results from his belief that scientific terms cannot properly represent the phenomenal reality of an individual's world - and on the basis of our examination of Weber's approach, there can be little doubt that he would have been in full agreement.³²⁶ But Schutz fails to see that, for Weber, theoretical concepts (primarily acausal ideal types) are used as an aid to facilitate as accurate an understanding of empirical reality as possible. Such concepts are particularly suited for this task because they have the unique advantage of being precise, clear, and fully communicable.

However, perhaps the single most decisive innovation Schutz introduces into interpretive sociology and to which most of the criticism raised against Weber, to say nothing of conventional sociology in general, can be attributed is his distinction between the subjective meaning of an action in progress

for the acting person and the ideal typical meaning of an act performed anonymously.³²⁷ The fact that Weber refers to the sociologist's understanding of the actor's intended meaning, whether achieved by rational or emotionally empathic means,³²⁸ is for Schutz additional confirmation that Weber does not take sufficient account of the problems of intersubjectivity. Rather, Schutz argues, it is necessary to distinguish between the objective meaning placed by the sociologist upon someone else's action and the subjective meaning of that action for the acting person. In these terms, Weber's distinction between observational and motivational understanding appears misconceived because both categories refer to an objective context of meaning, i.e. they are both derived from an interpretation by an observer of the meaning of another person's course of action.³²⁹ According to Schutz, in everyday life we gain knowledge of our contemporaries indirectly and we know their subjective meaning only through general types of subjective experience. This relationship within the social world is particularly important for sociology because the limitations imposed upon our awareness of our contemporaries apply equally to the relationship between sociologists and the actors they observe. In addition, the sociologist with a different system of relevances and interests to the actor in everyday life attempts to build ideal types, of an abstract nature, upon the constructs used in everyday life which are themselves general types representing the subjective experiences of anonymous actors or courses of action. For Schutz, sociology must incorporate the commonsense thinking contained in the typifications of everyday life, but in

so doing it cannot represent the subjective meaning of the actor which remains private. Instead, the first order constructs which refer to unique events, are replaced by models of typified events relevant to particular scientific problems. Once an objective course of action type is constructed then it is possible for the sociologist to hypothesize an actor with the relevant subjective meaning context. In this way, Schutz argues, objective knowledge of the meaning structures of everyday life can be formulated. It depends upon the use of models of actors (puppets) with specifically restricted consciousnesses for the particular theoretical purposes of the sociologist. Such concepts are, for Schutz, objective because they do not refer to the subjective meanings of real people in empirical settings and, on this basis, interpretive sociology can only deal with the purely external features of action. Nevertheless, according to Schutz, these formulations are generally valid rather than merely being of interest to their formulator because sociologists are trained to observe, to make inferences, and to generalize, all of which serves to guarantee the scientific value of the results.³³⁰

There can be little doubt that Schutz draws his inspiration for the construction of his personal and course of action ideal types from Weber's general definitional concepts presented in Economy and Society. Weber's definition of bureaucracy can be interpreted as being based upon a simplified model of an actor whose consciousness is limited in a particular way to the rational pursuit of a set of precise and unambiguous objectives. By accentuating reality in terms of objective possibility in order to construct a rationally coherent and,

therefore, a completely understandable concept of a possible social action Weber would, no doubt, have accepted that he had created a puppet. But any similarities between the ideal types used by Schutz and Weber cease at this point. For Schutz such abstract and anonymous types represent sociological knowledge, whereas for Weber, the acausal ideal types merely constitute a means for gaining knowledge of empirical reality. Consequently, for Weber objective sociological knowledge consists of causal explanations because only on this basis can the problems associated with both objectivity and the intuitive understanding of meaningfully self-evident connections be overcome.

There are, perhaps, two reasons why Schutz does not follow Weber's interest in causal explanation: first of all, as we have seen, Schutz associates causal explanation with historical inquiry and sociology with the formulation of abstract types³³¹ and second, Schutz's distinction between subjective and objective contexts of meaning leaves no possibility of a difference between Weber's categories of meaningfully and causally adequate explanation. Schutz's use of the category "objective context of meaning" is somewhat idiosyncratic and requires some comment before it is possible to appreciate his reasons for equating meaningful and causal adequacy.

Schutz makes a genetic distinction between subjective and objective meaning, i.e. he differentiates these contexts of meaning in terms of their origin. Hence subjective meaning refers to the private world of the actor and, significantly, objective meaning is defined residually to include all accounts of someone else's meaning - and these are inevitably constructed on the basis

of inference rather than direct experience. Given that the idea of objective meaning has the connotation of validity as well as generality (in opposition to subjective peculiarity) it would have been less confusing if Schutz had distinguished between the subjective meaning for the actor and an observer's inferences about the actor's meaning. Had Schutz followed this strategy he would have left open the possibility of distinguishing between different levels of accuracy or inaccuracy in the observer's accounts of the meaning of action which may well vary in terms of the observer's thoroughness and the representativeness or accuracy of assumptions about the typicality of social life. However, by using the term objective to denote merely an observer's account of the meaning of another person's action he precludes the possibility of some accounts being more accurate than others and, in effect, equates the value of all the representations of subjective meaning which can be formulated whether as part of everyday life, or more anonymously by sociologists.³³²

For Schutz, therefore, all sociological statements present objective contexts of meaning with the result that for his point of view, Weber's attempt to discover the actor's intended meaning is doomed to failure. Hence, the sociologists' judgement that an interpretation of a course of action is meaningfully adequate can only be based upon objective criteria, and is made when the action conforms to the observer's typical expectations. According to Schutz, however, a judgement of causal adequacy must meet very similar criteria: an interpretation of a course of action is causally adequate when there is a probability that the action will happen again in the same way. In each case the judgement is based upon the observer's past experiences and not

the actor's intentions.³³³ According to Schutz, therefore,

"Any interpretation which is meaning-adequate must also be causally adequate and vice versa. The two postulates really require that there be no contradiction to previous experience. As soon as one assumes that there is a definite stock of such experiences at hand... then either both of these postulates will be fulfilled or neither of them will." 334

Referring to the ideal type constructions used in sociology, Schutz argues, that they formulate motivational sequences which because of their typicality, are meaningfully adequate. He continues:

"To say that the motives must be causally adequate merely means that the motives could have brought about this action and, more strictly, that they probably did so." 335

In this way, Schutz merges the notions of meaningful and causal adequacy but it is an argument which has particularly unfortunate consequences for his attempt to anchor interpretive sociology upon secure foundations.

