political group, actual monopolistic rulership of a given territory was not essential, and is not at all so today. This 'institutional' character, especially the circumstance that one is 'born into' a church, distinguishes a 'church' from a 'sect', whose characteristic feature is that of an 'association', and admits on a personal basis only those who are religiously qualified.

22 The 'objectivity' of knowledge in social science and social policy

The first question posed to a new social science journal (especially one directed to social policy), or a new editorial board, concerns its ‘tendency’. We too find this question unavoidable, and following on from the remarks already made in the ‘Geleitwort’ we present here a more systematic treatment of the issues. This gives us an opportunity to shed light on the specific character of what we understand as ‘social scientific’ work in a variety of domains, if not of use to the expert, then of interest to the reader detached from practical scientific activity; even though, or perhaps directly because, we are here dealing with ‘self-evident’ matters.

The express aim of the Archiv has been since its foundation, alongside the enlargement of our knowledge of ‘social circumstances of all countries’ – i.e. the facts of social life, the training of judgement in respect of practical problems arising from these social circumstances; and hence, given the very modest degree to which such an aim can be pursued by private scholars, the

1 'Die "Objektivität" sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis', WZ, pp. 146-214. Translation by Keith Tribe. [Wéber] Where in Section I of the following reference is made explicitly to the views of the editors, or tasks proposed for the Archiv, the statements in question have been expressly endorsed by the joint editors, and are not of course the private views of the author. In Section II the author bears sole responsibility for both form and content.

The Archiv will never be swayed by any one particular school of thought, and the fact that contributors and editors alike lack a common standpoint or methodological view ensures this. Of course, agreement on certain basic views was a presupposition for the joint assumption of editorial control. This agreement concerns in particular a common estimation of the value of theoretical knowledge among 'one-sided' viewpoints, as well as in furthering the formation of clear concepts and the strict distinction between empirical knowledge (Erkenntnissin) and value-judgements, as represented here, without any claim being made as to the 'novelty' of such an enterprise.

The wide-ranging argument and frequent repetition of the same idea in Section II is aimed exclusively at achieving the greatest possible common understanding in such discussion. Often, although not too frequently, this interest is sacrificed to precision of expression, and it is this interest which has dictated that no effort has been made to replace a review of some methodological viewpoints with a systematic investigation. This would have made necessary the introduction of a number of epistemological problems that to some extent lie deeper. This is not an exercise in logic, rather the established results of modern logic should be set to work for us: problems will not be solved, but their significance made plain to the lay person. Anyone familiar with the writings of modern logicians – here I cite only Windelband, Simmel, and especially for our concerns Heinrich Rickert – will notice immediately that in most important respects this essay takes its starting point from them.
elaboration of a critique of practical socio-political work reaching as far as legislative factors. Nevertheless, from the very first the Archiv aspired to be an exclusively scholarly journal, employing only the means of scientific research and so the problem arose of how such an aim might in principle be reconciled with these means. If the legislative and administrative measures together with related practical suggestions found in its columns were open to judgement - what does that mean? What are the norms for such judgements? What sort of validity inheres in the value-judgments expressed by an individual, or those which a writer employs to support practical proposals? In what sense does he, in so doing, enter into the terrain of scientific discussion, for of course the leading characteristic of scientific knowledge must be the 'objective' validity of its results as truth. First of all we shall elaborate our own position on this question, so that we might later raise another: in what general sense are there 'objectively valid truths' in the domain of the sciences of cultural life? This is an inescapable question, given the constant state of change and bitter conflict over what appear to be the most elementary problems of our discipline, its method of working, the manner in which it constructs concepts, and their validity. We offer no solutions here, but seek rather to indicate problems - those problems to which our journal, if it is to be true to its past and future purpose, will have to direct its attention.

We all know that our science, as every science concerned with human cultural institutions and cultural processes (excepting perhaps political history), arose historically from practical perspectives. Its immediate, and initially sole, purpose lay in the production of value-judgments in respect of specific instances of state economic policy. It was a 'technique' in the sense, for instance, that the ethical disciplines of medical sciences are 'techniques'. It is now known how this situation was gradually modified. This modification was not, however, accompanied by a formulation of a principled distinction between 'existential knowledge', knowledge of what is, and 'normative knowledge', i.e. knowledge of what 'should be'. Such a distinction was blocked first of all by the view that immutably invariant natural laws determined economic processes, a view then succeeded by the idea that such processes were determined by a specific developmental principle; hence that which should exist coincided either, in the first instance, with the immanently extant, and in the second, with the inevitably emergent. With the growth of historical awareness, a combination of ethical relativism and historical relativism became the predominant attitude in our science, seeking to strip ethical norms of their formal character and hence, through incorporation of the entirety of cultural values, lend substantive definition to the domain of 'morals'. Economics would thus be raised to the dignified status of an empirically founded 'ethical science'. By 'morally' endorsing all possible cultural ideals one did away with the specific virtue of the ethical imperative without gaining anything with respect to the 'objective' validity of such ideals. We can and must leave debate over principles to one side here; and we hold fast solely to the fact that, even today, the mistaken opinion that economics does and should produce value-judgements formed on the basis of a specifically 'economic worldview' not only persists, but is (understandably) especially widespread among practical men of affairs.

As a representative of a specialized empirical discipline (as will be demonstrated below) our journal has to reject fundamentally this view; for we are of the opinion that the task of an experiential science can never be the determination of binding norms and ideals, from which in turn guidelines for practical application might be derived.

But what follows from this statement? In no respect is it here implied that value-judgements should be kept entirely out of scientific discussion because of their ultimate dependence upon particular ideals, that they are thus 'subjective' in origin. Both in practice and purpose our journal would always rebut such a statement. Critical argument does not stop short at value-judgements. The question is rather: What is the meaning and purpose of scientific criticism of ideals and value-judgements? This demands rather more detailed consideration.

