Capitalism, Weber and Democracy

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Abstract

Weber's occasional interventions in political debates, particularly towards the end of and just after the First World War, throw an interesting light upon his sociological thought and tell us much about his attitude towards modern society. In particular, if one gives due weight to the late political commentaries there are grounds for doubting the increasingly popular view of him as an ambivalent or pessimistic theorist of modernity. Against such a view, the political essays suggest that his support for political, cultural and economic modernization is clear, though highly instrumental. He sees in rational capitalism and in representative democracy a means to a modernizing revolution in which barriers to economic and political development can be overcome. The article concludes with the suggestion that America provides the implicit model of modernization.

Keywords democracy, capitalism, modernization, Weber

Introduction

In reading the debates that surround Weber's attitude towards modernity and modern institutions one quickly gets the impression that 'Weber' often stands as a surrogate for something else; that at stake is not merely a narrow scholastic or hermeneutic issue—the 'correct' or one plausible interpretation of a theorist, however eminent—but questions of democracy, liberalism and modernity themselves. This occasionally becomes explicit, as for example when David Beetham asserts that 'the problem of Weber is none other than the problem of liberalism itself' (1989: 322), to which one might add 'none other than the problem of modernity itself.' Within at least some contemporary social science debates Weber appears to act as a conduit through which a variety of positions are channelled or via which our own attitudes towards modernity become formed or reformed.

Two such debates have been running in parallel for some time. The first, among political scientists and political theorists, concerns Weber's attitudes towards democracy and liberalism. No one now seriously suggests that his political analysis somehow prefigured, let alone jus-

tified, the Nazi seizure of power, but there is still a strong case to be made for Weber as an anti-liberal and even anti-democrat.[1] Against this view stands the analysis of political theorists such as David Beetham (especially 1974) and more recently Richard Bellamy (1992) who interpret Weber as a complex liberal realist; as a 'liberal without liberal values' as Beetham puts it (1989: 312). The second debate, among sociologists and social theorists, concerns his attitude towards modern society. The old standard view of Weber as a precursor of modernization theory has been challenged by the increasingly dominant reading of him as *the* ambivalent theorist of 'modernity', or as theorist of tragedy and cultural pessimism. Thus understood, he can then be read through his contemporary, Nietzsche, or even retrospectively through the first generation of critical theorists or Foucault.[2]

Although the first debate does make reference to Weber's sociology, the second largely ignores his political analysis or focuses on the one famous political essay which is most akin to his sociological concerns, 'The profession and vocation of politics' (1919a). While this is a perfectly legitimate interpretative strategy and one which has provided considerable insights into his general outlook, it is not fully appropriate to Weber as a political thinker. By this I do not mean that there is a clear-cut division between Weber as the sociologist of modernity and as the somewhat Olympian political commentator. On the contrary, these aspects have to be understood in conjunction.[3] By mar-

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1.   This was the point of Habermas's perhaps ill-judged comment that 'Carl Schmitt was a "legitimate pupil" of Weber' (Habermas 1971: 66). More recently, Rune Slagstad (1988) has made a more sustained case for the continuity between Weber and Schmitt in their reduction of the state to a *Machtstaat* (power-state) and of politics to *ewiger Kampf* (eternal struggle). One difficulty for such a Schmittian readings is that for each time Weber suggests that politics is eternal and normless struggle it is possible to find an occasion on which he argues that this struggle is conducted via compromise. This anti-reductionist insistence that politics is about compromise as well as the struggle for power implies both a qualitative break between politics and war—in marked contrast to Schmitt's view that '"War is only the ultimate realization of enmity" in politics' (quoted in Scheuerman 1994: 18)— and entails a recognition of the legitimacy of competing interests that is in direct conflict with Schmitt's homogenizing project.

2.   Although not the first to point it out, an influential assertion of Nietzsche's sway over Weber is Wilhelm Hennis's 1985 lecture 'The traces of Nietzsche in the work of Max Weber' (in Hennis 1988: 146-62). More recently David Owen has made a very strong case for not only for the Nietzsche connection, but also the thematic continuity between Weber and Foucault. See Owen 1994.

3.   In this respect David Beetham, in his still definitive discussion of Weber's political thought, may have been a little over-scrupulous in maintaining 'a clear

ginalizing the later mature political analysis or reading them through the concerns of *The Protestant Ethic* (Weber 1930), the Nietzsche/ Foucault interpretation can underestimate the significance of Weber's role as a public intellectual; as someone whose 'scientific' work occasionally serves and is occasionally influenced by a larger external game, by the desire to make an impact on public life and worldly affairs. In the later political works there is still Nietzschean terminology, for example *ressentiment* and even *Herrenrasse*,[4] and there are still traces of his much discussed ambivalence and pessimism,[5] but these writings also contain something else, namely a concern with institutional design, political, cultural and economic modernization, and responsible politics. The role Weber rhetorically adopts for himself here is not that of romantic rebel rattling the bars of the iron cage, but of the responsible self-styled 'man of the world' (*ein Mann von Welt/ weltmännisch*) railing, rather bad temperedly, at the naiveté of his foes and the weakness of political leadership in Germany as it emerged from the First World War.