Whilst both Schutz and Weber are agreed on the inaccessibility of subjective meaning their responses to this problem are quite different. For Schutz sociology deals exclusively in ideal types of actors and courses of action which represent objective meaning contexts. The aim is to formulate abstract generalizations about the social world on the basis of the typifications of everyday life. Moreover, the emphasis upon generality rather than specific cases makes the construction of these concepts unproblematic and any difficulties which may be involved in the process of selection can be resolved in terms of the professional training of the sociologist.³³⁶ Within this abstract and de-contextualised world there is no need for analysis to discover which of a potential range of constructions is

accurate because there is no possibility of comparing them with empirical reality. The subjective meaning of acting people has become an ideal standard which is, by definition, quite unattainable to an observer. But in creating such a gulf between the subjective reality which sociology is designed to study and the kind of formulations which are possible Schutz has completely undermined the possibility, within his approach, of a reliable, accurate and therefore, scientific investigation of social action. In contrast, for Weber, although the subjective reality of the actor remains private, as a result of the complications involved in its study, this reality remains the goal for sociological work even though it may only be imperfectly attained. Within this methodological strategy Weber recognizes that a variety of meaningfully adequate (i.e. intuitively self-evident) interpretations may be equally plausible for a particular course of action. Thus the objective of sociological analysis is to discover, on the basis of a detailed examination of evidence about a particular case and in comparison with similar instances, whether or not one interpretation is causally adequate.³³⁷ For Weber this is the justification of sociology's claim to scientific status.

Let us briefly conclude with a summary of some of the most important differences between the approaches of Schutz and Weber to the study of action. Weber defines actions in terms of meaning, and for sociological purposes the subjective meaning he identifies is referred to as the motive. He is not concerned with how life as a whole is meaningful to the individual, rather only with the problem of the interpretation of an act or set of acts. He assumes that people have motives for some of their

conduct and that in favourable circumstances these can be discovered by an observer, although for most purposes an approximation to this is all that is possible. On other occasions a persons' conduct, whilst having meaning for the actor in Schutz's sense, is not comprehensible to the observer through means-ends analysis - the only method of understanding which is intersubjectively testable.

Weber's acausal ideal types are a means to discover knowledge of the social world, they do not represent such knowledge in themselves. By comparing them with reality the formulation of plausible hypotheses is made possible. These can then be examined from the causal point of view to see which, if any, were effective in a particular situation. As a result of Schutz's misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of ideal type concepts, he formulates abstract types which are intended to represent social reality and, therefore, constitute sociological knowledge.³³⁸

The same preoccupations can be detected in their respective definitions of reality. For Schutz all action is rational to the extent that it has an in-order-to motive.³³⁹ Yet for Weber the rational is not synonymous with the intentional because although the actor may have a motive, the action can only be described as rational if the appropriate choice of means to achieve an end is involved. Moreover, it is only through analysis that we understand action as the complex of intention, perseverance, knowledge of the situation, together with the potential degree of self deception, to mention only some of the relevant factors.

The basis for Weber's distinction between explanations which are meaningfully and causally adequate is his recognition of the inherent limitations of intuition as a method of scientific interpretation. The criterion of what is meaningful or plausible is the observer's own experience and this equally provides the basis for deciding what is typical. However, experience is personal, not common to members of a society and, for this reason, plausibility must remain a relatively subjective consideration. For Weber, it is only through empirical causal analysis that it is possible to guard against the dangers of idiosyncratic interpretation. But for Schutz with an entirely different view of the role of ideal type concepts, there is little explicit consideration of how the problems of the reliance upon intuitive understanding can be overcome. And, in fact, his discussion of the relationship between course of action and personal ideal types shows how real the danger is of presenting, in the guise of sociological knowledge, one's own awareness of the social world.

NOTES

1. In contrast, therefore, to the studies by von Schelting, op.cit.; J. Freund, The Sociology of Max Weber, (London: Allen Lane, 1968); Sahay, Sociological Analysis, op.cit.; H.H. Bruun, Science, Values and Politics in Max Weber's Methodology, (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1972); and T. Burger, Max Weber's Theory of Concept Formation, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976).
2. Parsons' interpretation of Weber's rejection of systematic theory is examined in Chapter 1.
3. John Rex, "Typology and Objectivity: A Comment on Weber's Four Sociological Methods" in Sahay (Ed.), op.cit. For an earlier example of a completely uncritical acceptance of Parsons' interpretation see E. Shils, "Foreword" in M. Weber, The Methodology of the Social Sciences, op.cit., vii-viii.
4. It was not until the late 1950's that an English translation was published of R. Aron, German Sociology (London: Heineman, 1957).
5. R. Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait (London: University of California Press, 1977). Indeed the selections from Weber edited by Gerth and Mills, op.cit., originally published in 1948, already focussed upon substantive issues.
6. Weber, The Religion of China, op.cit., The Religion of India, op.cit., and Ancient Judaism, op.cit.
7. Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, op.cit. On Law in Economy and Society, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), The Sociology of Religion, op.cit.
8. R. Aron, Main Currents in Sociological Thought, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, 1970), particularly volume 2.
9. R. Fletcher, The Making of Sociology, (London: Nelson, 1971) in two volumes.
10. O. Stammer (Ed.), Max Weber and Sociology Today, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).
11. D. Wrong (Ed.), Max Weber, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970).
12. J.E.T. Eldridge (Ed.), Max Weber: The Interpretation of Social Reality, (London: Michael Joseph, 1971).
13. W.G. Runciman (Ed.), Max Weber: Selections in Translation, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

14. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit.
15. Marianne Weber, Max Weber: A Biography, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975).
16. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit.
17. Freund, op.cit.
18. R. Bendix and G. Roth, Scholarship and Partisanship: Essays on Max Weber, (London: University of California Press, 1971).
19. Bruun, op.cit.
20. W.G. Runciman, Critique of Max Weber's Philosophy of Social Science, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).
21. Sahay, op.cit.
22. W.J. Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy: Perspectives on the Political Sociology of Max Weber, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).
23. Burger, op.cit.
24. G. Roth and W. Schluchter, Max Weber's Vision of History: Ethics and Methods, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).
25. Marshall, op.cit.
26. F.H. Tenbruck, "The Problem of Thematic Unity in the Works of Max Weber", British Journal of Sociology, 31 (1980), 316-351.
27. Bendix, "Two Sociological Traditions", op.cit.
28. See "Introduction" in A. Sahay (Ed.) Max Weber and Modern Sociology, op.cit., 4.
29. Butts, "Parsons, Weber and the Subjective Point of View", op.cit.
30. Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope, op.cit., and Pope, Cohen and Hazelrigg, op.cit.
31. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit.; and "R. Stammler's 'Surmounting' of the Materialist Conception of History", op.cit.
32. G. Roth, "Charisma and the Counterculture", in Roth and Schluchter, op.cit., 119.

33. G. Roth, "Epilogue: Weber's Vision of History", in Roth and Schluchter, op.cit., 204-5.
34. R. Aron, German Sociology, op.cit., 104.
35. Freund, op.cit., 70.
36. Bruun, op.cit., 202.
37. Eldridge, op.cit., 14.
38. Sahay, Sociological Analysis, op.cit., Chapter 2.
39. Burger, op.cit., 7.
40. See Tenbruck, op.cit., 316.
41. Heinrich Rickert, Science and History, (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1962). For an analysis of Rickert's discussion of the limits of concept formation in natural science, see Burger, op.cit.
42. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit.
43. Tenbruck, op.cit.
44. W. Schluchter, "The Paradox of Rationalization: On the Relations of Ethics and World", in Roth and Schluchter, op.cit.
45. Weber "Introduction" ("The Social Psychology of the World Religions") in Gerth and Mills (Eds.), op.cit.
46. Weber, "Intermediate Reflections: Theory of the Stages and Directions of the Religious Rejections of the World", in Gerth and Mills (Eds.), op.cit.
47. Weber, "Author's Introduction", in his The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971). C.f. B. Nelson, "Max Weber's Author's Introduction", Sociological Inquiry, 44, (1974).
48. Tenbruck, op.cit., 317-18.
49. See Chapters 1 and 4 respectively.
50. See Bruun, op.cit.; W.J. Cahnman, "Max Weber and the Methodological Controversy in Social Science", in Cahnman and Boskoff (Eds.), Sociology and History (New York: Free Press, 1964); S. Eliaeson, "Some Recent Interpretations of Max Weber's Methodology", Sociological Analysis and Theory, 7, (1977), 21-71.

51. C.f. H.P. Rickman, Meaning in History, op.cit.,
52. W. Windelband, History of Philosophy, op.cit.
53. Rickert, op.cit.,
54. Ibid., especially Chapter Eleven. Surprisingly, Rickert's position on the relation between history and sociology has been completely misunderstood by Burger, op.cit., 55-6.
55. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 58, fn. 9
56. Weber's pre-illness work is examined in Bendix, op.cit., Chapter 2.
57. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 3.
58. See Bruun, op.cit., 96.
59. Marianne Weber, op.cit., 259-60. C.f. Sahay, "The Importance of Weber's Methodology", in Sahay (Ed.), op.cit., 70-72.
60. Bruun, op.cit., 85-140; Burger, op.cit., 57-93.
61. Bruun, op.cit., 8-10.
62. See, for example, the theoretical and methodological opening remarks to Economy and Society, the critique of Stammerl, and the Statement of Editorial policy for the Archiv.
63. G. Roth, "Charisma and the Counterculture", in Roth and Schluchter, op.cit., 123-4.
64. The specific differences between Rickert and Weber are examined below.
65. Rickert, op.cit. C.f., "By concept formation is always understood the joining of elements, no matter whether these elements are or are not themselves already concepts", 39.
66. Ibid., 30. C.f., Rickert's comments on the phenomenological movement's objective of describing the world faithfully, 32.
67. Ibid., 33.
68. Ibid., 33-34.
69. Ibid., 34.
70. Ibid., 35. For a detailed examination of the method of concept formation used in mathematical reasoning, see Chapter 12.
71. Ibid., 35.

72. Ibid., 36.
73. Ibid., 5.
74. Ibid., 40-41.
75. Ibid., 44.
76. The limit set upon individualization is that concepts, to be useful, must retain a sufficiently generality to have a communicable meaning to others, see 41.
77. Ibid., 56.
78. Ibid., 57.
79. Ibid., 15-16, 57. This point has not been understood by Burger, op.cit., 55.
80. Rickert, op.cit., 18-19.
81. Ibid., 19.
82. Ibid., 20-21.
83. Ibid., 82.
84. Ibid., 83.
85. Ibid., 82.
86. Ibid., 86.
87. Rickert explicitly distinguishes his position from that of Windelband, see xii, 3, 78, 85. But c.f. F.A. Hayek, "preface to the English Language Edition", Science and History vi, and Burger, op.cit., 55.
88. Ibid., 105-6.
89. Ibid., 109.
90. Ibid., 113.
91. Ibid., 89.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid., 97, c.f., 22.
94. Ibid., 136.
95. Ibid., 139-140.

96. See the publications listed under fn 31.
97. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 55.
98. Ibid., 58, fn. 9. C.f. 55, fn. 2; 63, fn. 22; and 66, fn 25.
99. Ibid., 55-6.
100. On this point Weber is in complete agreement with Rickert.
101. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 56-7. C.f., 73-4.
102. Ibid., 57. See also, Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 72.
103. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 57.
104. Ibid., 58.
105. Ibid., 64, especially fn 23.
106. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 73.
107. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 63, fn. 22.
108. Ibid.
109. The concept of rational determinism is examined in Sahay, Sociological Analysis, op.cit., 20.
110. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 121.
111. Ibid., 122-3.
112. Ibid., 124. Indeed, Weber equates the "irrationality" of nature and human action, see "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 124-5.
113. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 63, fn. 22. See also, Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 74. For Weber the basis for distinguishing the two groups of sciences is the understandability of action, whereas, for Rickert is its relevance to value.
114. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 125. C.f., Rex, "Typology and Objectivity", op.cit., 22-3.
115. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 127.
116. Ibid., 129.

