THE SYNTHESIS OF IDEAL-TYPICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL ANALYSIS AS A METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY FOR THE STUDY OF IDEOLOGIES

Asaf Kedar
PhD candidate, Department of Political Science
Hebrew University of Jerusalem
askedar@hotmail.com
Tel. +972-3-7321568

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INTRODUCTION

In an article that appeared several years ago in the Journal of Political Ideologies, its authors issued a critique of the way ideal types are (mis)used:

Methodologically, distinctions are often formulated in terms of some sort of dichotomous Weberian ideal types, not existing in a pure form in practice, but useful for comparing against the complexity of political and historical reality. Too often this seems to lead to the complexity being lost sight of in the heat of analysis and to the ideal type or model coming to stand itself for the reality. An analytical distinction (itself problematic) thus comes to be treated as real.¹

The authors’ words of caution are certainly justified. The nature and function of the ideal type are often misconstrued, leading to methodological blunders such as those mentioned in the passage just quoted.² However, we should not throw the baby with the bathwater. For the ideal type may, if wielded wisely, prove to be an efficient tool in negotiating the tension between the recurring and the unique inherent not only in the realm of ideology, but in the historical flow of human existence as such. I will try to reaffirm the ideal type’s epistemological utility by anchoring it in the hermeneutical tradition. This move would, I suggest, clarify the ideal type’s epistemological status, and facilitate the process of extracting its most fruitful potentialities while sidestepping its pitfalls. Once this is accomplished, the ideal type will hopefully offer itself as a valuable asset for the historical and comparative study of ideologies.

The synthesis of hermeneutical and idealtypical analysis will be constructed in this essay as a three-layered mechanism, made up of philosophical hermeneutics, the ideal type, and methodological hermeneutics. Accordingly, the first part of the essay will be devoted to recapitulating the basic principles of philosophical hermeneutics. The ideal type, as formulated by Max Weber, will then be shown to be highly congruent with those principles. Finally, methodological hermeneutics will be brought forth as responsible for bridging the distance between the abstract idealtypical construction and the empirical world. I will conclude the essay with some reflections on the way in which the typico-hermeneutical synthesis may be applied at the service of comparative inquiry. The entire discussion, though predominantly theoretical by nature, will be conducted with a view to its implications for the study of ideologies.

² Such blunders may also be committed by those who are critical of ideal types. Daniel Sassoon (2001), for example, erroneously equates idealtypical analysis with essentialism and then criticizes it on this basis (p. 49). I hope in the course of this paper to disprove this equation.
PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

In the human sciences there has been, over the past several decades, a growing interest in hermeneutics, the latter partaking in - and carried upon the waves of - the “linguistic turn”. The hermeneutical contribution to the human sciences may be discerned both at the methodological and the philosophical levels. The methodological aspects of hermeneutics will be addressed later on in the paper. At this stage, I would like to recapitulate some of the basic tenets of philosophical hermeneutics that have proved to be most enduring and influential in the human sciences. The following presentation will be based eclectically upon the ideas of Gadamer, Ricoeur and others. In its brevity, it will inevitably gloss over the myriad nuances and controversies to be found among the various hermeneutical approaches. Its main purpose is to cursorily adumbrate the contours of the philosophic-hermeneutical view of the human sciences, as a framework within which methodological strategies for the study of political ideologies (in our case) will be discussed.

Philosophical hermeneutics seeks to understand the nature, the conditions, and the limitations of the human sciences (that is, of the possibility of attaining knowledge about human experience). Its fundamental precept is the rejection of the subject-object relationship (or at least its exclusivity) as an apposite model for the study of man. Instead, it views both scholars and their object of study as bound up together in their linguisticality and historicality, a condition which calls in turn for the adoption of interpretive procedures for the study of social life.

The assertion of linguisticality (Sprachlichkeit, in Gadamer’s terminology) as a fundamental and essential attribute of human nature and experience is perhaps the twentieth century’s greatest contribution to philosophy and to human understanding.3 In the field of hermeneutics, the crucial breakthrough was accomplished by Heidegger and especially Gadamer, for whom language was the “medium of hermeneutical experience”, in contrast to earlier Romantic and Diltheyan psychologistic conceptions of hermeneutics as empathic or imaginative understanding of the author’s inner world.4

3 Cf. Jay (1982), 86: “When the intellectual historians of the next century come to write their accounts of our own, they will inevitably remark on the dramatic quickening of interest in virtually all disciplines in the question of language.” From the perspective of the history of political thought, see Ball, Farr and Hanson (1989).

4 Gadamer (1975), pp. 345ff. As David Hoy (1982, p. 62) explains: “In hermeneutic experience what is being analyzed is the act of communication, and the participants exist in a world of previously shared meanings; that is to say, they share a language. In contrast to earlier, more psychological hermeneutic theories, Gadamer’s
The interpreter is always caught in the web of history as well as in that of language. Just as scholars cannot escape the linguistic oxygen that makes meaningful life and dialogue possible, neither can they completely ignore the historical situation in which their peculiar world of pre-understandings was constructed. Part of these pre-understandings may be discarded or criticized in the context of a given interpretive process; others may be embraced (and even developed) in the course of that process; but whatever the case may be, social scientists must develop a reflexivity towards the sedimentations of meanings with which they arrive at an inquiry. This is an indispensable precondition if scholars (and indeed the discipline as a whole) are to “enlarge” themselves through interpretive experience.\(^5\) In more concrete terms, self-reflexivity means also a greater awareness of the fact that the questions we ask and the concepts we use in formulating these questions and in conducting our investigations are informed by our preconceptions, the latter thereby playing a pivotal role in shaping our interpretations and, consequently, our scientific findings.

Given the linguisticality and historicality attending on social scientific inquiry, the interpretive process is to be seen as a dialogical or communicative process. This does not mean that life is breathed in some mysterious way into the interpreted text; only that interpreter and text maintain a certain degree of autonomy vis-à-vis one another. Interpreters cannot – and should not – abnegate themselves, their preconceptions and their interests in favor of a reconstruction of the supposedly “pure” meaning of the text; but neither should the world of the interpreter foist itself completely upon the text, tearing the latter violently out of its organic textual and contextual fabric. The middle ground between these two extremities may be usefully conceived as analogous to a dialogue. Interpreters do have their own world of meanings, with which they approach the text; but they must allow the text to, as it were, ‘have its own say’: they must, in other words, allow for meanings to arise out of the text that are not necessarily compatible with the interpreter’s expectations.\(^6\) The text is a linguistic creation, and

\(^5\) On Ricoeur’s enlargement of the self and Gadamer’s fusion of horizons, see note 6 below. For variations on the link between self-reflexivity and enhanced (self-)understanding, see also Bauman (1978), pp. 217-18, 220; Bleicher (1982), pp. 140-2.