Here I want to examine the implications of Weber's late political analysis for understanding not merely his personal political stance but also his sociology, and specifically his attitude towards modern

distinction between Weber's scientific and non-scientific work, on the assumption that each is to be considered on its own terms' (1974: 30-31). Beetham here wants to remain true to Weber's intentions and to avoid treating either the sociology as a mere expression of political outlook or the political writings as mere precursors of the sociology. This is perfectly justified, but should not be allowed to obscure the degree of mutual influence of the political and 'scientific' work, as I hope to demonstrate. Indeed, Beetham himself shows clearly that 'one of the characteristics of Weber's liberalism was the restatement of its [i.e. liberalism's] themes in sociological categories' (Beetham 1989: 311). The case for a close interconnection between political, scientific and even methodological concerns has been well made by Sheldon Wolin for whom Weber's 'formal sociology was laced with political themes' (Wolin 1981: 415).

4.   Without wishing to trivialize Nietzsche's influence, use of Nietzschean terms is not in itself strong evidence of such influence. It sometime seems to be the case that Weber, like many after him, was attracted to Nietzsche as a brilliant coiner of phrases and took pleasure in their sometimes playful employment or even adaptation, as for example in his characterization of the German parliament as having a 'will to powerlessness' (1918a: 187).

5.   Ambivalence, pessimism and even nostalgia have become clichéd attributions to Weber within some secondary literature. For example, Stewart Clegg writes 'nostalgia resides in views common to both Weberian pessimism and "critical theory". Nostalgics view the world as increasingly rationalized and enclosed in an iron cage' (1989: 136). This interpretation is too heavily reliant on a reading, or arguably misreading, of the closing passages of *The Protestant Ethic*.

society or, in more currently acceptable parlance, 'modernity'. I do not hope or wish to contribute to either of the above debates specifically. A great deal of very high quality scholarly work has gone into each, but there are connections between Weber's politics and his sociology which have yet to be made or at least need to be underlined.[6] For present purposes Weber is primarily interesting insofar as he remains a source of insight into current political and sociological questions. The political commentaries in which I am mainly interested address the problem of both liberalism and modernity via a complex account of capitalism (the market) and the state, and of the relationship between them. They thus have an echo far beyond the contemporary issues with which they were primarily concerned.[7] Via these texts we shall explore Weber's attitudes towards modernization and modernity in the spheres of politics, economics and culture. The Weber we find here has an almost heroic rather than pessimistic attitude towards the direction modern capitalism societies and modern representative democratic polities are taking.

The Littérateur

Perhaps the most economical way into Weber's views on these matters is through the identification of the target against which his arguments are ranged. The prime target is not Marx or even the socialists. Indeed much of Weber's political analysis can be read as an affirmation and development of Marx's critique of Hegel's assertion that bureaucrats represented a universal class. Like Marx, Weber wants to show that bureaucrats or civil servants have specific interests of their own, a tendency to develop into a caste, and a will to power. Not Marx then, but the 'littérateurs' (*die Literaten*, ' "men" of letters') are the objects of Weber's critique, indeed of his sometimes barely controlled contempt. Lassman and Speirs offer a useful definition:

> in the contemporary context… Weber mostly uses the term [*die Literaten*] censoriously to refer to those writers, frequently in academic positions, who seek to influence political life by their writings although lacking, in his opinion, the expertise to do so and shouldering no political responsibility for the effects of what they write (Lassman and Speirs 1994: 377).

6.   Where the debates do explicitly overlap is in their common concern with Nietzsche's influence on Weber's sociology and/or politics.

7.   This it the point Beetham (1974) so convincingly makes against, or at least to complement, Mommsen's reading of Weber in a strictly German political context.

One can reconstruct the outlook of the littérateurs from what Weber has to say about them,[8] and then in turn infer something of his own position from that critique. On Weber's account, the fundamental characteristic of the littérateurs was their conservative and romantic notion of an essential 'German spirit' which supposedly marked Germany out from other Western nations and which was to be preserved and defended at all costs. This spirit was thought to be threatened on two fronts: by capitalism and by formal parliamentary democracy. Together these represented an alien Western course which was antithetical to the German character and national spirit. Weber's response to these conservative nationalists sees him supporting the economic, political and cultural modernization and Westernization of Germany.

Capitalism and Anti-capitalism

Weber's riposte to the anti-capitalism of the littérateurs is trenchant:

> In view of the iron-hard spring that peace will bring us, it is a crime for the littérateurs, of whatever persuasion, to claim that the German 'will to work' is the nation's original sin and to propose a more 'easy-going' way of life as an ideal for the future. These are the *parasitic ideals* of a stratum of prebendaries and *rentiers* who have the impertinence to judge the hard daily struggle of their fellow citizens who are engaged in physical and mental work against the standards dreamed up at their writing-desks (1917: 84-85).

In marked contrast, he identifies the 'need for economic work to be enormously *intensified* and *rationalized*' for reasons both of national prestige and 'simply in order to make life *possible* for the masses in our country' (1917: 84). There is nothing here of the ambivalence towards the work ethic and capitalism that appears to pervade the final pages of *The Protestant Ethic*. The aside 'of whatever persuasion' is significant. It is clear that the anti-capitalism of conservative nationalists and that of the left is being damned in equal measure for its elitism and its indifference towards the condition of the nation and of the masses. To anticipate my conclusion, Weber is identifying himself with an almost American-style popular capitalism in which egalitarian and populist sentiments are fused with a broad pro-capitalist stance: '[with] the

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8.   For the sake of this analysis it little matters who the littérateurs were, or even whether they were merely a convenient construct (ideal type) against which Weber developed his arguments. Thomas Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* of 1919 conveys something of flavour of the position against which Weber was arguing.

rationalization of the economy, the interests of the workers and those of the entrepreneurs occupying the *highest* organizational positions, despite all their social antagonisms, are identical' (1917: 87).

