

# Sociology 'A' Level: Max Weber

## Individual Research Topic

 Use the Hutchinson Encyclopaedia on CD Rom and find out what you can about Max Weber's life and career. Obtain print out data sheets if it is possible.



- What is the **Protestant Ethic**?
- Why is the Protestant Ethic important to the rise of capitalism?
- What theory is Max Weber trying to correct with his analysis of the Protestant Ethic and the rise of Capitalism?
- How do other writers criticise this theory?
- How could you criticise this type of theory?



- What is an **ideal type**?
- Summarise Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy in as few lines as possible.
- How useful is the ideal type as a methodology? Suggest good points as well as the rather more obvious difficulties implicit in the methodology.



- How does Weber's description of bureaucracy relate to his theory of action? (Not easy to answer - you may have to work this one out for yourself. If you have problems see your teacher)
- Why is the analysis of bureaucracy so important to Sociology and the Sociology of the workplace?
- How realistic is Weber's description of bureaucracy in your own experience?



Try and work out your own answers to these questions - they are intended to test your understanding.

- What has Weber contributed to the study of Sociology? Try and think of five things that he wrote about that have helped you come to a wider understanding of society.
- Why hasn't Weber become as influential as either Marx or Durkheim, with a school of theory based on his work? Try and think of some reasons of your own. It would help if you discussed this with someone from the group.
- What do you feel about his some of his ideas? Comment on the ones that you find interesting, wrong headed, difficult or sensible.

# Sociology 'A' Level: Max Weber

**source: Roland Meighan et al. *Perspectives on Society (Nelson) 1979:78ff*** (This book is in the Learning Resource Centre and should be useful to you.)

The idea of a value-free sociology is most closely associated with the name of the great German sociologist, Max Weber (work published 1949). We should be clear what Weber meant by 'value-freedom'. Weber's methodology for the study of society was to construct 'ideal types' (mental models if you like) of social phenomena such as 'bureaucracy' or forms of life such as 'capitalism'. These were idealised conceptual models of the phenomenon for study which displayed what Weber thought were their essential features ...

Weber's value freedom is then a non-judgemental analysis of society 'in its own terms'. Thus, for Weber, a bureaucracy working well is a bureaucracy working to achieve the goals set for it by those at the apex, whether this bureaucracy is a charitable organisation or the C.I.A. Naturally this mode of analysis rules out any kind of critical appraisal of the power structure, for to study a society 'in its own terms' is to accept the projects of the most powerful and to banish any speculation that there might be better societies. It is worth noting that, after Weber's death and throughout the Nazi regime in Germany, Max Weber's value-free sociology was the sociology taught in German universities. This is an indication of the way in which this type of sociology can shake down with any political regime...

The idea of a value-free sociology has been extremely popular among professional sociologists since the war. Two major influences (themselves interlinked) may be detected. Firstly there is the immense prestige of 'science', and the attempts by professional sociologists to construct a Sociology modelled on the natural sciences. Secondly there is the incorporation of sociologists into government and business enterprise as researchers and advisers. These two tendencies have been very much stronger in the USA than in Europe, but until very recently it was the functionalist and empiricist sociology of North America that set the pattern for English sociology - so much so that the A.E.B. 'A' level syllabus is still listed under headings ultimately derived from American functionalism, although today this syllabus allows for many perspectives.

## **In your groups:**

Summarise the main arguments of the passage in as few words as possible.

What does Weber seem to mean by 'value-freedom'?

Can sociology be value-free?

Should sociology be value-free?