\(^6\) Bleicher (1982), p. 142; Bauman (1978), pp. 203, 229, 245-6; Gadamer (1975), who inter alia adduces the useful analogy between interpretation and translation (pp. 345-51, 356); see also Gadamer (1987), pp. 131-2. It should be stressed, together with Hoy (1978, pp. 96-8) that Gadamer’s notion of the “fusion of horizons” between text and interpreter (which occurs in the course of the dialogical interpretive process) does not mean the effacement of horizons, but rather the widening and sharpening of the interpreter’s horizon, a notion akin to what Ricoeur (1982, p. 143) called “exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self.” Jay (1982, p.
as such its reading involves the application of our linguistic faculties, in a way that is (at least to some extent) similar to what we do as we engage in conversation with each other. In both cases, we do not enter the mind of our counterparts, nor experience their world “from the inside”, but rather try to construe what they meant by resorting to the structure and context of their utterance and to the linguistic conventions pertaining to the case. It is thus a basically inter-subjective process, repudiating the classical subject-object dichotomy. This insight is valid to the realm of social action as well as to that of written texts.

A final notion worth mentioning is that of the “hermeneutical circle”, a concept that has been used in two major senses. First there is the ontological sense, best represented by Gadamer, i.e. the circularity characterizing the relationship between interpreters and their tradition or preconceptions:

The circle ... is not a formal structure [i.e., the relationship between parts and whole], ... but describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter. The anticipation of meaning that governs an understanding of a text ... proceeds from the communality that binds us to tradition. But ... tradition is not simply a precondition into which we come, but we produce it ourselves. Thus the circle of understanding is not a ‘methodological’ circle, but describes an ontological structural element in understanding.

The hermeneutical circle in this sense is thus yet another name that may be assigned to the historicality of the interpreter. Alongside the ontological conception of the hermeneutical circle, however, there is also the older, methodological sense, referring to the circular movement between understanding the “parts” and understanding the “whole”, which will be discussed further below.

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Before we go on with the development of the typico-hermeneutical synthesis, we need to consider the way the hermeneutical paradigm as presented above bears upon our

106) embraces the dialogical dimension of hermeneutics (in the sense propounded above) as indispensable for the field of intellectual history, as does LaCapra (1983), pp. 30-2. Betti, drawing on legal hermeneutics, asserts that “we must assume that the text has something to say which we do not know from ourselves and which exists independently of our act of understanding.” (quoted by Kelley, 1983, p. 656.)

7 Cf. Thompson’s (1993, p. 268) critique of Ricoeur’s too rigid dichotomy between written and spoken discourse. For Ricoeur’s position, see his 1973 article.


9 Bleicher (1982) has given this point special emphasis in his construction of a hermeneutic sociology.


12 See Gadamer (1975), pp. 258-61; Skinner (1975-6, p. 210); “The proper method [of hermeneutics] is said to be that of tracing out the line of the so-called hermeneutic circle, by placing the text to be interpreted within a field of assumptions and conventions to which it contributes and from which it derives its distinctively meaningful character.”
understanding of our object of inquiry, namely ideologies. In my view, ideologies are best to be understood in this context as cultural phenomena, in the broad, semiotic-interpretive sense that this concept has taken on over the past several decades.\textsuperscript{13} In what is a valuable theoretical synthesis, William Sewell recently proffered a conception of culture that is highly congenial to the study of ideologies. Sewell views culture as “an indissoluble duality or dialectic”\textsuperscript{14} between systems of meaning and social practice, “as a system of symbols possessing a real but thin coherence that is continually put at risk in practice and therefore subject to transformation.”\textsuperscript{15} Sewell goes on to think of “worlds of meaning as normally being contradictory, loosely integrated, contested, mutable, and highly permeable.”\textsuperscript{16} This conception of culture entails the adoption of interpretive strategies: since this whole conception hinges on the premise of the meaningfulness of social practice, it follows that the key to opening up this world is an interpretive one.\textsuperscript{17} This is true not only for the method by which structures of meaning are unearthed, but also for understanding their complex historical dynamics: how and why certain (structures of) meanings are constructed (and not others), how they percolate into the social fabric, by whom they are adopted, contested, or transformed and to what ends, and so on.

Ideologies qua cultural phenomena are also structures of meaning\textsuperscript{18} perpetually implicated in the realm of social and especially political practice, and characterized by an incomplete coherence that is subject to contestation and transformation (though perhaps to a lesser degree than non-ideological cultural phenomena).\textsuperscript{19} Concomitantly, ideologies – whether they are

\textsuperscript{13} For a useful survey, see Bonnell and Hunt (1999); see also the important agenda-setting volume by Rabinow and Sullivan (1987a).
\textsuperscript{14} Sewell (1999), p. 47.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 52.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 53. A similar approach is propounded by Dirks, Eley, and Ortner (1994), esp. pp. 3, 22.
\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Rabinow and Sullivan (1987b, pp. 6-7): “interpretation begins from the postulate that the web of meaning constitutes human existence ... interpretive social science can be called a return to the objective world, seeing that world as in the first instance the circle of meaning within which we find ourselves and that we can never fully surpass.”
\textsuperscript{18} I prefer to stick to the term “meaning” in referring to ideologies. This term is more comprehensive than Michael Freedden’s (1996) “concepts”, for (as Freedden himself acknowledges [p. 5]), ideologies are made up not only of concepts but also of other semiotic and cognitive entities, i.e. norms of conduct, unconscious and irrational urges, myths, idioms, metaphorical constructions, and so on. Mark Bevir’s (1999) term “belief” is more suitable, but “meaning” is still more inclusive, and furthermore places the world of ideologies more firmly within the intellectual field of cultural analysis, which I believe would be the most appropriate and fruitful scientific arena for the study of ideologies.
\textsuperscript{19} Cf. Sewell’s (1980) earlier and highly influential study of workers’ consciousness, pp. 6-10, particularly the following passage: “In trying to make sense of the workers’ agitation following the revolutions of 1830 or 1848, for example, the ideas we are pursuing were stated partially and in fragments ... and are available only in the most heterogeneous forms – in manifestos, records of debates at meetings, actions of political demonstrators, newspaper articles, slogans, speeches [etc.]. In such situations the coherence of the thought lies not in particular texts or in the ‘work’ of particular authors, but in the entire ideological discourse constituted by a large number of
construed as “restrictive” or “inclusive”, whatever their social functions are claimed to be, and whoever their producers or consumers are - ideologies, in both their synchronic and diachronic dimensions, are amenable to interpretive strategies of investigation.\textsuperscript{20}