Any thoughtful reflection on the ultimate elements of meaningful human action turns first of all on the categories 'means' and 'ends'. Specifically, we want something either 'for its own sake', or as a means of acquiring something ultimately desired. The suitability of means to given ends is the prime question accessible to scientific consideration. Taking into account the prevailing bounds of our knowledge, we can determine which means are either suitable or not for a given end. We can also estimate the chances of achieving a particular end with the given available means, and so in this way indirectly determine whether the ends themselves, given the prevailing historical situation, are practically meaningful, or criticize them as meaningless in the given circumstances. Furthermore, if the conditions for attaining a given end seem to be present (always of course within the limits of current knowledge), we can determine the consequences that the application of the requisite means within the total context of events will have besides the attainment of the intended end. In this way we offer to the actor the possibility of weighing these intended consequences against the unintended, and hence an answer to the question: What does the attainment of the desired end cost in the context of foreseeable injury to other values? Since in the great majority of cases every sought-for end does or can 'cost' something in this sense, no person behaving reflectively and responsibly can avoid this balancing of the ends of an action against its consequences; and one of the most important functions of the technical criticism considered so far is to provide this. Turning an assessment of this kind into a decision is certainly not the business of science, but of the desiring person: he weighs and chooses between the values concerned according to conscience and personal viewpoint. Science can help him to a consciousness that all action - naturally likewise in some circumstances a
namely, the increase of the ‘wealth’ of a state’s population. But it was from the very beginning more than mere ‘technique’, for it was integrated into the powerful eighteenth-century Weltanschauung uniting natural law and rationalism. The optimistic faith in the theoretical and practical rationalizability characteristic of this Weltanschauung of the real had the effect of hindering the discovery of the problematic character of a standpoint assumed to be self-evident. Just as the rational consideration of modern society arose in close connection with the modern development of natural science, so its entire approach remained connected to natural science. In natural scientific disciplines the practical evaluative orientation towards what was directly technically useful was closely associated from the very first with the hope, inherited from Antiquity and further elaborated, of attaining, by means of generalizing abstraction and analysis of the empirical, law-like relationships that would constitute a purely ‘objective’ (that is, freed of all values and individual ‘fortuitousness’), hence rational, monistic knowledge of reality in its totality. Those natural science disciplines linked to evaluative standpoints, such as clinical medicine, and even more so, whatever is usually referred to as ‘technology’ became purely practical ‘industrial arts’ (‘Kunstlehrte’). The values that they served – the health of the patient, the technical perfection of a concrete process of production – these were fixed for each of them. The means that they employed consisted and could only consist in the use of the law established by the theoretical disciplines. Every theoretical advance in the construction of these laws was, or could also be, an advance for the practical disciplines. With a given end, the progressive reduction of concrete practical questions (e.g. a case of illness, a technical problem, etc.) to the status of special cases of generally valid laws meant that extension of theoretical knowledge was associated and identical with the extension of technical-practical possibilities. When modern biology then subsumed under a universally valid evolutionary principle those aspects of reality which interest us historically, i.e. why something happened thus and not otherwise – a principle which at least seemed (none the less speciously) to permit the inclusion of everything essential in this reality within the schemata of universally valid laws, this appeared to herald a final twilight of the gods (Götterdämmerung)\(^\text{10}\) for all evaluative standpoints in all the sciences. Since the so-called historical event was a segment of the total reality, and since the principle of causality, the presupposition of all scientific work, seemed to require that all events be dispersed into generally valid ‘laws’; and in view of the overwhelming success of the natural sciences which in all seriousness had taken up this idea, it seemed that there was in general no conceivable meaning for scientific work other than the discovery of the laws of events. It was only ‘law-governed’ aspects of phenomena that could be scientifically material; ‘individual’ processes could only be considered as ‘types’, as illustrative representatives of laws. An interest in such events for their own sake did not appear to be a ‘scientific’ interest.

It is not possible to trace here the formidable repercussions of the certainties of natural scientific monism on economic disciplines. As socialist criticism and the work of historians began to transform the original evaluative points of view into problems, the vigorous development of biological research on the one hand and the influence of Hegelian panology on the other prevented economics from attaining a clear and full understanding of the relationship between concept and reality. The result, to the extent that it interests us here, is that in spite of the massive building blocks erected against naturalistic dogma – by German idealistic philosophy since Fichte, the achievements of the German historical school of law, and the work of the historical school of German economics – nevertheless, and in part as a result of all this work, the naturalistic perspective remained unvanquished.\(^\text{11}\) To this in particular there belongs the still problematic relationship within our discipline between ‘theoretical’ and ‘historical’ work.

There remains today a direct and apparently unbridgeable gulf in our discipline between ‘abstract’-theoretical method and empirical-historical research. Proponents of the first approach quite properly recognize the methodological impossibility of replacing historical knowledge of reality through the formulation of ‘laws’, or alternatively creating ‘laws’ by the simple juxtaposition of historical observations. To derive such laws – from this point of view it is evident that this is the ultimate aim of science – they take for granted as a fact that we have a constant and direct appreciation of the real structure of human action, and hence – so they think – it is possible to render the course of such action axiomatically intelligible, and as a consequence reveal its ‘laws’. The sole exact form of cognition – the formulation of directly perceptible evident laws – is also at once the only one that permits conclusions to be drawn concerning processes that are not directly observable; hence, at least for the fundamental phenomena of economic life, the creation of a system of abstract and consequently purely formal propositions analogous to that of the natural sciences is the sole means of intellectually mastering social diversity. Despite the fundamental methodological distinction between historical knowledge and knowledge of laws, which the creator of the theory had made the prime and sole such distinction, empirical validity is now claimed for the principles of abstract theory in the sense of the deducibility of reality from ‘laws’. True, that is not meant as a claim that abstract empirical laws themselves are empirically valid, but rather that when equally ‘exact’ theories have been constructed for all other factors, taken together these abstract theories

\(^{10}\) A disparaging term Weber takes from Nietzsche meaning effectively ‘game over’.

must contain the true reality of things — i.e. what is worth knowing in reality.

Exact economic theory is said to presuppose one psychic motive, while the task of others is thought to be the formation of similar hypothetically valid principles covering all other motives. Quite fantastic claims are made on occasion for the consequence of theoretical work, such as abstract theories of price formation, rent, and interest: that they might be employed, supposedly quite analogously with the principles of physical science, to deduce from given real premises quantitatively determined results having validity for lived reality, for human economic activity is with respect to a given end unambiguously determined in relation to means. This claim overlooks the fact that, to arrive at such a result in even a very simple case, the totality of a given historical reality together with all its causal relationships would have to be taken as 'given' and known in advance. But if this knowledge were accessible to the finite mind it would not be possible to conceive the cognitive value of abstract theory. The naturalistic prejudice that such concepts should create something analogous to the natural sciences has led to a mistaken appreciation of the purpose of theory construction. It was thought to be a matter of psychological isolation of a specific human 'impulse', the acquisitive instinct, or the isolated study of a specific maxim of human conduct — the so-called economic principle. Abstract theory considered it possible to support itself upon psychological axioms, and the outcome was that historians called for an empirical psychology so that the invalidity of those axioms could be demonstrated and also that the course of economic events could be derived psychologically.

We do not wish to enter into a thoroughgoing critique of belief in the significance of a (prospective) systematic science of social psychology as a future foundation of the cultural sciences, and especially of social economics. Those psychological interpretations of economic phenomena that we have, some of which are quite brilliant, do however demonstrate that the logical move is not from analysis of the psychological qualities of human beings to the analysis of social institutions, but the exact reverse: that the illumination of the psychological presuppositions and effects of institutions requires exact knowledge of the latter and their relationships. In individual cases psychological analysis can offer an extremely valuable deepening in our knowledge of the historical cultural determination and cultural significance of such institutions. What interests us in the social relationships of human psychic behaviour is in each case differentiated by the specific cultural meaning of the relationship in question. This involves quite heterogeneous and concretely combined psychic motives and influences. Social psychological research sorts out a variety of individual and mutually quite disparate kinds of cultural elements according to their interpretative susceptibility for our empathetic (nacherlebend) understanding. Starting from knowledge of individual institutions, we increasingly learn to intellectually understand their cultural specificity and cultural significance; we do not wish to deduce such institutions from psychological laws, or seek to explain them in terms of elementary psychological phenomena.