117. Ibid., 63, fn. 22. See also Weber, "R. Stammeler's 'Surmounting' of the Materialist Conception of History", op.cit., 25.
118. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 76.
119. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 108. See, for example, Weber's analysis of the possible meanings (relation to values) of the letters from Goethe to Frau von Stein, "Critical Studies in 'The Logic of the Cultural Sciences'", op.cit., 139-42.
120. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 103.
121. Ibid., 64, especially fn. 23.
122. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 76-7. On the heterogeneity of meaningfulness and laws, see Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 65-6.
123. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 78.
124. Ibid. C.f., "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 169, "... an infinity of causal factors have conditioned the occurrence of the individual 'event'".
125. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 78.
126. Ibid., 79.
127. Ibid., 80-81.
128. Hence, in the cultural sciences data can be used for two quite distinct methodological purposes: .. "(1) conceptualization with the illustrative use of 'particular facts' as 'typical' instances of an abstract 'concept', i.e., as an heuristic instrument on the one hand - and (2) integration of the 'particular fact' as a link, i.e., as a real causal factor into a real, hence concrete context.". See, "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 135.
129. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 135.
130. Weber, "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 159. C.f., "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 84.
131. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 149, fn. 43.
132. Weber, "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 143.

- 133. Ibid., 144.
- 134. Ibid., 150; Weber continues, "When I pass from the stage of the actual evaluation of an object into the stage of theoretical-interpretive reflection upon possible relations to values". C.f., Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 117.
- 135. Weber, "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 149.
- 136. Ibid., 147.
- 137. Ibid., 151.
- 138. Ibid., 160.
- 139. Ibid., 159-60. It is in this context that the validity of Weber's rejection of the programme of reducing all reality to laws becomes clear. In addition to his opposition to the use of abstract general concepts, he argues, "knowledge of cultural events is inconceivable except on a basis of the significance which the concrete constellations of reality have for us in certain individual concrete situations. In which sense and in which situation this is the case is not revealed to us by any law; it is decided according to the value-ideas in the light of which we view 'culture' in each individual case". See "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 80. See also, 84 and 87-8.
- 140. The idea of history as a science which did not use a generalizing method was quite unacceptable to a positivist philosophy of science.
- 141. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 72.
- 142. Ibid., 71.
- 143. Ibid., 84. See also, "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 159.
- 144. Ibid.
- 145. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 81-2.
- 146. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 179.
- 147. C.f., Bruun, op.cit., 85-140, and Burger, op.cit., 57-93.
- 148. Weber, "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 173.

149. Ibid., 180.
150. Ibid., 173.
151. Ibid., 177-8 where Weber considers the explanation of the actions of the housewife and child.
152. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 80.
153. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit.
154. Ibid., 160-169.
155. Ibid., 160.
156. Ibid., 162.
157. Ibid., 163.
158. Ibid., 166.
159. Ibid., 168.
160. Ibid., 152.
161. Ibid., 175.
162. Weber, "R. Stammeler's 'Surmounting' of the Materialist Conception of History", op.cit., 25.
163. Ibid. C.f., "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 180: "We are indeed always inclined to believe that if we find the 'personality' of a human being 'complicated' and difficult to interpret, that he himself must be able to furnish us with the decisive information if he really honestly wished to do so..... this is not so.... the contrary is often the case".
164. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 175.
165. Ibid., 186.
166. I.e. J. Lewis, Max Weber and Value-Free Sociology: A Marxist Critique (London; Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 8; J. Lopreato and L. Alston, "Ideal Types and the Idealization Strategy", American Sociological Review 35, (1970), 88-96; J.C. McKinney, Constructive Typology and Social Theory, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966); W.G. Runciman, op.cit., 33-35, J. Torrance, "Max Weber: Methods and the Man", European Journal of Sociology, 15, (1974), 134-145; J.W.N. Watkins, "Ideal Types and Historical Explanations", in H. Feigl and M. Brodbeck (Eds.), Readings in the Philosophy of Science, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953).

167. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 89-90.
168. Ibid., 90, where Weber also comments, "In its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found anywhere in reality.
169. Ibid., 94, 102.
170. Ibid., 91. C.f., 101, "The goal of ideal type concept construction is always to make clearly explicit not the class or average character but rather the unique individual character of cultural phenomena". For Weber, generic class concepts are used when, in research, it is necessary to classify events which "appear in reality as mass phenomena".
171. Ibid., 91. This aspect of ideal type concepts has been emphasized by Sahay. See, for example, "The Importance of Max Weber's Methodology", op.cit., 72-3.
172. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 107.
173. Ibid., 105.
174. Ibid., 93, 107.
175. Ibid., 98-9, cf, 91.
176. Ibid., 92.
177. This was useful for Parsons' interpretation of Weber in terms of a movement away from idealism, but less helpful to the idea of a sharp break between an early and a late Weberian position.
178. Ibid., 93.
179. Ibid., 92.
180. Ibid., 102.
181. Ibid., 95-6. This feature of the ideal type was emphasized by Burger, op.cit., 137, 159.
182. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 96.
183. Ibid.
184. Ibid.
185. Ibid., 96-7.

186. Weber, "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 169.
187. Ibid., 169-70.
188. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 4.
189. Ibid., 5.
190. Ibid., 13.
191. Ibid.
192. Ibid., 15.
193. Ibid.
194. Ibid., 3.
195. Karl Jaspers, General Psychopathology, (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1963), 301.
196. Ibid., 302.
197. Ibid., 303.
198. Ibid., 304.
199. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 4.
200. Ibid., 5.
201. Ibid.
202. Ibid., 6.
203. Ibid.
204. Ibid.
205. Ibid., 8.
206. Ibid.
207. Ibid., 9.
208. Ibid.
209. Ibid., 10. C.f., "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 178-180.
210. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 11.
211. Ibid., 12.