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I will now turn to demonstrate the congruence of Weber’s conception of the ideal type with the principles of philosophical hermeneutics. The text in which Weber expounds in greatest detail his notion of the ideal type is his “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Social Policy” (1949), first published in the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik in 1904. Weber subsequently implemented his ideal-typical methodology in a great variety of social-scientific inquiries, and since Weber’s time the ideal type has continued to be the subject of much discussion. It is not at all my intention to plunge into this entire corpus of Weber’s own work and his subsequent interpreters, nor is it my aim to provide a comprehensive interpretation of Weber’s methodological outlook. Rather, I will merely focus on Weber’s 1904 essay, trying in Ricoeurian fashion to reveal the hermeneutical world opened up “in front of” Weber’s text,\textsuperscript{21} thus rendering it amenable to appropriation into the hermeneutical tradition, into interpretive social science, and ultimately into the study of ideologies understood as cultural phenomena.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20}Bernard Susser (1996) and Gayil Talshir (1998) are right in highlighting the multi-layered nature of ideology. In this context, the cultural conception of ideology may perhaps be regarded as an umbrella-definition, providing a general framework within which the manifold perspectives on ideological phenomena can be accommodated. Developing this suggestion is of course beyond the scope of this paper.

The conception of ideology as propounded above concurs basically with Michael Freeden’s (1996) approach to the study of ideologies. Freeden, who has produced the most comprehensive, sophisticated, and systematic theoretical account of political ideologies to date, adopts a morphological approach to the study of ideologies that acknowledges their nature as structures of thought, but prefers the “notion of morphology as flexible, internally pliant, and subject to continuous shaping. ... what changes incessantly - due to essential contestability, historical and spatial circumstance, and human agency - is the particular shape the ideological decontestation will adopt, so that it can never be predetermined by rules of structure.” (p. 127) Thus, Freeden’s conception of ideologies preserves the affinity suggested here between ideology and culture. Even though Freeden focuses in his seminal book on political concepts, he nevertheless admits the much broader cultural scope of ideologies: “This study does not profess to offer a complete analytical approach to ideologies. It will not, for example, directly emphasize narratives, myths, symbols, idioms, or the affectivity of language - all additional dimensions that can be superimposed on the ideological product.” (p. 5) Mark Bevir’s (1999) notion of “webs of beliefs” is also informed by a soft structural dimension (pp. 190-1). On the inextricable intertwining between the realms of meaning and practice as a constitutive feature of politics and political thought, see also Farr (1989) and Baker (1990), pp. 6-7, 19-20.

\textsuperscript{21}See Ricoeur (1982), pp. 141-4.

\textsuperscript{22}The great affinity between Weber’s ideal-typical methodology and the hermeneutical tradition has generally been overlooked (with the partial exception of Mommsen, 1989, p. 122; and Outhwaite, 1975, passim); and there
THE IDEAL TYPE: A HERMENEUTICAL READING

It is not incidental that Weber’s most detailed account of the ideal type\(^{23}\) appears in an article occasioned by his assumption (together with Sombart and Jaffé) of editorial responsibility of the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik; for this fact is indicative of the inextricable part played by Weber’s methodological formulations in his ongoing attempt at understanding the conditions and the limits of the social sciences (and, by implication, of the Archiv). The first section of the article is devoted precisely to pointing out those limitations, before taking up the methodological questions:

The fate of an epoch which has eaten of the tree of knowledge is that it must know that we cannot learn the meaning of the world from the results of its analysis, be it ever so perfect; it must rather be in a position to create this meaning itself. It must recognize that general views of life and the universe can never be the products of increasing empirical knowledge, and that the highest ideals, which move us most forcefully, are always formed only in the struggle with other ideals which are just as sacred to others as ours are to us.\(^{24}\)

The assertion that the scholar’s world of meaning lies beyond the grasp of empirical science has profound implications for the nature of the social sciences:

The quality of an event as a ‘social-economic’ event is not something which it possesses ‘objectively.’ It is rather conditioned by the orientation of our cognitive interest, as it arises from the specific cultural significance which we attribute to the particular event in a given case. Wherever those aspects of a cultural event which constitute its specific significance for us are connected with a social-economic event ... they involve, or at least ... can involve a problem for the social sciences.\(^{25}\)

Thus, the investigator’s world of meanings partakes in shaping the very essence of social science. The category of a “social-economic event”, as Weber put it – that is, the most fundamental unit of social science as such – is conditioned by the “cultural significance” attributed to the events by the scholar.

\(^{23}\) It is possible to find in Weber’s essay (1949, p. 100) reference to “individual” and “quasi-generic” ideal types. Burger (1976) also identifies ideal types that “describe the (alleged) ‘essence’ of complicated systems of ideas” (p. 132) and “ideal types of developments” (p. 133). Mommsen (1989) refers to “structural types” versus “types of social change” (p. 124), and also discusses the transformation of Weber’s early ideal types into “pure types” (pp. 127ff). Hekman (1983) writes of general and historical, action and structural ideal types. However, as Burger (1976) puts it, these distinctions are significant only “as far as the substantive content of ideal types is concerned ... however, this has no methodological significance” (p. 135). In other words, in terms of the nature and logic of ideal types as methodological tools, there is no substantial difference between the various kinds of ideal types. Consequently, I have found little reason to complicate my discussion of the ideal type by reference to those distinctions.