The elaborate polemic that has grown up around the question of the psychological justification of abstract theoretical propositions, of the scope of the 'acquisitive instinct', of the 'economic principle' and so on is thus of little consequence.

That the construction of abstract theory requires 'deductions' from basic psychological motives is an illusion; such deductions are in truth merely a special case of conceptual formation characteristic of the sciences of human culture, however indispensable. It is worthwhile here outlining this process of concept formation in greater detail, for this will bring us closer to the main question concerning the significance of theory for social scientific knowledge. In so doing we will leave entirely unexamined the question of whether the theoretical constructions upon which we draw for examples, or to which we allude, do themselves serve the end that they seek; that is, whether they are materially fitting to this end. How much further present-day 'abstract theory' should be elaborated is ultimately a question of the economy of scientific labour, and such labour has other problems to pursue. The 'theory of marginal utility' is after all subject to the 'law of marginal utility'.

Abstract economic theory offers us an example of synthetic constructs that have been dubbed 'ideas' of historical phenomena. It gives us an ideal impression of processes in the commodity market of a social organization based upon an exchange economy, free competition, and consistently rational action. This construction brings together certain relationships and events of historical life into an internally coherent conceptual cosmos. This construction has the substantive character of a utopia arrived at by the conceptual accentuation of particular elements of reality. Its role relates to the empirically given facts of life is where relationships there represented abstractly, i.e. events related to the 'market', can be identified or supposed as existing in reality; and we are therefore able to make the characteristic features of this relationship pragmatically lucid and understandable in terms of an ideal type. This procedure can be of value, even indispensable, heuristically as well as in exposition. The concept of the ideal type can direct judgement in matters of imputation; it is not a 'hypothesis', but seeks to guide the formation of hypotheses. It is not a representation of the real, but seeks to provide representation with unambiguous means of expression. It is therefore the 'idea' of the historically given modern commercial organization of society developed with the same logical principles as used in, for instance, the idea of the medieval 'town economy' as a 'genetic' concept.16 In so doing, one does not construct the concept 'town economy' as an average of the economic principles observable in all towns, but rather as an ideal type. It is formed by a one-sided accentuation of one or several perspectives, and through the

12 Genetic here means specific or individual and the sense of its historical effect.
synthesis of a variety of diffuse, discrete, \textit{individual} phenomena, present sometimes more, sometimes less, sometimes not at all; subsumed by such one-sided, emphatic viewpoints so that they form a uniform construction in thought. In its conceptual purity this construction can never be found in reality, it is a \textit{utopia}. \textit{Historical} research has the task of determining in each \textit{individual case} how close to, or far from, reality such an ideal type is; how far, therefore, the economic character of relations in a particular town can be thought of as a ‘town economy’ in the conceptual sense. If employed with care, this concept has specific uses in research and exposition.

To take another example, one can in a similar manner outline the idea of ‘craft industry’ in a \textit{utopia}, one-sidedly accentuating particular features that can be found scattered among craft workers of the most various times and countries, bringing them together as a coherent ideal image, linking this to a \textit{conceptual} expression that one finds there manifest. One can then further attempt to outline a society in which all branches of economic, even of intellectual activity, are dominated by what appears to us to be an application of the same ideal-typical principle of a ‘craft’ system. To this craft ideal type there could then be juxtaposed a corresponding ideal type of capitalist industry (\textit{Gewerbeverfassung}), abstracting from particular features of modern large-scale industry, seeking finally to sketch out a ‘capitalist’ utopia, a culture where the realization (\textit{Verwertung}) of the interests of private capitals predominates. The character of diffuse, existing individual features of modern material and intellectual life would be enhanced and then brought together as a coherent ideal image lacking all internal contradiction. This would amount to an outline of an ‘idea’ of capitalist culture – but quite whether, and how, such an idea might be formed we shall here have to leave to one side. It is possible – or rather, it must be seen as a certainty – that several utopias of this kind could be constructed, of which no two would be the same, \textit{none} of which could be observed in empirical reality as an actually existing order of social conditions, but where each of them claims to be a representation of the ‘idea’ of capitalist culture, and where each of them can make this claim on the grounds that the features so characterized are taken from \textit{significant} parts of our lived culture and rendered into a unified ideal image. For those phenomena that interest us as cultural phenomena routinely derive their \textit{cultural significance} from a diversity of evaluative ideas that we can in turn relate to them. Just as there are quite different ‘points of view’ from which these will appear significant to us, so entirely different principles can be used for the selection of those traits that are to be applied to the construction of an ideal type of a particular culture.

What then is the significance of such ideal-typical concepts for the \textit{experiential} science (\textit{Erfahrungswissenschaft}) that we wish to pursue? First of all it must be said that we wish carefully to distance an idea of what \textit{ought} to be, the ‘ideal’, from these thought constructs which are ‘ideal’ only in a purely \textit{logical} sense. We are concerned with the construction of relationships which seem to our \textit{imagination} sufficiently motivated and \textit{objectively possible}, hence appearing \textit{adequate} from the standpoint of our nomological knowledge.

Whoever takes the position that knowledge of historical reality should or could assume the form of a ‘disinterested’ representation of ‘objective’ facts will deny the value of the ideal type. Even those who recognize that there is in reality no such thing as ‘disinterestedness’ in its logical sense; that even the most simple extract from statute or document can only have some kind of scientific sense by reference to ‘significations’, and hence ultimately to evaluative ideas – these will view the construction of some kind of scientific ‘utopia’ as a form of representation that endangers the impartiality of historical work, or perhaps more often as little more than a travesty. And it is a fact: the question of \textit{whether} this is a matter of a pure thought experiment, or scientifically fertile conceptual construction is not something that can be determined a priori. There is only one standard here: that of success in developing knowledge of concrete cultural phenomena and their context, their causal determination and their \textit{significance}. The construction of abstract ideal types is not an aim, but a \textit{means}. All careful observation of the conceptual elements of historical representation shows that as soon as the historian seeks to go beyond the mere registration of material relationships and ‘characterize’ the \textit{cultural significance} of even a very simple process he is forced to work with concepts that can only be defined sharply and unambiguously in ideal types.