212. Ibid.
213. Ibid., 19-20.
214. Ibid., 22.
215. According to Roth's "Introduction" to Economy and Society, the theoretical and methodological introduction was written between 1918 and 1920, see C. Certainly, the possibility must be admitted that the briefness of his statement of the formal issues, perhaps determined by their inclusion within the collaborative series Outline of Social Economics meant that Weber did not have the opportunity to develop in detail any differences between his later and earlier positions. However, in view of the basic theoretical and methodological agreement between Weber's early and late arguments, and taking into consideration Tenbruck's work on the dates of particular sections of Economy and Society, and the Economic Ethics of the World Religions, there is little to support the view that at the end of his life Weber had developed a radically different orientation on social science in comparison with his earlier work.
216. C.f., Burger, op.cit., 68, where he quite erroneously identifies cultural science with history, arguing that sociology and economics were, for Weber, natural sciences because of their emphasis upon generalization. See also Roth, "Introduction", LXIV.
217. Weber's analyses of Roscher and Knies have been invaluable in the attempt to clarify the nature of his thinking on historico-cultural science.
218. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 125-7.
219. Ibid., 152.
220. Ibid., 175. C.f., "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 96.
221. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 186.
222. Weber, "R. Stammler's 'Surmounting' of the Materialist Conception of History", op.cit., 25.
223. Roth, "Introduction", XXXIII.
224. Tenbruck, op.cit., 324, fn. 25.
225. Roth, in Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 1375.
226. Ibid., C.

227. The German version of Tenbruck, op.cit., was originally published in 1975. See also Schluchter, "The Paradox of Rationalization: On the Relation of Ethics and the World", op.cit., 59.
228. Tenbruck, op.cit., 319.
229. Ibid., 313, where Tenbruck argues that the "Author's Introduction" refers to the uncompleted study of occidental development and studies of culture.
230. Ibid., 317, fn. 6. Indeed Tenbruck is sceptical of the value of editorial attempts to improve the systematicness of Economy and Society, see his "Prefatory Note", British Journal of Sociology, 31, (1980), 315.
231. Tenbruck, "The Problem of Thematic Unity in the Works of Max Weber", op.cit., 331.
232. See Nelson, op.cit.; Marshall, op.cit., 14-27.
233. Tenbruck, op.cit., 326.
234. Ibid., 319.
235. Marshall, op.cit., 20-27; Nelson, op.cit.
236. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 19.
237. The exceptions are von Schelting, op.cit.; A. Sahay, Hindu Reformist Ethics and the Weber Thesis: An Application of Max Weber's Methodology, (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis; University of London, 1969), and Sahay, Sociological Analysis, op.cit.
238. Tenbruck, op.cit., 332. Indeed most of Economy and Society was written before Weber fully appreciated the nature of western rationalization which receives such emphasis in the "Author's Introduction".
239. Weber, "The Social-Psychology of the World Religions" in Gerth and Mills, op.cit., 280. Cf., "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions", in Gerth and Mills, op.cit. 324.
240. Tenbruck, op.cit., 336-7.
241. Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, op.cit., 47-8.
242. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 111.

243. Ibid., 49, 58.
244. Weber, "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics", op.cit., 24-5. See also, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 111.
245. Weber, "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics", op.cit., 20. C.f., "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences", op.cit., 123.
246. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 60.
247. Weber's discussion of value relevance in this article is, of course, particularly inconvenient to the developmental view of his work which sees his explicit statements about sociology to represent a fundamental break with his earlier analyses of the historico-cultural disciplines.
248. Weber, "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics", op.cit., 21-2.
249. For Weber, historical and sociological researches are inextricable as can be seen from his own studies of the effect of religious ethics upon economic life and this strategy contrasts sharply with that of Parsons who attempts to develop sociological concepts quite independently of historical work.
250. I.e., phenomena which are primarily of quantitative rather than qualitative interest to the sociologist.
251. Roth, "Introduction", op.cit., LXIV.
252. Weber, The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations, (London: New Left Books, 1976), 385-6.
253. Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, op.cit., 47. Almost the very reverse of this strategy is adopted by Parsons, see Sahay, Sociological Analysis, op.cit., 10-16 and Chapter 6.
254. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 19-20. C.f., Roth, "Epilogue; Weber's Vision of History", op.cit., 204-5. Indeed a gradual change in Roth's views on the relationship in Weber's work between history and sociology can be detected between the "Introduction" to Economy and Society (1968), XXXVI, "Sociology, Typology and Historical Explanation", in Bendix and Roth, op.cit., "Socio-Cultural Model and Developmental Theory", American Sociological Review 40 (1975), and the "Epilogue...", op.cit., which corresponds to a weakening of his belief that Economy and Society represents the culmination of Weber's studies.

255. Roth, "Charisma and the Counterculture", op.cit., 120. In particular, Weber was arguing against the kinds of sociology proposed by evolutionary and developmental theorists.
256. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 77-79. But cf. Burger, op.cit., following Parsons he sees a sharp division between history and sociology with the result that he misunderstands the relationship between individual and general ideal types in Weber's sociological work and argues that all the types are general, 121-134.
257. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 21-2.
258. See, in particular, Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 90. Ideal types are, for Weber, merely aids created for particular research purposes, they do not represent the essence of reality, 93-4.
259. Weber, "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics", op.cit., 43.
260. Ibid., 42.
261. Ibid., 44-5.
262. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 4.
263. Aron, German Sociology, op.cit., 71. C.f., Burger, op.cit., 154-164.
264. Sahay, "The Importance of Max Weber's Methodology", op.cit., 72. Von Schelting's work is examined in some detail by Bruun and Burger, but his interest in the epistemological and methodological bases of sociological knowledge is only pursued by Sahay as a means of clarifying both Weber's substantive researches and his contribution to sociological knowledge.
265. See Sahay, Hindu Reformist Ethics and the Weber Thesis, op.cit., 166-171.
266. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 11.
267. In value-analysis data is related to a variety of value presuppositions. Some of them may be successful in revealing new bases for investigating social reality and, therefore, lead to the construction of historical individuals, whereas, other points of view will not reveal anything significant to us and, not be worth knowing. For Weber this is an inevitable consequence of the arbitrary nature of the starting points of research.