\(^{24}\) Weber (1949), p. 57. In all quotations from Weber’s text, emphasis appearing in the original will be marked by italics, and added emphasis by bold letters.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 64.
But the scholar, in turn, cannot grasp the whole of social life in its totality; whence the epistemological consequence that social scientific inquiry is essentially and inevitably selective, and it is the investigator who determines which segment of reality becomes the object of inquiry. This “one-sidedness” of social inquiry puts into serious doubt the utility of generalizations for social science, and indeed, for Weber the aim of social scientific investigation is to understand social reality in its concrete individuality, rather than to formulate generalities. Since we can always grasp only a limited segment of the infinite reality; since that grasping is itself limited and conditioned by our values and presuppositions; and since, finally, even those values and presuppositions (and, consequently, those parts of reality that are deemed to be scientifically significant) are subject to constant change, it follows that the understanding of the social phenomena selected for investigation cannot take the form of generalities. Weber resigns himself to the limits of social scientific inquiry and the concomitant limited validity of the scientist’s conceptual constructions. The affinity of the passage below with the principles of philosophical hermeneutics is, I think, self-evident:

The intellectual apparatus which the past has developed through the analytical rearrangement of the immediately given reality is in constant tension with the new knowledge which we can and desire to wrest from reality. The progress of cultural science occurs through this conflict. Its result is the perpetual reconstruction of those concepts through which we seek to comprehend reality. The dissolution of the analytical constructs so constructed through the expansion and shift of the scientific horizon – and the reformulation anew of concepts

26 Ibid., p. 76: “The concept of culture … includes those segments and only those segments of reality which have become significant to us because of [its] value-relevance [i.e., its relevance as derives from the scholar’s value-orientation].” Cf. also p. 81: “‘Culture’ is a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which human beings confer meaning and significance.”

27 For Weber’s notion of one-sidedness, see Ibid., pp. 67, 71-2.

28 Weber himself does not completely reject the formulation of generalizations at certain stages of the inquiry; yet he does not clarify what is the epistemological basis for such generalizations, given his own postulation of the value-laden nature of social scientific inquiry and the inability to grasp any phenomenon in its totality. For Weber’s (limited) allowance of generalization in social science, see Ibid., pp. 79-80. This critique is relevant as well for Weber’s distinction between “class concepts” and ideal types (pp. 100-101).

29 Ibid., p. 80-1: “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.” Weber also spells out the implications of this view for the nature of causal analysis: “Where the individuality of a phenomenon is concerned, the question of causality is not a question of laws but of concrete causal relationships; it is not a question of the subsumption of the event under some general rubric as a representative case but of its imputation as a consequence of some constellation. The knowledge of causal laws is not the end of the investigation but only a means.” (78-9) See also p. 78: “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.”

30 Ibid., p. 84: “The cultural problems which move men form themselves ever anew and in different colors, and the boundaries of that area in the infinite stream of concrete events which acquire meaning and significance for us, i.e., which becomes an ‘historical individual’, are constantly subject to change.” See also pp. 105-7, where Weber explicitly states the connection between the nature of his conceptual strategy and his (ontological-hermeneutical) view of social science.
on the foundations thus transformed. ... The relationship between concept and reality in the cultural sciences involves the transitoriness of all such syntheses. ... revealing the limits of the significance of those points of view ... The great advances in the sphere of the social sciences are substantively tied up with the shift in practical cultural problems and take the guise of a critique of concept-construction.\(^{31}\)

The pivotal role of the principle of selectivity (or “one-sidedness”, as Weber called it) for Weber’s conception of social science and for his subsequent adoption of ideal-typical analysis cannot be overestimated, for

the ‘one-sidedness’ ... is ... a principle which is generally valid for the scientific knowledge of cultural reality. The main task of the discussion to follow [i.e., the elaboration of the ideal type] is to make explicit the logical foundations and the general methodological implications of this principle.\(^{32}\)

Thus, Weber’s social scientific outlook is permeated with what we may easily designate as hermeneutical principles: the values and presuppositions inescapably guiding the scholar’s work, and the perpetual transformation of these horizons over time; the inability to grasp the totality of human existence, entailing a significant limitation (if not rejection) of generalizations as a viable aim of the social sciences; the construal of social phenomena as imbued with significance, coupled with Weber’s characterization of the social sciences as dealing with “psychological and intellectual (geistig) phenomena” amenable to “empathic understanding”.\(^{33}\)

Upon all this may be added as well the historicization by Weber of science itself as a product of modern Western civilization.\(^{34}\)

The formulation of the ideal type stems from the attempt to spell out the methodological implications of this whole (philosophical-hermeneutical) discussion. Weber begins his elaboration of the ideal type with the following passage, marking the transition from the philosophical to the methodological part of the essay:

Having now completed this lengthy discussion, we can finally turn to the question which is methodologically relevant in the consideration of the ‘objectivity’ of cultural knowledge. The question is: what is the logical function and structure of the concepts which our science, like all others, uses? Restated with special reference to the decisive problem, the question is: what is the significance of theory and theoretical conceptualization (theoretische Begriffsbildung) for our knowledge of cultural reality?\(^{35}\)

Weber’s answer to this question is to be found in his conception of the ideal type, which he defines as follows:

\(^{31}\) Ibid., pp. 105-6.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 71.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 74.
\(^{34}\) This position is usually associated with Weber’s famous 1918 lecture, “Science as a Vocation” (1958); however, it had already made its debut in his “Objectivity” essay (1949, pp. 110f).
An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct (Gedankenbild). In its conceptual purity, this mental construct (Gedankenbild) cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a utopia. Historical research faces the task of determining in each individual case, the extent to which this ideal-construct approximates to or diverges from reality, to what extent for example, the economic structure of a certain city is to be classified as a ‘city-economy’.  

This key passage contains almost everything that is needed in order to understand the nature of the Weberian ideal type. First, the ideal type is one-sided, the hermeneutical meaning whereof has been clarified above. It is designed to highlight a certain aspect of reality that is significant from a certain “point of view”. That is why the same concept (for instance, “fascism”) may be given multifarious ideal-typical formulations (e.g., fascism as a systematic political doctrine, as a diffuse political culture or “style”, as a distinct pattern of political authority, etc.). Taking this logic one step further, it should be pointed out that the same empirical phenomenon may also be related to completely different ideal types (whether as the basis for the construction of those ideal types or as the object of research conducted with the aid of the ideal types). Thus, the thought of Georges Sorel, for example, may be related to the ideal types “revolutionary syndicalism”, “anti-materialist revision of Marxism”, “proto-fascism”, and/or “national socialism” (that is, his thought may be referred to in the process of formulating these ideal types; or it may be analyzed with the aid of one or more of those ideal types). The ideal type displays here its non-essentialist nature in its clearest form.