Or is it the case that concepts – such as ‘individualism’, ‘imperialism’, ‘feudalism’, ‘mercantilism’, ‘the conventional’, and countless similar conceptual constructs that we use to master reality in thought and understanding – can be won through ‘disinterested’ description of a concrete phenomenon, or by the abstract analysis of that which is \textit{common} to several material phenomena? The language of the historian contains hundreds of words that are ambiguous constructs created by the unreflecting need for the expression of thought constructs, words whose meaning is only sensed, but not clearly conceived. In the vast majority of cases, especially in the domain of descriptive political history, the lack of substantive clarity does no harm to the clarity of the account. It is here sufficient in individual cases that one \textit{senses} what the historian has in mind, or one can assume that a \textit{specific} definition of conceptual content had \textit{relative} significance for the individual case in hand. But the greater the clarity with which the significance of a cultural phenomenon has to be defined, so the need becomes ever more inescapable for working with clear concepts, defined not merely particularly, but universally. A ‘definition’ of this synthesis of historical thinking according to the schema, \textit{genus proximum}, \textit{differentia specifica}\footnote{Similar genus (as in plants) and different species – for example, the Linnean system of classification.} is of course nonsense; but let us examine it. This mode of defining the meaning of words
exists only in those axiomatic disciplines that work with syllogisms.\textsuperscript{14} There is no simple 'descriptive reduction' of the concepts to their elements, or only apparently, for here it is a question of which of these components is to count as essential. All that remains, if a generic definition of conceptual substance is to be attempted, is the form of the ideal type in the sense elaborated above. It is a thought construct; not historical reality, and most certainly not 'genuine' reality. Even less is it for employment in the service of a method for which reality is reduced to an exemplary instance, but rather functions instead as a purely ideal limiting concept (Grenzbegriff), against which reality is compared, so that particular significant component parts of its empirical content can for the sake of clarification be measured. Concepts of this sort are constructs in whose terms we formulate relationships through the employment of the category of objective possibility; and these constructs are judged with respect to their adequacy by an imagination oriented to, and guided by, reality.

The ideal type is in this function an attempt to comprehend historical individuals or individual components through genetic concepts. Take the concepts 'church' and 'sect'. They can be dissolved through pure classification into complexes of characteristics; in this not only the boundaries separating the two concepts, but also their substantive conceptual content, has to remain fluid. If however I wish to grasp the concept 'sect' genetically, that is, in relation to particular important cultural meanings that the 'sect spirit' has for modern culture, then particular characteristics of both concepts become essential, because they stand in an adequate causal relationship to those influences. The concepts then become ideal typical, since they do not appear in complete conceptual purity, or only in individual instances. Here as everywhere else a concept that is not purely classificatory leads away from reality. But the discursive nature of our knowledge – the circumstance that we grasp reality only through a chain of modifications in our apprehension of it – presumes such a conceptual shorthand. Our imagination can often do without explicit conceptual formulation as a means of research – but for exposition, so far as it seeks to be unambiguous, its use in the domain of cultural analysis is in numerous cases quite indispensable. Whoever takes a principled decision to do without it has to restrict himself to the formal aspect of cultural phenomena, for example, that of legal history. The universe of legal norms is naturally clearly definable and is valid (in the legal sense!) for historical reality. But the work of social science in our sense is concerned with its practical significance. However, this significance can very frequently only be brought unambiguously to mind by relating the empirically given to an ideal limiting case. If the historian (in the widest sense) refuses to attempt formulation of such an ideal type on the grounds that it is a 'theoretical construction', i.e. either of no use, or inessential to his given cognitive purpose, the regular outcome is that he either, consciously or unconsciously,

\textsuperscript{14} For example, logic.

uses other similar constructs without linguistic formulation and logical elaboration, or that he remains trapped in the realm of the ill-defined 'felt experience'.

There is certainly nothing more dangerous than the assimilation of theory to history engendered by naturalistic prejudices. Whether it is in the form of a belief that one has fixed the 'real' content, the 'nature' of historical reality, within those theoretical constructs; or in their use of such constructs as a procrustean bed into which history is to be forced; or perhaps that one sees 'ideas' as the 'genuine' reality underlying the flow of phenomena, hypothesized as the real 'forces' that work their way out in history.

The danger in the last case is greater if we tend to think of the 'ideas' of an epoch as thoughts or ideals that have dominated the masses, or a historically important section of the people during an epoch, and are therefore significant components of their cultural attributes. And two things can be added to this: first, that specific relationships exist between the 'idea' in the practical or theoretical sense, and the 'idea' in the sense of an ideal type of an epoch constructed as a conceptual support. An ideal type of particular social circumstances that can be abstracted from certain characteristic social phenomena of an epoch – and this happens quite frequently – appears to contemporaries themselves as an ideal to be striven for in practice, or as a principle that can be used in the regulation of certain social relationships. This is the case with the 'idea' of the 'preservation of subsistence' and many other Canonist doctrines, especially those of Thomas Aquinas, in contrast to the ideal-type concept of the 'town economy' that we discussed above and use today. This is certainly the case with the infamous 'basic concept' of economics; that of 'economic value'. From Scholasticism to Marxist theory the idea that there was something 'objectively' valuable became intertwined as a normative ideal with an abstraction based upon the empirical process of price formation. And that thought, that the 'value' of a commodity should be regulated according to certain principles of natural right did have and still has immeasurable significance for cultural development, and not only of the Middle Ages. Moreover, this has had a lasting and substantial impact on empirical price formation itself. But what is and can be thought within this theoretical concept can only be made unambiguously clear with the assistance of precise conceptual constructs, which means ideal types. Those scornful of the 'Robinsonades' of abstract theory should give this matter some thought, so long as they have nothing better – which here means something clearer – to put in their place.

The causal relationship between a historically existing idea that rules men, and the components of historical reality from which its corresponding ideal type can be abstracted, can be formed in quite various ways. In principle we need only to remember that the two elements are fundamentally different. Now however there is another factor: the 'ideas' that govern the people of a given epoch, however diffusely, can (where a degree of complexity of thought construct is involved) only be grasped with any kind of conceptual clarity in the form of an ideal type, since this idea empirically inhabits the heads of an
indeterminate and constantly changing number of individuals, and as such assumes the form of extreme variation with respect to form and content, clarity and meaning. Those elements of the spiritual life of individuals living in a definite epoch of the Middle Ages that, for example, we might designate as ‘Christian’ in those particular individuals would be, if completely represented, a chaos of infinitely differentiated and entirely contradictory complexes of ideas and feelings of all kinds; but despite all this, the medieval church was able to establish a high degree of unity in faith and morality. If we ask what in this chaos might be ‘Christian’ about the Middle Ages, for one after all continues to use this as a stable concept – what is ‘Christian’ about medieval institutions, it turns out that here, in every instance, we introduce a pure thought construct that we have created. It is a combination of articles of faith, canon law and moral norms, maxims of human conduct and numerous concrete interrelationships that we unite as an ‘idea’: a synthesis which, in the absence of ideal-typical concepts, we could not achieve without contradiction.

There is a very great difference between the logical structure of conceptual systems in which we represent such ‘ideas’ and their relation to that which is given to us directly by empirical reality. The matter is relatively straightforward with respect to cases where one (or a few) theoretical principles can easily be converted into a formula – as, for example, Calvin’s doctrine of predestination – or for cases where moral principles can be clearly formulated; these have dominated people and generated historical effects, so that we are able to arrange the ‘idea’ in a hierarchy of thoughts developed logically from these principles. It is of course easily overlooked that however compelling the significance of pure logical thought has been in history – Marxism is an excellent example of this – the empirico-historical process in the heads of human beings has to be understood as a psychological process, and not one determined by logical principles. The ideal-typical character of such synthesises of historically effective ideas is revealed still more clearly when those fundamental leading principles and postulates no longer survive in the heads of individuals who are, none the less, still dominated by thoughts logically or associatively derived from them, because the historically and causally fundamental ‘idea’ has either died out, or has been widely diffused only in respect of its consequences.