The littérateurs' anti-capitalism is said to demonstrate a 'profound ignorance of the nature of capitalism' (1917: 89) and specifically a conflation of its modern rational form with pre-modern robber capitalism. Unlike robber capitalism, the pursuit of gain through rationally disciplined labour *is* grounded in an ethic of responsible professionalism. No need now for the scare quotes which Weber put around the word 'spirit' in the original title of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*:

> the brazen casing (*Gehäuse*) which gives economic work its present stamp and fate was created and is maintained precisely by the—in terms of personal business ethics (*Geschäftsethik*) highest *rational*—capitalist operational *ethic* (*Betriebsethik*) of this second type of 'capitalism', the ethics of professional duty and professional honour, which, generally speaking, stand far above the average economic ethics which have *really* existed in *any* historical age (as opposed to those *preached* by philosophers and littérateurs) (1917: 90).

This statement endorses the Protestant ethic not merely on the grounds of its inescapably and aptness to modern circumstances—i.e. because it is our fate—but also because it is an *ethic* in more than just a sociological sense. It raises the economic activity of the entrepreneur to a moral level which is the equal of that of professionals in any other sphere. The lawyer, the civil servant or the academic are not the moral superiors of the capitalist, but are bound by variations of the same ethic of professional duty. Indeed, Weber closely empathizes or even identifies himself with entrepreneurs because they have a quality which the others all too often lack, they are *weltmännisch*. His descriptions of the entrepreneur are occasionally cast in an almost heroic register: 'a modern manufacturer, chained to the unremitting, intense, exhausting work of running his business, is, of all the representatives of the propertied strata, the type who is least able to make himself available for politics' (1917: 111). In part for these reasons Weber will not countenance any proposal of a return to earlier pre-capitalist community-based (*gemeinwirtschaftlich*) economic relations grounded in solidarity and reciprocity. Such a suggestion is met with scorn: 'anyone still unaware of the difference between these things [e.g. guilds, clans, etc. and modern single-purpose associations] should learn his sociological ABC before troubling the book-market with the products of his vanity' (1917: 91). This crass dismissal was not, but might well have been, aimed directly at Durkheim.

Democracy and Universal Suffrage

Just as Weber is often thought of as the theorist of cultural pessimism by sociological commentators, so too is he sometimes taken to be a critic of parliamentarianism, or even of liberalism.[9] Here I want to argue that his criticisms of representative democracy are in the service of an unambiguously supportive stance towards modern parliamentary forms, albeit on strictly instrumental grounds. Furthermore, procapitalism and support for representative democracy are closely interwoven. This is in part because of the equal interdependence of anticapitalism and anti-democracy among the conservative littérateurs whom he is criticizing.

The demand for a return to a precapitalist *Gemeinwirtschaft* is mirrored in the political sphere by the call for a form of franchise based not upon universal suffrage, but on the differential representation of distinct social classes or occupational groups (*Stände*; 'estates'). This attempt to recreate a *Ständestaat* ('the polity of the Estates' is Poggi's translation, 1978: 36) as a truly German state form is likewise treated by Weber as a piece of reactionary utopianism inappropriate to modern conditions and based upon 'confused ideas about the "articulation of society" according to the "natural occupations" ' in "communities of estates" ' (1917: 100). 'The underlying realities', he suggests, 'were different'. The historical *Ständestaat* was characterized not by solidarity, but by the quasi-ownership by individuals of political rights and powers. It was thus not a state at all in the modern sense (e.g. no rule of law, no binding decisions, etc.), but the antithesis of modern politics and business grounded as they are in rational calculation, procedure and a high degree of predictability of outcome. In contrast, there is what we might now call synergy between modern economic forms based upon rational capitalism and modern political forms of representational—for Weber, essentially plebiscitary—democracy. The crucial passage runs as follows:

9.　While acknowledging Weber's support for parliamentary forms, David Held comes close to such an interpretation when he writes: 'the tension between might and right, power and law, was to a large extent resolved by Weber in favour of might and power. Although he was firmly committed to the "rule of law", what was important about the democratic process was that it established a form of "elected dictatorship"' (Held 1987: 159). 'Elected dictatorship' is Quentin Hogg's (Lord Hailsham's) term, not Weber's, and does not capture the argument well. Held offers a very good account of Weber's political analysis, but for a more balanced interpretation of the specific issue of his views on liberalism and democracy, see Bellamy (1992: Ch. 4).

> In purely political terms it is no mere coincidence that equal 'numbers suffrage' is on the advance everywhere, for the mechanical nature of *equal* voting rights corresponds to the essential nature of today's state. The modern state is the first to have the concept of the *'citizen of the state'* (*Staatsbürger*). Equal voting rights mean in the first instance simply this: at this point of social life the individual, for once, is *not*, as he is everywhere else, considered in terms of the particular profession and family position he occupies, nor in relation to differences of material and social situation, but purely and simply *as a citizen*. This expresses the political unity of the nation (*Staatsvolk*) (1917: 103).

Universal suffrage is not an expression of natural equality, but a momentary *political* counterbalance to otherwise ubiquitous *social* inequality. It represents a brilliant institutional resolution of one of the central paradoxes of modern societies: they are founded on egalitarian political principles but nonetheless run through with economic and social inequalities. In the voting booth we are momentarily all equals —all citizens of the state—and the promise of modern democracy is made good. So modern subjects are collectively *Staatsvolk* and not *Volksgenossen*; members of a political community not a community of fate. This is the core political assumption of all modernists (cf. Habermas 1996). But modern plebiscitary democracy has a more important role to play. It addresses the unavoidable fact of bureaucratic domination. I shall return to this below, for now we should examine the third and most fundamental element of the littérateurs' world-view, the notion of a unique German spirit.