The ideal type’s resistance to essentialism is also evident in a second major element of Weber’s definition as quoted above: the ideal type is made up of components that are “more or less present and occasionally absent” from the relevant empirical cases. Hence, concrete historical phenomena can at most “approximate to” the ideal type or “diverge from” it. As

36 Ibid., p. 90. Emphasis in the original.
37 Ibid., p. 91: “[With regard to the ‘idea’ of capitalistic culture] it must be accepted as certain that numerous, indeed a very great many, utopias of this sort can be worked out, of which none is like another; and none of which can be observed in empirical reality as an actually existing economic system, but each of which however claims that it is a representation of the ‘idea’ of capitalistic culture. Each of these can claim to be a representation of the ‘idea’ of capitalistic culture to the extent that it has really 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. Inasmuch 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-typical view of a particular culture.”
38 Cf. Ibid., p. 105: “these concepts are shown to be obviously inappropriate as schema into which reality could be completely integrated. For none of those systems of ideas ... can exhaust its infinite richness.” See also p. 97, where Weber in fact recommends the utilization of more than one ideal type in certain cases.
39 The passage quoted in the previous note is equally relevant here as well.
we shall see later, this insight opens up the possibility of utilizing the ideal type in the framework of comparative investigation. This has not been overlooked by Weber:

[The ideal type] is ... neither historical reality nor even the 'true' reality. It is even less fitted to serve as a schema under which a real situation or action is to be subsumed as one instance. It has the significance of a purely ideal limiting concept with which the real situation or action is compared and surveyed for the explication of certain of its significant components.  

Weber, to be sure, is concerned here with comparing an empirical phenomenon with the ideal type; there is no reason, however, why the ideal type should not be used for comparing between two or more empirical cases as well.

A third major feature of the ideal type arising out of Weber's definition is that it is not in itself the end of the inquiry. Rather, it is a heuristic tool at the service of “historical research” that is concerned with “individual cases”. In other words, the ideal type's generalizing pull is checked by, and subordinated to, the epistemological needs of the inquiry into concrete, individual historical cases. On the one hand, clearly formulated concepts are needed in order to bring out as clearly as possible the investigator's point of view (and the limits thereof); at the same time, however, the very fluidity of the viewpoints guiding social scientific research, coupled with the specificity of the historical phenomena, precludes viewing those concepts as the ultimate ends of the inquiry. Thus, the issue of concept formation is relegated to secondary importance. For an ideal type is to be judged not according to the rigor with which it was formed, but rather according to its “success in revealing concrete cultural phenomena in their interdependence, their causal conditions and their significance.” In other words, it is the scientific value of ideal types that is dependent upon their contribution to understanding specific historical cases, not the scientific value of historical cases that is dependent upon their contribution to the formation of ideal-typical concepts.

The three prominent features of the ideal type as adumbrated above all point towards the existence of an inescapable distance between conceptual construct and empirical reality. This distance, in turn, may be levered for the purpose of attaining scientific insights of several kinds. First, the ideal type's distantiation enables it to identify a circumscribed, recurring historical

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40 Ibid., p. 93. See also Burger (1976), p. 137.
41 Cf. p. 106: "concepts are not ends but are means to the end of understanding phenomena which are significant from concrete individual viewpoints."
42 Weber (1949), p. 107: "It should be understood that since really definitive historical concepts are not in general to be thought of as an ultimate end in view of the inevitable shift of the guiding value-ideas, the construction of sharp and unambiguous concepts relevant to the concrete individual viewpoint which directs our interest at any given time, affords the possibility of clearly realizing the limits of their validity."
43 Ibid., p. 92.
pattern which transcends individual cases (since it is not identical to them), yet at the same time does not come at the expense of the unique features of those cases. Second, the ideal type may serve, thanks to its distance from reality, as a measuring rod in the comparison of two or more historical phenomena that are all somehow related to a common point of reference, yet at the same time are related to it in different ways that are shaped by the textual and contextual configurations of each individual case. Third, the distance from reality opens up the possibility of comparing between the ideal type and a single empirical case, with the effect that a better understanding of that case is attained which would not have been possible without the heuristic suggestions of the ideal type. Finally, the diachronic transformation of an historical phenomenon may also be construed in terms of that phenomenon’s changing relationship to the various components of the ideal type.

Given the inherent distance between the ideal type as an abstract, relatively general conceptual construction on the one hand, and the specificity of the individual historical phenomena on the other hand, it is clear that the ideal type in itself cannot be considered as a self-contained methodological strategy. It must be supplemented by an interpretive mechanism that would be capable of opening up the rich specificity of each historical case, thereby rendering the empirical world accessible to the heuristic probings of the ideal type.

Weber construed the interpretive dimension of social scientific inquiry largely in causal terms. Understanding a social action means, roughly, reconstructing the causal chain leading to the appearance of that action, and the significant contexts would accordingly be only those partaking in this causal chain. However, it is unnecessary to limit ourselves, as Weber did, to causal analysis in the explanation of historical phenomena. As Ehud Sprinzak has noted, the ideal type and the causal dimension have two distinct roles in Weber’s methodological edifice: the former serves merely an “orientational” function, i.e. clarifying “what we are about to explain”, while the latter constitutes the “operational” element, providing the actual (one-sided) historical explanation. From this functional separation between the ideal type and causal analysis, it follows that causal explanation may in principle be substituted by other operational elements, with the ideal type remaining intact in its orientational position. I would suggest that methodological hermeneutics, manifested above all in the notion of the

“hermeneutical circle” between texts and contexts, may be embraced as such a substitute, thus providing the ideal type with the interpretive dimension it lacks. Let us now examine more closely the way the ideal type functions in tandem with the hermeneutical circle.

**The Ideal Type and Methodological Hermeneutics**

The ideal type is to be viewed as an interrogatory framework of the hermeneutical dimension of the inquiry. It constitutes an articulation of the interests held, and questions raised, by the scholar with respect to the empirical phenomena. It is then the task of hermeneutical analysis to seek the answers to these questions and interests in the subject matter itself.

In this context, it is important to point out yet another central attribute of the ideal type: namely, its structural character. It consists, as Thomas Burger put it, “of a number of elements standing in particular relationships to each other”, a feature which in turn is roughly congruent with "a specific segment of empirical reality and the interdependences existing in it." This is especially congenial to the study of ideologies, which – as we have seen - inherently possess a structural dimension.

The hermeneutical implication of this logic is simple: the hermeneutical analysis of ideologies within an ideal-typical interrogatory framework is out to seek a certain structure in the empirical world. This is to be achieved by showing how the existence of a certain set of interrelated elements arises out of the original, organic fabric of a given text (or set of texts) as one of its possible meanings. However, it should be stressed that the structural dimension of the ideal type – like the ideal type itself – has no ontological status (as advocates of structuralism would argue), but only heuristic value. Thus, no structure should be expected to appear empirically exactly as it was formulated in the ideal type: the aforementioned distance between the ideal type and empirical reality would usually preclude such a situation. Rather, the empirical-interpretive analysis should be conducted with the expectation that only a more or less distorted and/or fragmented reflection of the ideal-typical structure would actually be found.

