

Discuss "verstehen" in the context of interpretive approach in social sciences. How the concept of verstehen shaped Max Weber's understanding to gain knowledge about society and social actors?

### 1) Introduction:-

Verstehen or interpretive understanding is a revolutionary concept introduced by Max Weber in sociological methodology which posits seeking the subjective meaning or motive behind social actions. This concept sharply contrasts with positivistic approach of sociology. Weber, being the pioneer of this approach, strongly based his ideas on verstehen. His ideas about social actions and society in general deeply showcase his subjective understanding of the society.

### 2) The Approach of Verstehen:-

The word 'verstehen' itself is of German origin and means "to understand". It refers to interpretive understanding in the lexicon of sociology. It is

a methodology of sociological research that stresses subjective understanding of social action and society instead of empirical or objective research.

Link to the asked part

"The objective of Verstehen is to interpret social action and understand it causally."

Max Weber

### 3) Applying Verstehen in Social Sciences:

The approach of Verstehen in social sciences allow the social scientists to get a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied. It focus not on objective facts and figures but on study of goals, objectives and motives behind the social realities.

#### a) Encouraging the Researcher into the Frame of Mind of the Subject,-

The aim of Verstehen is to encourage the researcher to delve into the frame of mind of the subject i.e. to walk inside in their

## Verstehen

### Focus

Use scale

Subjective  
understanding  
of social  
action

### View of Society

using subjective  
lens to see  
facts, not ref

### Example

why people  
protest?

Avoidance of

### b) Avoid Biases

Verstehen can be gain incredible  
way in interpretive research to  
avoid biases. These research  
are often in the form of

empathetic interviews or case

studies that allow researchers

to see social realities from  
through the words or

perspective of the subject. Thus  
allowing them to avoid inbuilt  
biases

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

c) ~~Studying Social Action~~  
in its natural habitat i.e. Society  
The real habitat of  
social action is society and  
 verstehen allows us to study  
this action in its very habitat

4) How Verstehen Shaped Weber's  
Understanding of Society :-

Throughout the work  
of Max Weber, we see a clear  
influence of Verstehen. A glimpse  
of interpretive understanding is  
evident in every theory he  
has presented during the course  
of his career.

a) Topology of Social  
Action

His famous topology of social  
action focuses on categorizing  
action based on the subjective  
meanings that people attach  
to their behavior. He gives  
the following categories

i) Zweckrational: This is the  
instrumentally rational action based  
on definitive goals and efficient means

ii) Wertrational:-

This action is based on

the inherent belief in the value of act

### iii) Affective Action

This form of action is solely driven by emotions and feelings.

### iv) Traditional Action

This form of action is inspired by longstanding customs.

## b) Theory of Religion — Religion as Inspiring force behind Economic and Political Action

His work on Religion in his

work "The Protestant Ethic & the Spirit of Capitalism" is

another manifestation of his inspiration from verstehen. In

this work he proclaims that

it was religion that motivated people to work for economic benefit eventually leading to rise of capitalism.

## c) Theory of Ideal Types — Also a Subjective Construct to Study Action

Weber's idea of 'Ideal types' is also inspired from verstehen where he uses an ideal

mental construct to measure the

reality. According to him, ideal types offers an idea that is "normatively desirable" that and can be used to measure social actions or realities.

In short we see that every one of his works is inspired by the idea of verstehen that aims not at calculating social statistics but studying social realities through subjective understanding.

Write 8-99 sides  
Add more headings  
Add reference  
Content is fine though

### Conclusion:-

Verstehen is a social idea that aims at interpreting understanding of social reality by looking at the motives of social actors and how they construct reality through their actions. The work of Max Weber demonstrates this idea by delving into the subjective reasoning of social actions and actors.