The character of the synthesis as an ‘idea’ that we create emerges even more strongly if those underlying principles are from the beginning incomplete, or never fully realized in consciousness, or never at least take the form of conscious connections in thought. If we adopt this procedure, as always and must always happen, this ‘idea’ – for instance, the ‘liberalism’ of a specific period, or ‘Methodism’, or some kind of conceptually undeveloped variation of ‘socialism’ – concerns a pure ideal type of exactly the same character as the synthesis of ‘principles’ of an economic epoch from which we started. The more comprehensive the relationships that are to be represented, and the more varied their cultural significance, the more their comprehensive and systematic representation as a conceptual system approaches the character of an ideal type; and the less it is possible to make do with one such concept – hence the more natural and inevitable the repeated attempts to bring into consciousness every new aspects of meaning through the construction of new ideal-typical concepts. All representations of the ‘nature’ of Christianity, for instance, are ideal types, of necessarily limited and problematic validity if they are to be viewed as historical representations of the empirically given, but they have on the other hand a high heuristic value for research, and a high systematizing value for exposition, if they are taken to be solely conceptual means for the comparison and calibration of reality. In this function they are indispensable.

But there is another, far more complicated significance implicit in such ideal-typical representations. They regularly seek to be, or are unconsciously, ideal types not only in a practical, but also in a logical sense: model types which – to keep with our example – include that which Christianity should contain from the point of view of the expositor, what is for him ‘essential’ in it because it is of lasting value. If this is so consciously – or more frequently, unconsciously – then they contain ideals that are related evaluatively to Christianity: tasks and goals to which his ‘idea’ of Christianity is directed, and which can of course diverge quite markedly from the values that, for example, early Christians related to Christianity – and this divergence will doubtless continue. In this sense however the ‘ideas’ no longer provide purely logical assistance, they are no longer concepts with and against which reality can be compared and measured, but ideals with which it is evaluatively judged. This is no longer a matter of a purely theoretical procedure relating the empirical to values, but concerns instead value-judgements that are included within the ‘concept’ of Christianity. Because the ideal type here claims empirical validity it breaks into the region of evaluative interpretation of Christianity: the basis of an experiential science is left behind; and we are dealing with a personal confession of faith, and not ideal-typical concept formation.

Although this distinction is quite plain, these two fundamentally distinct meanings of the ‘idea’ are amalgamated in the course of historical work with extraordinary frequency. It is always foreshadowed as soon as a historian begins to develop his ‘conception’ of a personality or of an epoch. Contrasting with the constant ethical standards that Schlosser employed in a rationalist spirit, the modern historian, schooled in relativism, seeks to understand the epoch of which he speaks ‘in its own terms’ – but also wants to judge it; he feels the need to draw his judgement ‘from the material’, i.e. to allow the ‘idea’ in the sense of the ideal to emerge from the ‘idea’ in the sense of the ‘ideal type’. The aesthetic allure of this procedure constantly tempts him to blur the line separating them – a half-measure that on the one hand does not permit of evaluative judgement, while on the other it tends to deny responsibility for its judgements. By contrast, it is an elementary duty of scientific self-control, and the sole means of defence against deception, to make a sharp distinction between the logically comparative relation of reality
to ideal types in their logical sense, and the evaluative judgement of reality directly in terms of ideals. An 'ideal type' in our terms, as can be stated once more, is entirely indifferent to evaluative judgement, it has nothing to do with any sense of 'perfection' other than in a purely logical sense. There are ideal types of brothels as well as of religions, and there are ideal types of brothels which are technically 'functional' from the point of view of contemporary mores, as well as those for which the absolute opposite is true.

Detailed discussion of the most complex and interesting case - the question of the logical structure of the concept of the state - must be here left to one side. Here the following brief observations can be made: if we ask to what in empirical reality the thought 'state' corresponds, we encounter an infinity of diffuse and discrete active and passive human actions, relations regulated factually and legally, sometimes unique, sometimes recurrent in character, all held together by an idea, a belief in actually or normatively prevailing norms and relations of rule of man by man. This belief is partly consciously held as a developed idea, partly dimly perceived, partly passively accepted and reflected in the most varied forms in the heads of individuals who, if they really did clearly think this idea through, would have no need of the 'general theory of the state' that they sought to elaborate. The scientific concept of the state, however formulated, is naturally only a synthesis that we employ for specific cognitive ends. But it is on the other hand also abstracted from the imprecise syntheses that could be found in the heads of historical humans. The concrete form assumed by the historical 'state' in such contemporary syntheses can however be rendered explicit only through orientation to ideal typical concepts. And there is not the slightest doubt that the manner in which these syntheses were made by contemporaries, however logically incomplete, the 'ideas' that they formed of the state - the German 'organic' state metaphysic contrasted to the American 'business' view, for example - were of eminent practical significance; that in other words the practical idea that should, or was believed to, prevail, and the theoretical ideal type constructed for heuristic ends ran in parallel and tended constantly to run into each other.

In the above we mostly, if not exclusively, deliberately treated the 'ideal type' as a thought construct for the charting and systematic characterization of individuals - i.e. the uniquely significant relationships such as Christianity and capitalism. This was done so that we might eliminate the widespread belief that in the domain of cultural phenomena the abstract type can be identified with the abstractly generic. This is not true. Without going into analysis of the much discussed, and through misuse discredited, concept of the 'typical', we can establish on the basis of our previous discussion that the formation of concepts of type through the exclusion of 'accidentals' has its place with historical individuals. Generic concepts, constantly encountered as elements of historical representations and concrete historical concepts, can be formed into ideal types through the abstraction and intensification of those conceptually important elements. In practice, this is indeed an especially frequent and important instance of the application of ideal types, and each individual ideal type is composed of conceptual elements that are generic and have themselves been formed as ideal types. Here also the specifically logical function of ideal-typical concepts is apparent. An example of a simple generic concept (that is, a concept that is a complex of many features shared in common with other phenomena) is that of the concept 'exchange', so long as I ignore the meaning of conceptual elements, and analyse everyday usage. If I relate this concept to that of the 'law of marginal utility' and create the concept of 'economic exchange' as an economically rational process, then this involves a judgement of the 'typical' conditions of exchange, as with every logically fully developed concept. It assumes a genetic character and hence also becomes ideal typical in the logical sense; it distances itself from empirical reality, which can henceforth only be a standard of comparison, that can be related to the ideal type. It is much the same with the so-called 'basic concepts' of economics: in their generic form they can only be developed as ideal types. The contrast between simple generic concepts capable only of summarizing that which is common to empirical phenomena, and generic ideal types - as, for instance, an ideal-typical concept of the 'nature' of craft production - is one which alters from case to case. But no generic concept as such has a 'typical' character, and there is no such thing as a purely generic 'average' type. Whenever we refer to 'typical' magnitudes, for instance, in statistics, then this involves more than a mere average. The more that we are concerned with the simple classification of processes that appear in reality as mass phenomena, the more that we are involved with generic concepts. By contrast, the more that complicated historical relationships are conceptually formed with respect to those elements relating to their specific cultural significance, then the concept, or the conceptual system, will assume an increasingly ideal-typical form. For the objective of ideal-typical conceptual construction is not the conscious clarification of generic factors, but rather the clarification of that which renders cultural phenomena unique.