The structural moment of the analysis would also be checked by the textual character of the object of inquiry. A text usually possesses a certain organic quality which defies any straightforward reduction to an analytical structure. In fact, it is precisely this organic fabric,
along with the text’s peculiar contextual configuration, which constitutes the distinct horizon of the text and its “plurivocity”.\textsuperscript{49} Respecting the autonomy of the text and thereby maintaining a dialogical relationship between it and the scholar’s interest (as embodied in the ideal type) requires an acknowledgement of the one-sidedness and limited validity of the anticipated structure.

As a brief illustration of the limited nature of the ideal-typical structure, let us have a look at a convenient existing example of an ideal-typical definition – that of fascism, as formulated by Roger Griffin:

Fascism is a genus of modern politics which aspires to bring about a total revolution in the political and social culture of a particular national or ethnic community. While extremely heterogeneous in the specific ideology of its many permutations, in its social support, in the form of organization it adopts as an anti-systemic movement, and in the type of political system, regime, or homeland it aims to create, generic fascism draws its internal cohesion and affective driving force from a core myth that a period of perceived decadence and degeneracy is imminently or eventually to give way to one of rebirth and rejuvenation in a post-liberal new order.\textsuperscript{50}

The structural dimension in Griffin’s definition manifests itself principally at two levels: first, in the distinction between core and peripheral components; second, within the core, in the nexus between the perception of degeneracy and the anticipation of revolutionary rebirth. At the same time, it is easy to see that indeterminacy is consciously built into the very essence of this structure. Indeterminacy pervades this ideal type not only where it is explicitly acknowledged (i.e., in the elements conceded to be “extremely heterogeneous”), but also in that part of the definition which appears at first glance to be relatively well-defined: namely, the “core myth” of fascism described at the end of the passage. Take for example the “post-liberal new order” mentioned by Griffin: every word comprising this concept begs for concrete elaboration. Here the hermeneutical dimension comes into play, for it is the task of hermeneutical analysis to determine the precise position of each of the individual empirical cases – to map out the topography of the modifications that each case represents – in relation to this as well as all the other components of the ideal type, by filling in the blank spots left in the latter’s constitution. Wittgenstein’s conception of meaning as dependent on language-games may serve here as a useful analogy. Ideal types such as “fascism” may be regarded as

\textsuperscript{49} Cf. Ricoeur (1973), p. 107: “A text is more than a linear succession of sentences. It is a cumulative, holistic process. This specific structure of the text cannot be derived from that of the sentence. Therefore the kind of ‘plurivocity’ which belongs to texts as texts is something other than ... the ambiguity of individual sentences. This plurivocity is typical of the text considered as a whole, open to several readings and to several constructions.”

\textsuperscript{50} Griffin (2002), p. 24, n.15. A decade earlier, Griffin (1991) in fact systematically elaborated an ideal-typical methodology, quite similar in its temperament to the one propounded here, for the exploration of ideologies in general and fascism in particular.
analogous to those words ("game", "good", "Moses", "chair", etc.), whose indeterminate meanings Wittgenstein discusses in his Philosophical Investigations, with the conclusion that they possess no inherent meaning, but receive multifarious specific meanings according to the concrete contexts in which they appear. To use Wittgenstein's terminology, ideal types - or in our context: "fascism", "socialism", "liberalism" etc. - have only families of meaning. The flip side of this Wittgensteinian conception, however, is that we nevertheless employ single concepts that are applicable to ranges of phenomena. This is no less crucial for our ability to produce significant scientific insights than the relative indeterminacy of those concepts.

The importance of contexts in the application of the ideal type to empirical cases indicates the central methodological-hermeneutical principle to be employed in the interpretive analysis: the circularity between texts and contexts, between "parts" and "whole". The meaning of a word, for example, can be understood only within the context of the sentence in which it is employed, but at the same time the sentence can be understood only in terms of its constituent parts. Similarly, a text can on the one hand be reliably interpreted only when placed within its contextual configuration (i.e. the unique combination of certain intellectual traditions, the author’s biography and oeuvre, socioeconomic conditions, and so on), which imbues it with its meaningful historical specificity and concreteness. But on the other hand, the context itself, i.e. the historical setting in which a text is embedded, can be understood only in terms of its constituent parts, the interpreted text included. Hence, hermeneutical analysis may certainly be employed for the purpose of understanding individual written texts, as it was originally designed to do; but the interpretation of texts is equally to be regarded as a way to open windows from which the general historical landscape may be viewed.

Consequently, the hermeneutical circle is of great utility for the study of ideologies, which ultimately consists in exploring the dynamics of structures of thought embodied in a great variety of texts - from philosophical treatises to political party programs, from parliamentary

51 Wittgenstein (1953), §65-88. This does not mean that it is impossible to locate a more or less narrow range of meanings that has historically prevailed with respect to a given ideology. However, even such an ideationally hegemonic state of affairs is a problem requiring demonstration, and is not to be taken for granted. Moreover, the demonstration must traverse the unique contextuality of the various pertinent empirical manifestations of the examined ideology.

52 The word “whole” is used here merely illustratively; when dealing with social phenomena it is usually quite impossible to delineate the boundaries of such a “whole”.

53 LaCapra (1983) provides us with a brilliant exposition and relentless problematization of the relation between texts and six types of context: “intentions, motivations, society, culture, the corpus, and structure” (pp. 36ff). From this perspective, intentionality and linguistic contexts - which are accorded almost exclusive attention by Skinner (2002) and Pocock (1972, 1985) - constitute only one (though, to be sure, very important) contextual dimension among several.
acts of legislation to pamphlets and newspaper articles – within political, socioeconomic, intellectual and cultural historical settings. The circularity of texts and contexts can be a powerful tool at the hand of investigators of ideologies in weaving their tapestry out of the woof of ideological texts and the warp of historical situations.\(^54\)

However, the question of how exactly texts and context interact (beyond the mere fact of their interrelatedness) is a problematic issue in its own right. We should pay heed to Dominick LaCapra's words of caution:

> It is only when the precise nature of [the relationship between texts and their various pertinent contexts] is posited as a genuine problem that one will be able to counteract the dogmatic assumption that any given context – the author's intentions, a corpus of texts, a genre, a biography, the economic infrastructure, modes of production, society and culture in some all-consuming and frequently circular sense, codes, conventions, paradigms, or what have you – is the context for the adequate interpretation of texts. My explicit goal ... is to make 'context' less a shibboleth or a passe-partout and more a limited, critical concept in historical research.\(^55\)