The German Spirit

Underpinning the opposition of the littérateurs both to capitalism and parliamentary democracy was an essentially anti-modernist conception of the 'German spirit'. In formulating his critique of this notion Weber adopted a series of sociological arguments very similar to those much more recently and fully elaborated by Norbert Elias in his *Studien über die Deutschen* (1992). Neither author is especially critical of the very idea of a national character, and indeed Weber does not try to deconstruct the notion of a German spirit by showing it to be merely mythical. Rather the question for both authors is 'which historical experiences shape the character or "spirit" of a particular nation and its culture?' Each answers indirectly via another more specific question: 'which social group or stratum "sets the tone" for the entire national culture as that culture emerges in conjunction with the increasing monopolization of violence and administration by the mod-

ern nation state?' This latter question is one about the relationship, the state of play, between social strata or status groups and about the impact of this on both national culture and national politics. In Weber's case, however, much more than in Elias's, this question takes on a political and even party-political significance[10] because, as he argues elsewhere, political parties are the modes of expression of the interests of particular social groups. Since 'nobody wants to be governed by ill-bred parvenus' (Weber 1917: 118), the political question then becomes 'which stratum is fit to rule?' and 'by which party is this stratum represented?' Weber's answer to both parts of the question in the German case is 'none', or rather not that group which currently rules.

The crux of the analysis of the German national character is the assertion that in the absence of an aristocracy 'of adequate breadth and political tradition' (Weber 1917: 119) the cultural and political vacuum is filled by groups whose ethics are shaped by the rigid values of the *Burschenschaften* or *schlagende Verbindungen* (student fraternities) and officer corps.[11] Right of entry and membership of such a society is governed by a single but absolute criterion, namely whether an individual is *satisfaktionsfähig* (entitled to give satisfaction in a duel). The values of such a society are incapable of democratization and modernization. *Satisfaktionsfähigkeit* is inherently exclusive. Weber contrasts this with both English-speaking and with Latin countries whose dominant culture is no less influenced by elites, but where the values of these elites are at least in principle capable of democratization and general dissemination throughout the population via the mechanism of class imitation:

> The forms of governing the behaviour of people in the Latin countries, right down to the lowest strata, are produced by imitating the '*gesture of a cavalier*' as this evolved from the sixteenth century onwards. The conventions of the English-speaking countries, which also shape the behaviour of society down to the lowest stratum, derive from the social habits of that section of society which set the tone from the seventeenth century onwards, a stratum which developed in the late Middle Ages

10.　This difference illustrates the validity of Beetham's observation that it was 'a characteristic of Weber's approach, that issues which others regarded as social became for him essentially political' (1974: 17). This is the point that the Nietzsche/Foucault reading tends to overlook.

11.　Weber's identification of the *Burschenschaften* as the natural milieu of *völkisch* nationalism has contemporary relevance. Political analysts of the far right in Austria and southern Germany have recently commented on the continuing role of the *Burschenschaften* as the spiritual home of and informal network for rightwing political actors. See Gessenharter 2000.

from a peculiar mixture of rural and urban bourgeois notables—'gentle-men' who were the bearers of 'self-government' (1917: 121).

Whether or not this is a historically accurate picture is not relevant here. What is important is the conclusion that Weber draws from it: only the values of the bourgeoisie are suitable to a modern society because only these are sufficiently individualistic and democratic. Anyone can become bourgeois given the right breaks, but even the right breaks can never make you *satisfaktionsfähig*.[12] But the culture of the officer corps and of the 'colour students' has another fatal weakness. It lacks that quality to which I have already referred and which Weber clearly thinks appropriate to modern conditions; it is not *weltmännisch*: 'they certainly do *not* train the individual to be a *man of the world*; in fact the result produced by their undeniably banal, undergraduate atmosphere and their subaltern social forms is the very opposite' (1917: 117). Like Arthur Schnitzler in his monologue 'Lieutenant Gustl', Weber portrays the ethic of the student/officer class as simply out of step with modern times and caught up in a fantasy of honour and a fetishized (but ultimately bogus) code of conduct.

So German culture too needs to be modernized. Any new German spirit has to be based not on the pseudo-aristocratic values of the officer class, but on bourgeois individualism and egalitarianism: 'the Germans are a *plebeian people*—or, if people prefer the term, a bourgeois (*bürgerlich*) people, and this is the only basis on which a specifically "German form" could grow' (Weber 1917: 121).

Summary

Weber offers pretty much unqualified, though highly instrumental, support for both capitalism and parliamentary democracy in the late political writings. The war context is clearly vital here. The sociologist of duty was not going to forget his as one of the 'fighters on the home front' towards German soldiers in the trenches. But there are two more general grounds for his attitude towards capitalism and democracy: first, the quite conventional, though by no means uncontentious,[13] proposition that capitalism and formal democracy are

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12. The full significance of this is brilliantly illustrated in John Osborne's play *A Patriot for Me* and in Istvan Szabo's 1981 film *Colonel Redl*. Both play and film are based on an historical incident. The world that Weber is describing is vividly brought to life in Joseph Roth's novel *Radetzky March*.