The fact that ideal types, including generic ideal types can be used, and are used, is of methodological interest only when related to another circumstance. So far we have encountered ideal types in the main as abstract relational concepts, conceived by us as stable historical individuals in the flow of events, in which developments take place. Now a complication crops up, seamlessly reintroducing with the assistance of the concept of 'type' the naturalistic prejudice that the goal of social sciences is the reduction of reality to 'laws'. Even developments can be construed as ideal types, and such constructions

15 Generic concepts as ideal types are the construction of types of phenomena found in a large variety of societal settings - for example, feudalism. Genetic concepts as ideal types isolate an aspect of meaningful behaviour such as rational profit maximization. Outside Weber's ideal-type usage, generic refers to a large group or class of phenomena, e.g. crustaceans, or hunter-gatherers, whereas genetic concerns the specific origins or causes of phenomena.
can be of very great heuristic value. But there is in this a very great danger that ideal type and reality will be driven together. One could, for instance, reach the theoretical conclusion that in a "thoroughly" 'craft-based' society land formed the sole source of capital accumulation. From this one could perhaps - we are not concerned here with the rectitude of the construction - form an ideal image of the transformation of craft industry into a capitalist economy, determined by simple factors such as the finitude of land, increasing population, inflow of precious metals, and the rationalization of life conduct. Whether the historical course of development is actually the one that has been constructed could only be determined with the assistance of this construction as a heuristic means through comparison of ideal type and 'facts'. If the ideal type were 'properly' constructed while the actual course of events did *not* correspond to the ideal type, this would prove that medieval society was *not* in certain respects totally 'craft-based'. And if the ideal type had been constructed in a heuristically 'ideal' manner - whether this applies to our example is not important here - research would then seek a clearer understanding of the character and historical significance of these non-craft elements of medieval society. If it arrives at this conclusion it has fulfilled its logical aim *in that* it makes plain its own lack of reality. In this case, it was a test of a hypothesis. This procedure is unobjectionable so long as one constantly recalls that ideal-type typical constructs of development and history are two elements that require sharp demarcation, and that the act of construction was in this case solely a means of *deliberately* and *validly* imputing a historical process to its real causes, selecting from the sphere of the possible given the prevailing state of our knowledge.

Strict maintenance of this distinction is in our experience rendered much more difficult by one factor. For the sake of the evident demonstration of the ideal type, or ideal-type development, efforts will be made to clarify it by adding illustrative material from empirico-historical reality. The danger of this procedure, in itself quite legitimate, is that historical knowledge appears here in the *service* of theory, rather than the reverse. The theorician is strongly tempted to view this relationship as normal, or worse, push theory and history into each other and as a result take the one for the other. This situation arises more sharply if the ideal construction of a developmental sequence and conceptual classification of ideal types of particular cultural entities (e.g. commercial enterprise forms developed on the basis of 'closed domestic economy', or religious concepts developed out of 'gods of the moment') are integrated into a *genetic* classification. The series of types that results from the conceptual criteria selected then appears to be a lawfully necessary historical sequence. The logical ordering of concepts on the one hand, and the empirical ordering of the conceptualized in space, time, and causal relationship on the other, becomes so entangled that there is an almost unavoidable temptation of doing violence to reality so that the real validity of the construction might be verified in reality.

We have deliberately avoided demonstrating this with respect to what is for us by far the most important case of ideal-type construction: that of Marx. This was done so that our exposition might not be further complicated through the introduction of Marx interpretations, and also so that we might not anticipate contributions to our journal that will regularly present critical analyses of that great thinker. We will limit ourselves here to the observation that all specifically Marxian 'laws' and developmental constructs - to the extent that they are free of fault *theoretically* - are of ideal-type character. The eminent, even unique heuristic meaning of these ideal types, if they are used in comparison with reality - and likewise their danger, the moment that they are conceived as empirically realized, or even as real (i.e. in truth: metaphysical) 'driving forces', 'tendencies', etc. - this is familiar to all who have ever worked with Marxist concepts.

Generic concepts - ideal types - ideal-type generic concepts - ideas in the sense of actual thought connections made by historical human beings - ideal types of such ideas - ideals that govern historical human beings - ideal types of such ideals - ideals to which the historian relates history - *theoretical* constructions combined with the *illustrative* employment of the empirical - *historical* investigations using theoretical concepts as ideal limiting cases - plus the varied possible combinations that can here only be indicated: all thought constructions whose relation to the empirical reality of the directly given are problematic in every single instance: this sample alone shows the endless ramifications of conceptual and methodological problems which remain active in the sphere of the cultural sciences. And we must simply abandon any ambition of seriously examining in any greater depth practical methodological questions that are here only briefly exposed, or the relation of ideal-type to 'statutory' knowledge, and that of ideal-type concepts to collective concepts.

After all this discussion the historian will still insist that the rule of the ideal-type form of conceptual formation is a specific symptom of the immaturity of a discipline. And in a certain sense this is correct, although linked to consequences other than those that he would draw. Let us take a few examples from other disciplines. It is certainly true that a harassed third-former, just like the primitive philologist, first thinks of a language *organically*, that is, as a meta-empirical *totality* ruled by norms; but assumes the business of science to be the determination of what *should* prevail as a language rule. The first task normally assumed by a 'philology' is to reduce the content of a 'written language' to rules, as was done by the Accademia della Crusca.¹⁶ If today by contrast a leading philologist declares the 'speech of

¹⁶ *Academy founded in Florence in 1582, itself modelled on an earlier society in Perugia (Accademia degli Scrittori). Both names indicate the function of separating the linguistic wheat from the chaff (crusca) and led to the purification of the Italian language on a fourteenth-century Tuscan model.*
every single person' to be the object of philology, then the creation of such a programme is only possible once a relatively stable ideal type exists in written language, with the aid of which the endless variety of speech can (tacitly) be systematically studied, and without which aid such research would lack all orientation and limit. The construction of theories of the state on the basis of natural law or an organic metaphor is no different; nor is – to introduce an ideal type in our sense – Benjamin Constant’s theory of the ancient state which served as a safe haven until such time as one had found one’s way about the vast sea of empirical facts. A science entering into maturity always involves supersession of the ideal type, insofar as it is thought to be empirically valid, or a generic concept. Use today of Constant’s learned construction to demonstrate particular aspects and historical peculiarities of ancient political life is still quite legitimate, so long as one carefully remains in touch with its ideal-typical character. But there are sciences destined to eternal youthfulness, and that includes all historical disciplines, all those disciplines to which the eternally advancing flow of culture poses new problems. Here the transience of all ideal-typical constructions, but at the same time the inevitability of constantly forming new constructions, is central to their task.