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I will now try to illustrate the ways in which the complex relationship between texts and contexts may be manifested in concrete historical cases. For this purpose, it may be worthwhile to take a look Keith Baker's analysis of the intellectual origins of the French Revolution.\(^56\) Baker (whose book, significantly, was published in the framework of the “Ideas in Context” series of the Cambridge University Press) seeks to demonstrate that the development, in the course of the eighteenth century, of the ideological framework of the Revolution consisted to a considerable extent in the deconstruction – followed by a reformulation – of the prevailing traditional discourse on monarchical authority. More specifically, the crucial process is claimed at the beginning of the book to be that of “a

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\(^{54}\) This goes against Freeden’s (1996) rather narrow conceptualization of hermeneutics and its possible contribution to the study of ideologies (pp. 116-7, 121-2). Ideologies can ultimately be accessed only through the “quasi-world of texts”. (I borrow this concept from Ricoeur, 1982, p. 149, though I do not use it in exactly the same sense that he gave it.) And this world, in turn, is ultimately accessible only through hermeneutical analysis. Now, although the basic hermeneutical units of analysis are individual texts, this does not mean that those texts may not be considered (with the aid of the hermeneutical circle) in their various forms of interrelationship, and in the ways they are woven together into their common historical setting. Sewell’s (1980) exploration of the development of working-class ideology constitutes an eloquent demonstration thereof. The hermeneutical circle in its broad conceptualization figures prominently in the following methodological statement made by Sewell: “workers shared the political, religious, and social language of the day ... it therefore follows that a history of workers' actions and consciousness must constantly move back and forth between the particular experiences of workers and the changing patterns of the larger society – the form of the state, major political battles, the nature of relations between various classes or orders, the ideas that informed public discourse, and so on. Although the core of this book is an account of the changing ideologies and organizations of urban skilled workers, it ranges far afield when such excursions are required to set workers' actions in a proper context.” (p. 13)

\(^{55}\) LaCapra (1983), p. 16.

\(^{56}\) Baker (1990).
disaggregation of the attributes traditionally bound together in the concept of monarchical authority – reason, justice and will – and their reconceptualization as the basis of competing definitions (or attempted redefinitions) of the body politic."57 Baker then proceeds, as an introduction to the rest of his book, to briefly recount the basic features of the traditional conception of royal authority as well as those of each of the three discourses that evolved out of the aforementioned disaggregation: “judicial discourse” emphasizing justice; “political discourse” emphasizing will; and “administrative discourse” emphasizing reason. Each of these discourses is presented telegraphically in what may be regarded as ideal-typical form. Consider, for example, his adumbration of judicial discourse:

The essential notions in this discourse are justice as the recognition of that which is fitting and proper (giving each his due in a hierarchical society of orders and Estates); social order as constituted by prescription, tradition, and continuity; the exercise of public power according to constitutionally prescribed legal forms; and public participation understood in the most traditional sense of making representations, that is, framing particularistic claims.58

Baker brings his ideal-typical formulations beautifully into play in chapter 5 of the book, titled “French political thought at the accession of Louis XVI”. Here he analyzes three texts composed in 1775, their interpretation heuristically guided by Baker’s concepts of judicial, political, and administrative discourses. Malesherbes’s Rémontrances was concerned with “safeguarding the ability of traditional judicial institutions and representative assemblies to check the arbitrary exercise of administrative power.”59 Turgot’s Mémoires sur les municipalités, on the other hand, “offered the vision of a transformed administrative system that would implement the rights of man and bring about the rule of reason.”60 Saige’s Catéchisme du citoyen was the most radical treatise of the three, “appeal[ing] to the conception of an ultimate political will inherent in the nation, a will that knows neither judicial restraint nor constitutional limitation.”61 Baker ends the chapter by summing up the meaning of the three treatises as construed in view of his interrogatory framework:

Taken together, these three strands of thinking would seem to represent a disaggregation of the attributes traditionally bound together in the concept of royal authority into competing definitions of the nature of political order. Taken singly, each may be seen as emphasizing in the language of the Enlightenment the priority of one aspect of the royal authority as traditionally conceived: justice, reason, or will.62

57 Ibid., p. 25.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., p. 123.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., p. 127.
62 Ibid., p. 126.
How do texts and contexts interact in Baker's analysis? The authors' intentions are certainly involved as a contextual factor in the interpretation of the texts; in fact, much of Baker's account of the texts is based upon observations of the illocutionary forces embodied in this or that statement. Nevertheless, the intentional dimension is only of secondary importance in the inquiry. It is not particularly important for Baker to understand what Malesherbes (rather than someone else) was doing in formulating the Remontrances, or what Turgot (of all people) was doing in his Mémoires. Rather, the intentional context is instrumental in providing a channel of access to a more significant meaning of the texts (from Baker's point of view). The chief aim of Baker's analysis was to demonstrate the existence of certain structural features in the texts, structures which stand in significant relationship to the traditional discourse on royal authority. Specifically, it is the tension between, on the one hand, the context of the traditional discourse on royal authority; and, on the other hand, the structure of the texts (or rather, the fractured supra-textual structure that is brought into view as it is perceived that the parallel existence of the three texts as separate entities constitutes a splintered version of the previously unitary discursive formation), – it is this tension which generates that meaning of the texts that is significant for Baker's interrogatory framework.

The importance of the three treatises for Baker's historiographical interest arises also from their peculiar position at the beginning of a new form (or forms) of political thought, as well as at the end of a traditional one. This is what may be called the future-oriented historical significance of the texts: "[The three documents] suggest the existence of three broad strands of thinking, from the interaction of which the revolutionary ideology was eventually born."63

This level of meaning brings into sharp relief the blurred boundaries between text and context, for the treatises under examination become a part of broader (con)textual fabrics and historical processes.64 All this appears only in embryonic form in the essay; for example, Baker mentions that Turgot's Mémoire "exercised a clear influence on the proposals of reforming ministers in the period of the Pre-Revolution", and that similarly Saige's Catéchisme "circulated again in 1787 and (more widely) in 1788, when royal ministers again took measures against the parlements".65

In order to bring out in full scale this historical significance of the texts, it would have been necessary to demonstrate more systematically how the ideas propagated by the texts were part

63 Ibid.

64 On the problematic status of the very distinction between texts and contexts see LaCapra (1983), pp. 26-7: "the context or the 'real world' is itself 'textualized' in a variety of ways ... For the historian, the very reconstruction of a 'context' or a 'reality' takes place on the basis of 'textualized' remainders of the past."