13. For a recent critique of the assumption that capitalism presupposes democracy, see Benjamin Barber (1996).

linked by something stronger than mere historical contingency; secondly, he sees them as complementary revolutionary energies through which the dead-hand of tradition can be lifted and those conservative social forces which ally themselves with it broken. Weber is no less a backer of modernizing revolutions than is Marx, but his revolutionaries sit in company offices or stand on the floor of the stock exchange.[14] He was thus a bourgeois ideologist in a stricter sense than that phrase is generally deployed; a 'representative bourgeois' to use Beetham's apt term (1974: 240). He shares the bourgeois ambitions for modernization in the economic, political *and* cultural spheres, and the content of that modernization reflects bourgeois values. These proposed 'three modernizations' can be summed up as follows:

Weber's 'Three Modernizations'

Economic	Political	Cultural
Continuing rationalization and intensification of production.	Adoption of standard features of representative democracy: sovereign parliaments with budgetary control, party competition, parliamentary answerability of officials, regular elections, constitutional monarchy (or plebiscitary presidency).	Victory of bourgeois values, virtues and ethics: individualism, political egalitarianism, vocationalism, professionalism, parsimony, application and efficiency.

In simply listing Weber's proposals like this it becomes clear that these are not 'three modernizations' at all, but one: the application of the closely interwoven bourgeois virtues of functionality, efficiency and economy (the single German word *tüchtig*, much used by Weber, covers all of them)[15] to these spheres of social activity and life. Not

14. Wolin identifies a similar motivation behind *The Protestant Ethic*: 'Weber wanted not only to counter the Marxist explanation of the origins of capitalism, but to celebrate the moral and political superiority of the capitalist hero of the past over the proletarian hero of the present and future' (1981: 412). Though it is clear that for Weber the capitalist can be the hero of the present and future too.

15. *Tüchtigkeit*, as opposed to mere *Fleiss* (diligence, industry), also plays an important role in Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethic where he argues that it is not *hard work* that God demands, but *effective work* in a calling. The early 1990s British Telecom ad campaign slogan 'Work smarter, not harder!' nicely captures this difference between *Tüchtigkeit* and *Fleiss*, and might be viewed as a contempo-

just economic production, but also politics and culture are to be judged by a common standard: their *Tüchtigkeit*. It is also important to note the degree of interdependence of these modernizing strategies, the adoption of any one of which can be a means to the modernization of any of the others. For example, cultural modernization can act as a strategy of political and economic modernization, but equally political and economic modernization will impact on culture. This interpretation of Weber not as pessimistic or tragic theorist of modernity, but as a campaigner on its behalf casts the more familiar aspects of his analysis of power and politics in a difference light. In effect he transforms general 'sociological' dilemmas into potentially resolvable problems of practical politics and institutional design. It is to this that I now turn.

Bureaucratic Domination as a Problem of Institutional Design

> In a modern state real *rule*, which becomes effective in everyday life neither through parliamentary speeches nor through the pronouncements of monarchs but through the day-to-day *management of the administration*, necessarily and inevitably lies in the hands of *officialdom*, both military and civilian (Weber 1918a: 145).

This single tightly packed sentence contains the core ideas that inform Weber's analysis of modern politics. It focuses attention on the issue of rule (*Herrschaft*), on the way in which it becomes effective ('*sich…im Alltagsleben auswirkt'*, Weber 1921: 320), and on its location within specific institutions and in the hands of specific types of actors. Rule is exercised via the routine management or operation of the administration (*Handhabung der Verwaltung*) and, consequently, is exercised by officialdom and its agents are officials. But two further points should be noted about this sentence: first, Weber refers to 'real rule', presumably as opposed to the mere appearance of rule enjoyed by modern monarchs and parliaments; secondly, rule lies *necessarily* and *inevitably* in the hands of officialdom. The first of these points is the familiar and highly contemporary thought that parliaments are mere talking shops (and monarchy increasingly ceremonial), but the second contains an odd and important claim. Weber is not suggesting that it is a contingent empirical fact about modern society that rule happens to be embedded in administration and exercised by officials, but rather that this is part of the constitution of modernity. A modern society in which

rary and somewhat livelier expression of the values Weber claimed to find in all those rather sober Protestant maxims. *Tüchtig* is related to *taugen*, fit for its purpose.

rule is not exercised via the day-to-day operation of administration is unthinkable.

It is not difficult to see the appeal of this to us, influenced as we now are by the shifts in emphasis of political sociology brought about in part through the influence of Foucault. Whereas Weber talks elsewhere about the formation of the nation state as a process of the *concentration* of power—of the means of coercion—in the hands of a single institution, here he is talking about its *diffusion* throughout social networks and relationships. While the former has set the agenda for much of political sociology, the latter seems to prefigure Foucauldian notions of capillary power as constitutive of social relations, and thus to subvert the lines of demarcation between state and society robbing political sociology and political science of a clear and distinct object of investigation, and perhaps also undermining Weber's own definition of power in terms of agents' *will*.

The question that this assertion of a *necessary* connection between modern society and bureaucratic domination raises is not so much '*what* is the state?' as '*where* is the state?' And the answer appears to be everywhere, and nowhere. This creates a tension in Weber's political analysis which he never successfully resolves. On the one hand, he seeks (not least against Marx) to identify the *specificity* of the state and the uniqueness of its source of influence, on the other hand the analysis of bureaucratic domination ascribes an omnipresence to the state which threatens to undermine his efforts to identify it as a separate body and to maintain a distinction between the social and the political. While Weber managed to keep a precarious balance between these positions, his work has subsequently created two mutually exclusive research programmes. In one direction we have political science emerging as the analysis of political institutions and processes and of political sociology as an account of processes of state formation, in the other direction we find the collapsing of the categories of the social and the political of a kind that can be found in some of the more extreme formulations of elite theory and in Carl Schmitt's work, and which have re-emerged through the work and influence of Michel Foucault.