268. C.f., Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 21-2.
269. Weber, "The Social-Psychology of the World Religions" in Gerth and Mills, op.cit., 294.
270. Franklin's ideas were used as an ideal type of the spirit of modern capitalism even though historically and geographically he was not part of the relevant events. Presumably Weber used Franklin rather than "invent" - in accordance with objective possibility - a system of beliefs and attitudes because they were empirically real.
271. Weber clearly distinguished between the logical and psychological consequences of a belief system, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", op.cit., 96.
272. Sahay, "Introduction", op.cit., 13. Undoubtedly Burger's confusion about the role of the ideal type concepts can be explained by his failure to relate them to Weber's empirical researches based upon individual causal explanation which necessitated comparison with analogous cases. See Burger, op.cit., Chapter 4.
273. Sahay, "The Importance of Max Weber's Methodology", op.cit., 74.
274. Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions", in Gerth and Mills, op.cit., 293.
275. Von Schelting argued that the conclusions Weber drew from his empirical researches were inconsistent with his explicitly stated methodology on this point. For a discussion of the issues involved see Sahay, Sociological Analysis, op.cit., 39.
276. See Sahay, Hindu Reformist Ethics and the Weber Thesis, op.cit., and Marshall, op.cit.
277. They remain hypothetical because they are based upon a number of value-relevant conceptualizations which may become less important to social scientists with the passage of time and be replaced by other value presuppositions.
278. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 19.
279. E.g., Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions", op.cit., 280 and Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions", op.cit., 324.. This element of Weber's work is completely misunderstood by Burger, op.cit., Chapter 4.
280. Weber's distinction between the four types of action and his emphasis upon end-rational and value-rational no doubt seemed to Parsons to be leading in the direction of the abstract kind of analytic elements from which he envisaged that complex social actions were "built".

281. C.f., Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope, "De-Parsonizing Weber", op.cit.; Bendix, "Two Sociological Traditions", op.cit.; Sahay, Sociological Analysis, op.cit.
282. Parsons did not include history in the social sciences because it is not a generalizing pursuit but Weber did not draw a rigid division between the two enterprises.
283. C.f., Warner, op.cit., 1334-1347.
284. Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, op.cit., 592-3.
285. Ibid., 597.
286. Ibid.
287. Undoubtedly Parsons was correct in arguing that the scientist's values influence the choice of problems in natural and social science.
288. Possibly there would not always be such contrasting but coherent, as opposed to fragmentary, value-relevant selections from reality. This is an extreme example chosen to demonstrate that there can be no solution to the diversity of values inherent in the facts by pretending that the professionalization of the sociologist will produce objectivity.
289. C.f., Bauman's observation on Parsons' use of the German word verstehen rather than its English equivalent.
290. Rational models can, if they are formulated as hypotheses, be a means to the discovery of empirical knowledge - but they were not used in this manner by Parsons.
291. C.f. Bershady, op.cit., 39.
292. Undoubtedly Parsons' distinction between analytical and historical sciences made this problem more serious because it led Parsons to consider that the historical disciplines dealt with specific empirical actions whereas sociology utilized general and abstract conceptualizations involving major problems for testing.
293. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 15-17.
294. The types of action are ideally rational. The category of end-rational action has been accentuated to the point of impracticability - how can one decide between different ends without prior standards?
295. Undoubtedly the major problem of the programmatic strategy is the lack of a coherent relationship between general concepts and specific empirical instances.

296. Not real in the sense of a copy of reality, but real in contrast to ideal accentuated meanings.
297. Schutz, Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 5. Schutz argues that his analysis is based upon Economy and Society and the collected methodological essays. But there are few references to the essays, see 25, 200, 208, 221 and 243 and Schutz does not deal at all with Weber's empirical studies.
298. Roth, "Introduction", op.cit., LXII.
299. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., my emphasis.
300. The pure types of action and developmental sequence are, in the majority of cases, quite different to empirical uniformities. In economics, Gresham's Law is one of the few cases where a rationally consistent ideal type conforms to empirical process because in the vast majority of cases the divergence between the type and reality is unambiguous. When Weber refers to empirical uniformities he means generalizations from individual causal explanations, not meaningfully self-evident, but hypothetical, processes such as the routinization of charisma.
301. For Schutz's view of the changes in Weber's ideal type concepts between the early and late work, see The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 244.
302. Ibid., 7. Schutz makes the point that Weber is much more interested in empirical research than the philosophical foundations of sociology. This is partly true, but Schutz's inference that Weber did not ground his approach securely does not follow. There is a great deal of such philosophical grounding in Roscher and Knies but what is important to Schutz is that it is not of a phenomenological kind.
303. Schutz's claim that the problem once established determines the information which is relevant does not meet the objection that the "problem" can be conceptualized in possibly several value-relevant ways.
304. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., A. Giddens, New Rules of Sociological Method, (London; Hutchinson, 1976), 28-9, assumes this criticism to be correct.
305. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 9.
306. Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 162.
307. Ibid., 168.
308. Ibid., 166.

309. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 9.
310. This is Parsons' strategy.
311. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 21-2.
312. Different kinds of research involve different sorts of compromise in the attempt to gain the information which is appropriate to the study.
313. Compare Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 166-169, and Schutz, Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 57-66.
314. Of course, there are differences between Schutz and Weber. But what is at issue is not the existence of differences per se, but the demonstration that a particular omission will necessarily weaken the significance of Weber's research.
315. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 4.
316. I.e., different social strata have a propensity to hold different religious beliefs.
317. Schutz does not show that Weber's failure to distinguish in-order-to and because motives undermines his explanation of particular phenomena.
318. Schutz, Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 18.
319. In The Structure of Social Action, Parsons adopts a very similar view.
320. Schutz was aware of this, but he did not see its significance for Weber's overall approach, Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 19.
321. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 6.
322. C.f., Rex, Sociology and the Demystification of the Modern World, op.cit., 13-15.
323. C.f., Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 21-2.
324. Paradoxically, whilst Schutz recognizes that scientific knowledge involves selection, he is ambivalent about its status vis a vis phenomenological analysis.
325. Later in his career Schutz generalized this point to make thought valid only for a speaker's situation, see "Don Quixote and the Problem of Reality", op.cit.
326. C.f., Weber, Roscher and Knies, op.cit., 162.
327. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit.