65 Baker (1990), p. 112.
of a more general intellectual climate, and/or took part in subsequent intellectual developments (through their impact upon, and appropriation and circulation by, later readers), in a way that eventually led up to the crystallization of revolutionary ideology. In such an analysis, a significant historical meaning of the texts would have been disclosed by turning them into part of a contextual configuration. In any case, all these maneuverings between texts and contexts are to be watched over by the ideal type, which prevents the interpreter from going astray in the dense historical thicket.\footnote{As Sprinzak (1972) put it, the ideal type is “a concept that by keeping a grasp on the concrete historical phenomenon would lead the search of knowledge toward that which is meaningful.” (p. 308)}

The logic underlying Baker’s analysis as presented here is that of methodological hermeneutics performing its circular dance to the tune of the ideal type(s). It places the texts within a wider historical context, in a way that leads to a better understanding of the context (e.g., pre-Revolutionary discursive dynamics) just as much as it discloses something new about the texts (i.e., their historical significance as gravediggers of traditional monarchical discourse and as important building blocks of revolutionary ideology).

The typico-hermeneutical synthesis, however, is characterized not only by a circularity between texts and contexts, but also, within the framework of comparative inquiry, by a circularity between the recurring and the unique in historical reality, as will be discussed briefly in the following section.

**THE COMPARATIVE CIRCLE**

The tension between the scientific proclivity for generalization and the inexorable pull of human reality towards particularization has been haunting the social sciences ever since their inception, largely under the pressure of the phenomenal success of the natural sciences. But whereas the epistemological goals of the natural sciences (at least in their classical form) demand that the generalizing moment be rationally perfected, those of the social sciences, conversely, require that it be hermeneutically checked. Yet this does not mean that regularities in the historical flow of human existence, however indeterminate or unstable they may be, should be disposed of as an epistemological asset. It is rather a matter of placing the quest for regularities within our fundamental understanding of the human sciences as limited by the historical specificity of both scholar and subject-matter. The investigator’s horizons and the subject matter’s inescapable textual and contextual specificity will guarantee the incompleteness of

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\footnote{As Sprinzak (1972) put it, the ideal type is “a concept that by keeping a grasp on the concrete historical phenomenon would lead the search of knowledge toward that which is meaningful.” (p. 308)}
any generalization. In the absence of the latter, we are destined to remain trapped in the comparative circle, within which similarities and differences between various historical phenomena are revealed and assessed, and the relationship between the similarities and the differences across cases is explored in order to extract fruitful scientific insights. Such a process inevitably embeds the recurring patterns within as many contextualities as there are case-studies; but, in turn, it may also shed some light upon those very same specificities, from the perspective of the cross-case similarities. In other words, although we can never break out of the circular relationship between the understanding of the unique in its full richness and the identification of the recurring, this is nevertheless a scientifically virtuous circle, not a vicious one.

The ideal type couched in hermeneutical surroundings is perfectly suited for setting this virtuous circle in motion. It is the analytical incarnation of what Charles Maier called the “double-edged sword” of comparative inquiry. The ideal type provides at the same time both relatively clear categories (and interrelationships between categories) that enable the scholar to bring several phenomena under a single conceptual roof, and relatively incomplete categories (and interrelationships) that may be expected to appear differently in each individual case.

Now it should be recalled that the ideal type and the scholar’s motivations in its construction are imbued with significance, i.e. with a certain research interest that is deemed meaningful by the scholar. This same significance is to inform as well the ideal type’s built-in dissonance between its relative clarity and relative incompleteness. Thus, we can assert at this stage (1) that the relationship between the singularity of an ideal type and the plurality of the empirical reality to which it lays claim is irredeemably problematic, and (2) that this troubled relationship is nevertheless regarded by the scholar to be somehow significant. These conclusions, if heeded by investigators, would force them (a) to justify their claim that several given phenomena maintain sufficient meaningful commonalities among them so as to be approached with the same heuristic tool; (b) to accomplish this justification by showing that those commonalities can survive the concrete specificity of the several cases; and (c) to explain the significance of the divergences among the various cases against the backdrop of their commonalities. The outcome of such a research procedure is a sophisticated comparative inquiry, capable of

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67 Cf. Maier (1988b): “what is generic can be understood only in relation to what is specific. Comparison must be a two-edged sword.” (p. 84); and also: “all history is condemned to comparison. The analogies allow comprehension of past developments that can never be exactly like something else, but can be understood only insofar as they are somewhat like something else.” (pp. 98-9). See also Maier (1988a), p. ix.
generating rich and complex empirical findings concerning both individual cases and historical phenomena that transcend any single case.

**CONCLUSION**

I hope to have demonstrated in this paper that what may appear at first glance to be weaknesses of the ideal type – its relative indeterminacy, its oscillation between the general and the particular – turn out to be among its most important advantages, enabling it to render a wide range of services in the exploration of social reality and of ideologies in particular. It is nevertheless true that the fine balance between the generalizing and the particularizing dimensions of the ideal type are very easy to mishandle. That is why anchoring the ideal type in both philosophical and methodological hermeneutics is so important. The principles of philosophical hermeneutics usher the scholar into a meta-methodological climate that is extremely suspicious of any simplistic essentialism or crude generalization. This is essential in order to counter the strong generalizing pull exerted by the ideal type, and to enhance the reflexivity of investigators towards the limitations of their conceptual constructions. The presence of the hermeneutical circle on the other side of the ideal type renders visible the distance between the ideal-typical construction and empirical reality, and checks any inclination to foist the ideal type upon empirical cases without heeding their historical individuality.

We have also seen that the typico-hermeneutical synthesis may be useful for the study of ideologies, principally in identifying circumscribed regularities, arriving at a better understanding of single empirical phenomena, and conducting more sophisticated comparative inquiries. To be sure, there is still much room for the further development of the synthesis in adapting it for specific investigatory needs and for different conceptualizations of ideologies. Yet I hope that the flexibility and indeterminacy inherent in the typico-hermeneutical synthesis will prove capable of accommodating the myriad approaches towards the study of ideologies. At any rate, it was not my intention here to provide a detailed methodological roadmap. Rather, I would say that if this paper results in nothing but a greater appreciation of the constructive role that may be played by ideal-typical formulations in thinking about ideologies, and of the importance of hermeneutics for a more sensitive and sophisticated employment of the ideal type, then my work will have received its ample reward.
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