Against an interpretation which overemphasizes the latter, I want to argue that if we relocate these observations on the ubiquity of bureaucratic domination in their political context, there are grounds for hesitation in reading Weber through the wrong end of a Foucauldian telescope. Specifically, I want to argue that Weber's concern is with quite conventional questions of *institutional design*. There are two points to note here. First, as suggested already, there is no con-

ception of a premodern freedom or solidarity which is threatened by
bureaucratic domination and after which Weber hankers in the man-
ner of *altkonservativ* writers like Adam Müller. The problem is rather
one of a clash between two *modern* values: technical efficiency and
individualism. These are the two pillars on which modern society rests
for Weber, but they are not compatible. Individualism alone would
give whim and whimsy the upper hand and destroy the stability of
the social environment and level of predictability on which rational
capitalism above all rests. But equally, technical efficiency threatens to
destroy any individuality making political leadership impossible and
rendering 'society' rudderless. Secondly, it follows for Weber that the
challenge then is to design institutions in which these two necessary
but mutually incompatible principles are held in check or in which
they can be yoked in tandem to pull in a common direction.

The assumption that social and political dilemmas can be addressed
through institutional design has itself been criticized for its naiveté
(see Putnam 1993). But Weber's view is rather cautious. Good institu-
tional design is a necessary but not sufficient condition for producing
desirable effects: 'technical changes in the running of the state do not
in themselves make a nation vigorous (*tüchtig*), nor happy (*glücklich*),
nor valuable (*wertvoll*). They can only clear away mechanical obstacles
in its path' (1918a: 134). Since 'a modern mass state has only a re-
stricted, not an infinite, number of possible forms to choose from'
(1918a: 133) the task is to select that form which, though it cannot
guarantee the end, can at least maximize our chances of achieving it.
How this is to work can best be seen in Weber's analysis of the crisis
in German political life around 1918. This crisis was not merely one of
a war lost but has its roots in German political culture and in its nine-
teenth-century political heritage.

Weber makes the case for institutional reform via a critique of the
main alternative 'solution' to political malaise: strong leadership. A
'new Bismarck' is not a potential solution to political crisis, and the
hope for such a thing is itself one of its symptoms. Although fulsome
in his praise of Bismarck's political skills and intelligence, Weber
argues that Caesarist leadership—everywhere the hope of the right in
conditions of crisis—is in fact an obstacle to finding effective institu-
tional arrangements. Not only is the emergence of a Caesarist leader a
matter of good, or indeed bad, luck, but even where such a figure
takes centre stage short-term benefit will be paid for with long-term
damage to political institutions and political culture. In the case of
Bismarck, 'his rule led the nation to lose the habit of sharing responsi-
bility', left behind 'a nation *entirely without political will*' and 'accus-

tomed to *submit passively*' (1918a: 144).[16] While Caesarist leadership can provide a solution of a kind to the problems of bureaucratic power, that solution is too closely tied to the person of the leader and entirely dependant upon his or her personal qualities. In the longer-term Caesarism will reinforce the tendency towards *Beamtenherrschaft*: 'ever since Bismarck's resignation, Germany has been governed by men who were "officials" (in mentality) because Bismarck had excluded all other political minds besides his own' (1918a: 161). Like charismatic leadership which becomes routinized, the qualities of Caesarism cannot easily be transferred from the person of the leader to institutions. It is ephemeral. So it is not to the leader we should look for the solution, but to institutions themselves and to their reform.

Here again, Weber's preferred solution is the modernization of German politics through the adoption of now standard features of representative democracy: parliaments, party competition, a quasi-plebiscitary system of elections and ambitious politicians competing for power and personal glory. He is in fact very explicit about this project of bringing German institutions into line with those of other nations on the basis of the latter's objective superiority: 'only someone with a regrettable lack of faith in the independence and strength of the German people (*Deutschtum*) could believe that the essential character of the nation would be called into question if we were to share effective institutions for running the state with other nations' (1918a: 133).[17] Thus it is on grounds of efficiency rather than popular participation that Weber recommends parliamentary democracy. What distinguishes his liberalism from that of many other liberals is that democracy is viewed as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. As has often been observed, notions of democratic participation and will formation are largely absent from this defence of representative democracy. This is in part due to Weber's nationalism and in part because of his view that 'the masses'—whom he acknowledges somewhat begrudgingly as

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16. These remarks on Bismarck indicate that David Beetham may have been wrong in suggesting that 'no more archetypical example of the plebiscitary leader of Weberian hue exists today than Margaret Thatcher' (1989: 323). In characterising her effect as the creation of 'abject servility on the part of her closest supporters', Beetham in fact echoes Weber's critique of Caesarism. Thus, should we wish to flatter Margaret Thatcher in this manner, then the comparison would have to be with Caesarist rather than plebiscitary leadership.