Attempts to determine the ‘genuine’, ‘true’ meaning of historical concepts recur incessantly, but are always incomplete. As a consequence the syntheses with which history continues to work either remain imperfectly defined, or, as soon as unambiguous conceptual content is sought, the concept becomes an abstract ideal type and stands revealed as a theoretical, therefore ‘one-sided’ perspective capable of illuminating the reality to which it is related. But this concept also of course proves itself to be unsuitable for use as a schema within which reality can be completely integrated. For no systems of thought, whose support is vital if we are to grasp given significant elements of reality, are capable of exhausting reality’s infinite wealth. None of them are anything more than an attempt, on the basis of prevailing knowledge and using the conceptual constructs available to us, to bring order into the prevailing chaos of facts that we have drawn into a field circumscribed by our interest. The thought apparatus developed by the past through the cognitive processing of immediately given reality – which in truth means cognitive reconstruction – and by ordering reality in terms of those concepts corresponding to the apparatus’s state of knowledge and the tendency of its interest, is constantly challenged by new knowledge that we can and wish to draw from reality. In the course of this struggle cultural scientific work makes progress. The outcome is a constant process of reconstruction of those concepts within which we seek to grasp reality. The history of the sciences of social life is, and thus remains, a constant shift from the attempt to order facts in thought through conceptual construction – the dissolution of cognitive constructs so realized by the extension and displacement of the scientific horizon – to the reformulation of concepts on this changed foundation. It is not the error of seeking to construct conceptual systems in general that is expressed by this – every science, including simple descriptive history, operates with the conceptual stock-in-trade of its time – it expresses instead the circumstance that in the sciences of human culture the construction of concepts depends on the posing of problems, and the latter change with the content of the culture itself. The relation within the cultural sciences of the concept to the conceived implies the transience of all syntheses. Large-scale attempts at conceptual construction have in the domain of our science often been of value in revealing the limits of the significance of the perspectives that founded them. The greatest advances in the domain of the social sciences are substantively connected to the shift of practical cultural problems and disguise themselves as critiques of conceptual construction. Among the most important tasks of our journal will be to serve this critical endeavour and hence the investigation of synthetic principles within the domain of social science.

In the conclusions that can be drawn from the above we now come to a point at which, here and there, our views differ from many (even eminent) representatives of the historical school, among whose pupils we certainly belong. In many respects the latter still hold, explicitly or implicitly, to the opinion that the purpose and aim of every science is to organize its material as a system of concepts, the content of which is to be acquired and slowly perfected through the observation of empirical regularities, the construction of hypotheses and verification of the same; until at some time or other a ‘complete’ and therefore deductive science has been formed. Given this objective, the historico-inductive work of the present is preliminary work governed by the incompleteness of our discipline: and naturally nothing is more questionable from this perspective than the formation and use of clear concepts which seems to over-anticipate an objective to be realized in the distant future. This view would be unobjectionable in principle within the context of ancient and scholastic epistemology, an epistemology that was still a reflex for the bulk of specialists of the historical school: it was assumed that the purpose of concepts lay in the direct representation in imagination of ‘objective’ reality; and so the persistent claim was made that all clear concepts were unreal. Whoever follows through the basic principles of modern epistemology – principles that go back to Kant – according to which concepts instead are, and can only be, cognitive means for the purpose of intellectually mastering the empirically given, would have no objection to the idea that clear genetic concepts are necessarily ideal types. From this latter viewpoint, the relationship between concept and historical work is reversed: the objective of historical work appears quite impossible, concepts are not the objective, but the means to the end, knowledge of relationships that are significant from individual viewpoints. Because the contents of historical concepts are mutable, they need in any given context to be as clearly formulated as possible.

17 Benjamin Constant (1767–1830) drew a striking contrast between the liberty of the ancients and the liberty of the moderns. Ancient liberty consisted of privileges and liberties along with devotion to the city state.
One would only ask that in use their character as ideal constructs be carefully emphasized, that ideal type and history not be confused with each other. Since really definitive historical concepts are not in general to be thought of as an ultimate end, given the inevitable shift in leading evaluative ideas, the construction of sharp and unambiguous concepts relevant to the concrete individual viewpoint directing our attention at any given time affords the prospect of maintaining a clear appreciation of the limits of their validity.

It will be said, and we have already admitted, that in the individual case the course of a concrete historical relationship can be made quite intelligible (anschaulich) without the constant introduction of defined concepts. And it will be claimed for the historians of our discipline that they may speak the 'language of life', as has been said of political historians. Certainly! But it can only be said that in this procedure there is often a very high degree of coincidence in the conscious registration of the viewpoint from which the process gains significance. We are generally not in the favourable position of the political historian for whom the cultural contents to which his account is related are naturally unambiguous, or at least seem to be. Any intelligible description entails artistic representation: 'each sees what is in his own heart' - valid judgement everywhere presupposes the logical working through of what is immediately perceived, which means the use of concepts. It is indeed possible, and often aesthetically appealing, to keep these in petto, but it always endangers the security of the reader’s orientation, and often that of the writer, with respect to the content and scope of his judgements.

The neglect of clear concept formation in the context of the discussion of practical, economic and social policy is especially dangerous. An outsider would find incredible the degree of confusion generated by, for instance, use of the term 'value' - that problem child of our discipline which gains unambiguous meaning only ideal-typically - or words such as 'productive', 'from the economic standpoint', and so forth, terms that withstand no clear conceptual analysis. It is here chiefly collective concepts taken from everyday life that have had an especially unhappy impact. One can take a textbook example most transparent to the layperson, the concept of 'agriculture', as it appears in the phrase 'interests of agriculture'. If we begin by taking the 'interests of agriculture' as the empirically verifiable more or less clear subjective perception of their interest on the part of economically active individuals; and if we for the time being ignore the countless conflicts between cattle-keeping, animal-feeding, corn-growing, corn-feeding, schnapps-distilling, etc. agriculturalists, not every layperson is aware of what is familiar to the expert: that there is an enormous entanglement of value-relations running into each other and against each other grasped only hazily by that heading.

We shall list only a few of them here: the interests of farmers wishing to sell their property and hence solely interested in the rapid rise in land values; the exact opposite interest of those wishing to buy, rent or lease; the interest of those who wish, for the sake of social advantage, that their descendants retain

the property, and are therefore interested in the stability of landed property; the opposite interest of those who, in their own and their children’s interests wish to see land move into the hands of the best farmers or, not necessarily the same thing, to the buyer with the most capital; the purely economic interest in the economic freedom of the 'most efficient farmer' in the business sense; the conflict between the interests of established ruling strata in the maintenance of the prevailing social and political position of their own 'status' and that of their descendants; the social interest of the non-dominant farmers in the decline of those strata that oppress them; occasionally, their contradictory interest in the political leadership of those strata for the protection of their commercial interests.