328. Weber, Economy and Society, op.cit., 9.
329. This is a good example of how little Schutz's and Weber's projects have in common. Schutz's criticism is quite correct in terms of his distinction between subjective and objective meaning, but from Weber's rather different stance where the emphasis is placed upon gaining as accurate an understanding of an action as possible, the progression from observational to motivational understanding represents a significant step.
330. Schutz, "Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action", op.cit., 36-8.
331. A major similarity with Parsons.
332. C.f., Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 132-138.
333. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 231-4.
334. Ibid., 235.
335. Ibid., 336.
336. Schutz, "Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human-Action", op.cit., 36-8,
337. It is, of course, only a judgement made within the limitations of the available evidence.
338. E.g. Schutz, "The Stranger", op.cit., "The Homecomer", op.cit., and "The Well-Informed Citizen", op.cit.
339. Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, op.cit., 239.

CONCLUSION

In this study the attempt has been made to clarify the nature of Weber's Theory of Action which has been obscured by the attempts, particularly by Parsons though to a lesser extent by Schutz, to extend and in their view improve his approach to the scientific study of social action.¹ Their interpretations of his work are based upon the belief that Economy and Society represents a new stage in Weber's thinking in which sociology is conceived of for the first time as a thoroughly generalizing study of action and society and, therefore, constitutes a radical break with his earlier methodological analyses of the problems of historical inquiry - in particular, that his statements about the dependence of empirical knowledge upon value-relevance and individual causal explanation are inappropriate for sociological methodology. In Parsons' case, the identification of a major change in Weber's position is developed to the point where the abstract and general types of action and social relationship, presented in Economy and Society, are seen to involve an implicit general theoretical system of the kind favoured in naturalistic conceptions of social science but explicitly repudiated by Weber in the essays written between 1903 and 1907. For Schutz the almost exclusive emphasis upon Economy and Society led him to identify the goal of sociology with the formulation of general acausal ideal types which are quite different in purpose, though indispensable, to the goal of Weber's sociological researches - namely, the conclusions he drew from the comparative studies of the effects of religious ethics upon economic

life, which as Tenbruck has shown, occupy an equally prominent place in the last few years of Weber's life.

On the basis of a detailed examination of Weber's epistemological assumptions, theoretical conceptualizations and methodological strategies, clarified where necessary by reference to his empirical studies, we argue that there is a fundamental continuity in his approach to the study of action throughout the work produced after his illness. Consequently, the interpretation by Schutz and Parsons of stages in Weber's thinking has led to the misunderstanding of his theoretical and methodological position in three main areas: value-relevance and the objectivity of sociological knowledge; the role of theoretical concepts and the relationship between history and sociology; and the character of understanding together with both the possibilities and the limitations this form of knowledge provides for the study of action.

For Weber, in the study of social action objective knowledge can only be formulated in terms of individual causal explanations of value-relevant historical individuals or in terms of generalizations derived from such causal sequences. It is a fundamental principle of his epistemological stance that a presuppositionless knowledge of social reality is not possible. All description involves selection in accordance with a particular point of view and as a result of the diversity of values, which could serve as the principle of selection, the process of establishing the object to be explained by an inquiry involves an inescapably arbitrary element. This has major consequences for the definitional concepts used in history and sociology where there is an interdependence between relatively individual and general

concepts.² However, both Parsons³ and Schutz denied the applicability of value-relevance in sociology and argued that objective conceptualization avoiding value judgement was possible on the basis of a generalizing strategy and the professionalization of sociologists who would follow the discipline's rules of procedure. However, it is not without significance that Parsons' work received a great deal of criticism precisely in terms of its claims to conceptualize social systems, power, inequality, and social order, objectively.⁴

The theoretical concepts used in sociology were, for Weber, general acausal "definitions" of typical actions and complexes of action, and served purely as a means to the discovery of knowledge about the empirical world; afterall, their explicitly accentuated nature meant that they could not represent the conclusion of the attempt to gain knowledge of social reality. According to Weber, sociological knowledge is derived from the individual causal explanations of historical work which is equally dependent upon sociological typologies for an initial orientation to its subject matter. But for Weber these "definitions" were not fixed for all times because they were constructed on the basis of an amalgamation of several value-relevant historical individuals and were, of course, only useful to particular inquiries. Weber states this explicitly in terms of his typology of church and sect and undoubtedly the same reasoning applies to his other types including, perhaps the most famous of all, bureaucracy. In effect, the types were constructed for specific purposes and their validity is to be judged only in these terms, a point sadly missed in the voluminous literature which has developed with the intention of improving the ideal typical

actions to fit all points of view. Whilst Parsons and Schutz differed in their interpretations of these theoretical concepts they both accepted a major division between the problems and methods of historical and sociological work and, thereby, reject the interdependence of historical and sociological explanation which is so crucial to Weber.⁵ For Parsons, as we have seen, Weber's theoretical concepts represented a growing acceptance of general theory and became a justification of his own development of theoretical sociology, largely independent of empirical research. For Schutz, within the framework of his distinction between subjective and objective meaning, the formulation of abstract types of action became one of the goals of sociological work. Indeed Schutz saw great merit in the abstractness of these concepts because it afforded the opportunity of unifying the objective and subjective meaning contexts in the consciousness of the homunculus constructed by the social scientist and, thereby, solved the fundamental problem of interpretive sociology - the representation of the actor's (subjective) meaning by the scientist's (objective) concepts. However, both Parsons and Schutz failed to see that the precision of these theoretical concepts was attained only at the cost of becoming a means to gaining knowledge.