17. An example is Weber's advocacy of an (American-style?) plebiscitary presidency for Germany (Weber 1919b). This proposal lends weight to the view that Weber's affection for parliamentarianism weakened and his liking for strong leadership strengthen post-war—i.e. to the view I am criticizing here.

also 'with us' (1917: 113)—are incapable of democratic participation beyond acclamatory and negative politics. This view of the masses as 'unable to think beyond the day after tomorrow' does indeed take Weber close to Carl Schmitt for whom '*das Volk* itself cannot discuss …it can only acclaim, vote, and say yea or nay to questions put to it' (Schmitt 1965: 315), but not so close as to oppose modern representative institutions (see Baehr 1990; Bellamy 1992: 211-14). It does however lead Weber to seek instrumental rather than valuerational grounds for justifying modern democracy (and indeed capitalism).

The efficiency of democratic institutional arrangements is measured against their ability to redress two key political effects of bureaucratic domination: (1) the reduction of politics to the competition of material interests, which allows bureaucracy to maintain its power merely by playing one interest off against another; (2) the refusal of officials, or those 'politicians' with the mentality of officials, to take *personal* responsibility for their actions. True politicians in their struggle for personal power have only a fickle loyalty towards material interests (they will support almost anything which furthers their cause and their careers), but on the other hand they are also willing to be held personally accountable: 'the *struggle* for personal power and the acceptance of full *personal responsibility for one's cause* (*Sache*) which is the consequence of such power—this is the very element in which the politician and the entrepreneur live and breathe' (Weber 1918a: 161). So it is not the exceptional leader ('father of the nation' types) in whom we should place our faith, but in everyday politicians with venial interests: 'What we lacked was *leadership* of the state by a *politician*, which does not mean a political genius (they can only be expected every few centuries), nor even an important political talent, but simply by anyone who is a politician *at all*' (1918a: 162).

Parliamentary democracy is the most effective means of putting in place those conditions which best facilitate the emergence of such political figures and the constitutional and practical preconditions—crucially the control of budgets—through which they can become effective as a force against civil service administration. But it also creates less formal preconditions for the emergence of political leaders: parliaments act as a schooling for politicians and as a mechanism of their selection (*Führerauslese*). Once more it the parallel between representative democracy and capitalist enterprise which is the key. Both the entrepreneur and the politician operate in a competitive market, and it is this fact of permanent competition and struggle which hones the skills of each. The operation of parliament also teaches that central political skill: the art of compromise. Again Weber's analyses of demo-

cratic politics and of capitalism are ineluctable entwined, and his support for the one entails support for the other.

Weber's analysis draws him into quite detailed questions of constitutional design in which such issues as the answerability of officials to parliamentary committees, the right of parliament rather than officials to set goals and targets, the constitutional role of the monarch (later of the President of the Reich), and the control of budgets become important. There is no need to follow him into this area. I think enough has been said to establish my central contention: the analysis of bureaucratic domination should not be read as part of either a proto-Schmittian political decisionism or a proto-Foucaudian theory of the administration of social relations. The latter is certainly Weber's *fear*, as is clear for example from his scattered critical observations on the state-provision of welfare, but bureaucratic domination is also a problem for practical politics which can potentially be addressed by institutional, constitutional and political means. In contrast to the take on Weber by the first generation of Critical Theorists, the *total administration* of society is not our unavoidable fate, merely the challenge we face. While bureaucratic domination will, indeed should, be a feature of modern society, properly designed political institutions can act as a counterweight.

Although Turner and Factor (1994) have convincingly argued that much of Weber's originality lies in his translation of legal concepts into social scientific ones, he is neither strictly a constitutional theorist nor a political scientist in the contemporary sense. If there is an answer or counterweight to bureaucratic domination then it cannot be merely institutional. He is thus not vulnerable to Robert Putnam's criticism of institutional designers that they fail to take into account the surrounding social and cultural context which codetermines the success or failure of even well-designed institutions (Putnam 1993). In addition to the formal balance between individualism and bureaucratic domination which well-designed political institutions *can* facilitate, broader informal balances also have to be in place. These informal balances involve not the constitution of the *state*, but of the *economy* and of *society*. In this respect Weber remains a sociologist even as he analyses Germany's political malaise. Yet again it is the relationship between the state and the market which is crucial.

While Weber recognizes the dependence of capitalism on administration, legal regulation and parameters established and maintained by the state—and is thus not a forerunner of neo-liberalism however close his friendship to Ludwig von Mises (see Scott 1996)—he nevertheless believes that the continued presence of private enterprises

(firms) can act as an effective check on the encroachment of bureaucratic domination into all areas of social life. The much-discussed pessimism re-enters the analysis with the thought, later elaborated by Schumpeter (1943), that capitalism itself will succumb to bureaucracy. Weber offers a number of familiar explanations for this possible scenario. First, modern capitalism shares the *zweckrational* orientation of modern administration. Secondly, capitalist enterprises are themselves emerging as bureaucratic corporations which confront the same dilemmas of effective leadership and direction as do state enterprises. Thirdly, the organization of status groups into interest groups will increasingly distort the workings of the market and thus provide an additional and effective brake on the dynamism of capitalist society (cf. Olson 1982). Fourthly, the growth of social welfare and 'informal law' will vastly increase the power of bureaucratic control in every facet of civil society (see Scheuerman, 1994). But the 'pessimism' is inconsistent. Elsewhere, as for example in the famous essay on socialism (1918b), Weber argues precisely the opposite case: socialization of the means of production would mean that political considerations would become subordinate to the economic rationale of the managers of state enterprises, and thus to the profit principle (see also 1918a). This analysis suggests a view less apocalyptic than his well-known diagnosis of unstoppable 'Egyptianization', but also one which is more consistent with the intentions behind the political writing. It suggests an extension of the notion of an informal balance of powers in which there is an imaginable possible modern world where the command imperative of politics and the profit imperative of the market hold each other in, in effect, stalemate. But 'stalemate' here is not an unsatisfactory end point of the game, but a constructive state in which neither the political nor the economic imperative gains the upper hand. This would be a world in which there is neither a total anarchy of production nor total regulation of life. It would, of course, be quite reasonable to be pessimistic about the likelihood of such a positive sum game being ever set up, let alone sustained for any period, and it is relatively easy to imagine Weber wishing to avoid naive optimism on this point. Nevertheless, this hope for a balance between market and state is there in Weber as a potential condition of the possibility for good institutional design to be effective as well as merely 'good'.