The list could so easily be extended without end, despite the fact that we have been as brief and imprecise as is possible. We ignore the fact that the more 'selfish' interests of this kind are mixed and amalgamated with, constrained and diverted, by the most varied pure ideal values, in order to remark that, if we speak of the 'interests of agriculture', we generally think not only of those material and ideal values to which individual farmer relate their own 'interests', but also of those sometimes quite heterogeneous evaluative ideas to which we can relate agriculture: for example,

- the interests of production, deriving from the interest in cheaper, if not necessarily high-quality, food for the population, and in which the interests of town and country clash along many dimensions, and in which the interest of the present generation does in no respect have to coincide with the probable interest of future generations;

- the populationist interest, the especial interest in a numerous rural population derived from 'state' interests driven either by conceptions of national power, or domestic policy, or various other ideal interests such as an expectation that a plentiful rural population will influence the cultural character of a country. This populationist interest can clash with the diverse commercial interests of all sections of the rural population, conceivably with all contemporary interests of the mass of the rural population;

- or, for example, an interest in a particular form of social organization of the rural population on account of the nature of political or cultural influences resulting from that; this interest, depending on its focus, can clash with all conceivable interests held by individual farmers, even the most pressing present and future interests, as well as those of the 'state'. And - this complicates the matter even further - this 'state' to whose 'interests' we freely relate these and numerous other similar individual interests is often only a convenient covering term for utterly entangled evaluative ideas, to which it is in turn related in individual cases: - purely military external security; the securing in dominion of a dynasty or particular class internally; interest in the maintenance and extension of the formal state unity of the nation, for its own sake or in the interest
of particular objective, if varied, cultural values, to which we adhere as members of a people united by a state, transformation of the social character of the state with respect to quite varied cultural ideals. It would simply take too long even to sketch out everything that might be included under those 'state interests' to which we could relate 'agriculture'.

The example chosen here is crude and simple; more so our summary analysis. The layperson could analyse, for instance, the concept 'class interest of the worker' in a similar and more thorough fashion and see just how entangled and contradictory this term is in respect of the interests and ideals of the worker, and also in respect of the ideals in whose terms we regard the worker. It is impossible to do away with slogans relating to the struggle of interests by laying a purely empirical emphasis on their 'relative': clear, precise, conceptual definition of the various possible viewpoints is the only path that leads us beyond the ambiguity of the phrase. As a worldview or a prevailing norm the 'argument for free trade' is simply laughable, but it has inflicted heavy damage on our discussions of trade policy – quite independently of the trading ideals to which the individual adheres – such that we have underestimated the heuristic value of maxims formulated in ideal-typical form by the greatest merchants of the earth. It is only ideal-typical conceptual formations that clarify specificity of viewpoints that become relevant in individual cases through the confrontation of the empirical with the ideal type. The use of undifferentiated collective concepts with which everyday language works is always a cover for a lack of clarity of thought or aspiration, often enough the tool of serious deception; but always a means of obstructing the proper formulation of a problem.

We have come to the end of this discussion, the only purpose of which has been to trace the fine line that separates science and belief, and makes clear the meaning of the search for socio-economic knowledge. The objective validity of experiential knowledge rests, solely rests, upon the fact that given reality is ordered by categories which are in a specific sense subjective: they represent the presupposition of our knowledge and are based on the presupposition of the value of those truths which experiential knowledge alone is able to give us. For those whom this truth has no value – and belief in the value of scientific truth is the product of particular cultures, and is not given naturally – then the means of our science has nothing to offer them. He will certainly search in vain for another truth to take the place of science with respect to those aspects that it alone can provide: concepts and judgements that are not empirical reality, nor represent such reality, but which allow it to be ordered in thought in a valid manner. As we saw, in the domain of the empirical socio-cultural sciences the possibility of meaningful knowledge of what is essential for us in the infinity of events is linked to the consistent use of viewpoints of a specifically particular character, all of which in the last instance are directed by evaluative ideas, which ideas in turn can be registered and experienced as elements of all meaningful human action, but which are not derived from or validated by the empirical material. The 'objectivity' of social scientific knowledge depends rather on the fact that the empirical given is always related to those evaluative ideas which alone give it cognitive value, and the significance of the empirically given is in turn derived from these evaluative ideas. But this empirical given can never become the pedestal upon which is based an empirically impossible proof of its validity. The belief that we all possess in some form or other – in the meta-empirical validity of the ultimate and highest evaluative ideas, with which we anchor the meaning of our being – does not exclude the constant change in concrete viewpoints from which empirical reality gains significance, but rather includes it: life, in its irrational reality and its store of possible significances is inexhaustible, the concrete formation of value relations remains therefore fluid, subject to change in the distant future of human culture. The light given off by these highest evaluative ideas falls upon an ever-changing finite part of the monstrously chaotic stream of events that flows through time.

None of that should lead to the misunderstanding that the real task of social science lies in the constant pursuit of new viewpoints and conceptual constructions. On the contrary: nothing should be here more strongly emphasized than the proposition that the knowledge of the cultural significance of concrete historical relationships is exclusively and alone the final end that, along with other means, the work of conceptual formation and criticism seeks to serve. There are in our sphere, to use the words of F. Th. Vischer, 'material specialists' and 'interpretative specialists'. The hunger of the first can be satisfied only with legal documents, statistical tables and surveys; he is insensitive to the quality of a new idea. The latter on the other hand dulls his taste for facts by ever newer conceptual distillations. The genuine artistry that, for example, among the historians Ranke possessed in such great measure shows itself by its capacity to link known facts to known viewpoints but none the less create something new.

All work in the cultural sciences in an age of specialization, once oriented towards particular material by a particular way of posing a problem and having created its methodological principles, will treat the analysis of this material as an end in itself. It will cease consciously assessing the value of the individual facts in terms of their ultimate evaluative values, and will lose its awareness of being ultimately rooted in these evaluative ideas altogether. And that is a good thing. But at some point the atmosphere alters: the significance of viewpoints used unreflectively becomes uncertain, the path becomes lost in the twilight. The light cast by the great cultural problems has moved onward. Then even science prepares to shift its ground and change its conceptual apparatus so that it might regard the stream of events from the heights of reflective thought. It follows those stars which alone are able to give meaning and direction to its labour:
Further reading

In the German language Weber's methodology is referred to as *Wissenschaftslehre*. This has a larger compass than the Anglo-American understanding of technical methods. *Wissenschaftslehre* includes ontology, epistemology, methods, and the praxis of knowledge. In this wider circle of reference, we come back to some of the issues already mentioned in the Further reading to Part III. Rather than repeat these debates I will confine my remarks to strictly expositional references, of which there are surprisingly few in English. And by implication there are a great number of works dealing with Weber's methodology in the light of twentieth-century developments in the philosophy of science and of social science. Weber is mostly treated in terms of what he *should* have said according to the post-Weberian paradigms of neo-positivism, phenomenology, interpretivism, and critical theory. On this range of interpretations see Sven Eliaeson, *Max Weber's Methodologies*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2002. An additional complication in the literature is that Weber, in liberating himself from German collectivist and organicist thinking, overlaps with an Anglo-American analytic tradition initiated by J.L. Austin and extended by major figures such as Quentin Skinner and John R. Searle. Martin Hollis, in *Models of Man. Philosophical Thought on Social Action*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, operates in the confluence of these two traditions.