Weber's use of ideally accentuated types is also closely related to his views on the nature of the understandability of human action which, as we have seen, can involve two kinds of meaning - the real empirical meaning of an individual's action and the ideally typical meanings constructed by the sociologist about an actor or group of actors. In sociology, which has traditionally aimed to be an empirical science the object is to gain knowledge of empirical

actions, but as Weber made abundantly clear, major problems confront the sociologist's attempt to understand the meaning of another person's action. It is for this reason that the sociologist, on the basis of an appreciation of what generally motivates action, formulates several hypothetical explanations of the action which, for the purposes of clarity, are developed to a level of logical coherence unlikely to be found in reality. By comparing the empirical actions with the ideally typical hypotheses, Weber argues that it is possible to achieve a clearer and more accurate understanding of the action. In this manner, it is possible to progress from an explanation which is adequate at the level of meaning to one which is causally adequate - recognizing, of course, that even in the most favourable circumstances of the availability of evidence the best that can be achieved is a close approximation to the actor's subjective meaning which, for a variety of reasons, remains private and elusive to the sociologist. Nevertheless, despite these qualifications, this approximation may be sufficient for the sociologist's purposes. In contrast to the complexities of understanding with which Weber's methodology is designed to deal, Parsons took a simplistic view of understanding the other and, as a result of the sustained theoretical nature of his work he did not seriously confront the problems of interpreting the subjective meaning of action at the empirical level. Schutz proceeded in a different direction and decided that the problems involved in gaining knowledge of the subjective meaning of another's action were so fundamental as to be insolvable and as a result of this focussed his methodological strategy upon the attempt to represent the typical meanings of

general and repeatable action. If this strategy is compared to Weber's the weaknesses of Schutz's reasoning become more clear because the construction of the ideal types is based essentially upon the sociologist's own experience of the world and given his rejection of the possibility of knowledge of the subjective meaning of actions for specific actors it is difficult to see how the sociologist can progress beyond meaningfully adequate but plausible hypotheses about courses of action and events.

Having clarified the areas of misunderstanding, fostered by these two important interpretations and extensions of Weber's approach, it is appropriate to consider how successfully Weber's Theory of Action can withstand the criticisms which have been directed at the work of Parsons and Schutz. In comparison with Parsons' work, Weber's approach is based upon a more complex theoretical and methodological structure involving a three-fold distinction between description, generalized conclusions and methodological procedures which link description and generalization together. For Parsons, theory is separated from research - it is an a priori speculative activity which because of the programmatic nature of his approach is largely immune to the testing of descriptive studies and knowledge of specific cases. Much of what is for Weber merely a methodological device to aid our interpretation and analysis of concrete events becomes within the Parsonian system an allegedly real characteristic of empirical reality. Moreover in Parsons', unlike in Weber's, approach theory is no longer a means to the discovery of knowledge, but becomes the object of knowledge itself. In comparison with Schutz's conception of interpretive sociology, Weber's Theory of

Action provides a methodological strategy for understanding the subjective meaning of action. It is a strategy which recognizes the real limitations of the understandability of another person's actions and guards against the presentation as sociological knowledge of an intuitive appreciation of actions and events, based upon the sociologist's inevitably partial experiences of social life, by emphasizing the importance of analyzing meaningfully adequate explanations in the attempt to discover the closest possible correspondence with the empirical material. In Schutz's work the use of utopian standards of understanding led him to abandon Weber's practical research strategy and in the emphasis upon general types of action and actor led him to separate sociological reasoning from research into specific events and situations⁶ and, of course, the subsequent development of some of his ideas in ethnomethodology led to the rejection of the possibility of objective knowledge of the subjective meaning of someone else's action.

This comparison of the work of Weber with that of Parsons and Schutz has revealed some of the strengths of the Weberian Theory of Action in relation to the limitations of conventional sociology which were revealed during the crisis of the late 1960's and early 1970's. Parsons and other functionalists, whether of a conflict or consensus perspective, did not recognize that the selection of material for conceptualization involves value relevance and the relating of material to different points of view and, therefore, an inevitably arbitrary element in the description and establishment of the data of sociological inquiry. Indeed, it was the refusal to recognize this, allied to the simplistic view that objectivity

was dependent upon the training of the sociologist, which led to the inherently unresolvable debates about ideological distortion and political partiality because the real, though unperceived, issue concerned the attempt to reconcile the fundamental diversity of values which could be used as a basis for investigating empirical reality. These problems were made much more difficult by the legitimation of a theoretical level of reasoning largely independent of specific individual instances, whether contemporary or historical, in which theoretical schemes were developed, modified and rejected on grounds quite different to those of empirical testing. Indeed the situation was exacerbated by the view taken in conventional sociology that the understanding of the meaning of action was relatively self-evident with the result that the phenomenological and ethnomethodological critiques of sociological knowledge found some rather easy targets in the dependency upon taken for granted and unjustified assumptions about social life. Ultimately sociology cannot be immune from such criticism, but in the enthusiastic realization of this weakness of principle in conventional sociology little attempt was made to see how such assumptions necessarily undermined sociological findings or if the problems of this dependency could be minimized.⁷ The result was a "crisis" in sociology and the increasing popularity of new forms of social inquiry. In the context of these problems raised against sociology, this study has attempted to show that Weber's Theory of Action offers a methodological strategy which takes account of the value-relevant nature of conceptualization and the problems which this raises for objectivity, which emphasizes the closest links between theory and empirical research,

between sociology and history, between heuristic devices and knowledge of reality and, which offers a practical methodology for studying the connections between values and human action that in favourable circumstances may lead to an understanding of social action sufficiently accurate for sociological explanation.

Finally, a comment in terms of the objectives of this study about the relationship between Weber's Theory of Action and sociology more generally. Weber's approach is specifically concerned with understanding social action which for him meant discovering the link between beliefs and conduct. He recognized that other conceptions of sociology are quite possible and, indeed, since his death definitions of sociology in which the understandability of action has been accorded a far less prominent place have been particularly influential within the discipline. However, with the exception of the work of Parsons and Schutz, who explicitly attempted to extend and improve Weber's ideas, these other approaches have not been examined. The aim of this study has been to clarify one very significant contribution to sociology, not to evaluate the merits of widely differing perspectives, nor to define what sociology is, or should be.

NOTES

1. Cf., R J Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, op. cit., 137, fn. 26
2. E.g., the conceptualization of the British car worker would not be identical to all car workers in the industrialized world, although some features would be held in common. Hence it is not immune from the implications of value-relevance.
3. Parsons notionally accepted the importance of value-relevance, but interpreted it too narrowly as the scientist's interests which determined the problem studied and thereby rejected the more radical implication of Weber's use of the concept.
4. Schutz's analyses do not deal with the macro level of social structure which is probably the reason his work has escaped criticism of its objectivity.
5. See D. Zaret, "From Weber to Parsons and Schutz: The Eclipse of History in Modern Social Theory", American Journal of Sociology 85 (1980), 1180-1201 which is in broad agreement with our conclusions.
6. Cf., Gorman, op.cit., 84
7. E.g. Filmer, et. al.

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