Conclusion

The late political writings do not seem to offer much support for two of the most oft-quoted judgements on Weber either as a political

thinker—that he was a 'liberal in despair' (Mommsen 1974: 95)—or as a sociologist—that 'where Marx offered a therapy, Weber offered only a diagnosis' (Löwith 1982: 162). There is therapy in Weber, but it is symptoms-oriented rather that systemic; pragmatic rather than utopian. To offer therapy at all suggests something other than despair (though despair can of course reappear in the form of doubt that the addressees of one's therapy are in any condition to benefit from or even capable of adopting it). This therapy consists in harnessing capitalism and modern representative democracy for the sake of the one absolute value which underlies the whole analysis: the nation. Weber's support for *both* parliamentary democracy *and* capitalism is instrumental; they are the means for creating a nation which is *tüchtig, glücklich* and *wertvoll*. But I want to finish on a rather speculative note concerning Weber in *his* context.

I have been arguing against a common view of Weber as the theorist of cultural pessimism. In opposition to such a view, I have presented him as a supporter of political, economic and cultural modernization. But modernization—like related terms such as 'new' and 'modern'—is an empty box. Modernization is at least a contested concept, and perhaps essentially so. It is also a term of propaganda: my modernity, your complacency. What is in the box? What does the modernization of German politics, economics and culture really amount to? Where could the model of a *modern* society be found circa 1918? I have also argued that modernization means Westernization for Weber; the modelling of German institutions on those of other western nations. But perhaps it means something more specific. Following the suggestion of American scholars (e.g. Diggins 1996; Scaff 1998),[18] perhaps it means above all Americanization. Dvořák composed the American Quartet and the New World Symphony in 1893. The modernistic opening of Bartók's *Miraculous Mandarin* (1919-24) is said to have been inspired by his first glimpses of New York. Jazz was soon to influence the compositions of Alexander von Zemlinsky, Ernst Krenek and even Alban Berg. Kafka never visited the place, but his first novel (published posthumously in 1927) was *Amerika*. By the time of the late political writings, modernity and America, and modernization and Americanization, were coming to be equated by European

18. It should however be noted that Scaff quotes material which suggests that one of the littérateurs may have been Weber himself some thirteen years earlier: 'writing from Indian territory, he noted that the old *"Indianerpoesie"*, the magic and romance of native American life, was threatened by "the most modern" aspect of "capitalist 'culture' "' (Scaff 1998: 78).

artists and intellectuals.[19] So the suggestion is simply this: rather than reading Weber as a critic of German culture and politics at the one extreme, or as a theorist of a general deterritorialized modernity at the other, there is a middle position locating him in a context in which European intellectuals were coming to terms with America in an effort to shake loose their own historical baggage whether cultural, in the case of artists, or political, in the case of Weber. Think for example of how closely Weber's recipe for Germany— a modernizing mix of a hardworking, efficient and successful economy on the one hand and a modern parliamentary system on the other—resembles that actually adopted by *West* Germany under Konrad Adenauer in the 1950s; a system put in place by the Allied Occupying Powers under American leadership. To borrow a formulation beloved of sociologists of knowledge, 'it may be no coincidence that' Weber was reappropriated in the 1940s and 1950s as a theorist of modernization by American sociology. If my suggestion is correct, theirs is a somewhat unfashionable interpretation which we may need again to take seriously. There may be something stronger than an elective affinity (*Wahlverwandtschaft*) between Weber and American modernization theorists, namely a 'soul affinity' (*Seelenverwandtschaft*). He too may have been working with a conception of modernization and modernity for which America was emerging as the implicit and at times the explicit paradigm.

It is at least an interesting thought experiment to consider the extent to which Weber's more sociological writings can likewise be interpreted as an intellectual appropriation of the meaning of America. It is not just that so many of the maxims quoted in *The Protestant Ethic* are from Americans (including founding figures like Benjamin Franklin), but even the early empirical work on agricultural labour was concerned with those who, whether out of volition or force of circumstance, fled the land in search of the city's freeing air. Not all of these people stayed in Berlin, Budapest, Warsaw or Vienna. Many went on to New York and Chicago. America was not only the most obvious case of a modern society created by immigrants, it was also the one created under Protestant hegemony. If modernity here equals *Landflucht* (flight from the land) + capitalism + Protestantism + democracy + individualism, it would perhaps not be so surprising to catch this equation under a simpler formula: modernity = America. But we do not have to go along very far with this thought experiment

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19. For a spirited, entertaining, and polemical discussion of the American origins of the notion of modernity, see Woodiwiss 1997.

to recognize a potential problem for Weber's political *and* sociological analysis. If he is equating modern society with America, then it would follow that there is at least one further implicit equation at work as well: capitalism = American capitalism. This is the point on which a Weberian and a Durkheimian understanding of capitalism diverge, and where those who have not learnt their 'sociological ABC' may yet reap their revenge.

Acknowledgments

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