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Contents

List of Contributors 5-6

Editorial
Sam Whimster 7-10

Weber as a Reader of Rudolph Sohm, and the Incomplete Concept of ‘Office Charisma’
Jean-Philippe Heurtin 11-42

Max Weber on the Market’s Impersonality and Ethic
Virgil Henry Storr and Solomon Stein 43-63

Work and Personality in Flexible Capitalism
Vincenzo Mele 64-87

Max Weber and the Idea of Progress
John Torpey 88-105

Weber’s Critical Evaluation of Tarde: An Assessment
Sandro Segre 106-115

Book Reviews 116-134
Kari Palonen, A Political Style of Thinking: Essay on Max Weber
Peter Breiner

Keith Tribe

Thomas C. Ertman (ed.), Max Weber’s Economic Ethic of the World Religions
Andreas Buss

Notes for Contributors 135
List of Contributors

Jean-Philippe Heurtin is Professor of Political Science at the University of Strasbourg. After having worked on the sociology of political institutions (cf. his book *L’espace public parlementaire: Essais sur les raisons du législateur* [Presses Universitaires de France, 1999]), he focused on the sociology of social and political mobilization. One result of this research is the book devoted to the Telethon that he published in 2016 with Dominique Cardon, *Chorégraphier la solidarité: Le Téléthon, le don, la critique* (Economica, 2016). He is also engaged in research on sociological theory. In this field, among his publications are *La sociologie du droit de Max Weber* (Dalloz-Sirey, 2006) and *Habitus, habitudes, attitudes: Sur les concepts dispositionnels en sciences sociales* (forthcoming).

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**John Torpey** is Presidential Professor of Sociology and History at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, and Director of its Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies. He is the author or editor of many books, including *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 2018) and *The Three Axial Ages: Moral, Material, Mental* (Rutgers University Press, 2017).
All the articles in this issue of the journal question the delineation of a number of Weber’s ideal types—of office charisma, market impersonality, the salience of the Berufsmensch, the effect of science and technology, and the stability of social action—and offer variants and different interpretations.

We can start by asking what are the validity criteria of an ideal type. We know they are intellectual constructions but they are not spun out of thin air. They belong to a mental, Popperian third world but what are the referents that would satisfy criteria of validity? I asked this question when writing about patrimonialism (in MWS 18.2) in relation to early Indic kingdoms. Theoretically, for Weber, patrimonial structures stem from patriarchal situations. Anthropologists and historians treat kinship networks, acknowledging the role of a person who exercises a degree of power, in a wide variety of ways. Patriarchalism, by comparison, is a fairly blunt catch-all, and the transition to patrimonialism remains problematic. If the validity referent is to be made to the empirical, then, perhaps, a validity criterion would be the existence of some form of patrimony. Without some ascertainment of patrimony (however defined) the patrimonial ideal type cannot be deployed; it would be judged as invalid.

Readers of MWS 18.2 will have noted the appearance of Sheldon Pollock’s Sanskrit cosmopolis thesis (in his The Language of the Gods in the World of Men). The hinduization of upstart kingdoms makes sense within a patrimonial typification of rulership. But for Pollock this completely misconstrues the situation, because what we should be grasping is the poetics and aesthetics of Sanskrit as it diffused across south and south-east Asia. The referent here is cultural validity.

For academic social research, validity (along with reliability) has been reasonably well operationalised. The same cannot be said for the Weberian approach and anyone using the method of the ideal type will at some point be confronted with the question of validity, not to say tripped up by it. The issue invites further work.
In their article Virgil Henry Storr and Solomon Stein write: ‘the inconsistency between Weber’s account of the impersonal nature of the ideal-typical market relationships and his use of an alternate ideal type when in his applied sociology and history (even within Economy and Society) has not been highlighted’. There are many situations in which impersonality in markets is ‘compromised’ by substantive human values. How then to handle the many variants and are they to be classified as outliers? Storr and Stein also point out that the textual status of the much-quoted and much-used passage on market impersonality is a five page fragment and is titled as such in the Roth and Wittich edition of Economy and Society. They confront the issue as follows:

‘In judging the value of any particular formulation of an ideal type, the basis for evaluation is the usefulness of that typification for rendering meaningful aspects of concrete historical cases in which the phenomenon is present.’ We can apprehend a theoretical logic in Weber’s ideal type, which has the same sociological directionality of Karl Marx’s ‘all that is solid melts into air’. Impersonal and calculative attitudes towards market exchanges have economic logics: they can steer economy away from status determinants as well as setting up monopolistic capture. The impersonality ideal type gives a theoretical dividend yet it also blocks out positions that proceed from the social potential of reciprocal interaction present in market exchanges, which are made explicit by early marginalist theorists—something acknowledged by Weber.

Jean-Philippe Heurtin examines the line of theoretical development Weber took in the contrasting of personal and office charisma. Weber follows Rudolf Sohm who was emphatic that divine grace and institutional life were incompatible. This was part of a debate within Lutheran theology. A different position was stipulated by Adolf von Harnack who argued that divine spirit is present in both the leader and the organization of Christian ecclesia, whether early or later. The Catholic development of Sohm’s argument attributed the handing on of a pneumatic spirit through the processes of election and ordination. These possibilities are ruled out in the Weber ideal type, though there remain, Heurtin argues, an element of charismatic election in the appointment of bureaucratic leaders. Office charisma therefore is not impersonal; moreover, bureaucratic rationality is bounded. We also have outliers in the charisma model, such as the under-investigated lineage charisma.

Vincenzo Mele counterposes Simmel’s concept of ‘universal man’ deriving identities of individuality from the overlapping circles of
modern living and work with Weber’s professional man and woman, the *Berufsmensch*. The modern mensch, for both Simmel and Weber, is a theoretical construction. Weber’s professional man, who is joined throughout the 20th century by the professional woman, is an ideal typical person formed and determined by the historically very peculiar notion that salvation in another world is to be found in and through work in this world. For the ancient Greeks, to work—farmers and slaves—was to be disqualified from the political life of the city. Yet, as Mele notes, professional occupation is the source of selfhood and political citizenship in the modern West.

*Berufsmensch* is one of the most important and consistent concepts in Weber’s oeuvre. It explains how the modern world functions, and it is the comparator for other civilizations, most of which found, or would have found had they been able to compare, the whole idea ridiculous. As Peter Ghosh has demonstrated in the recently appeared *Oxford Handbook of Max Weber* a professional ethic or an economic ethic as a built-in disposition of the professional displaces more universal notions of religious morality. Of markets, as noted by Storr and Stein, they function and develop through a merchant ethic that best abides by good faith and fair play. Talcott Parson made the gestalt of the professional the explanatory core of how modern society and organizations functioned. However, in the many arguments Mele adduces, this momentous ideal typical person is currently under threat of extinction. The *Berufsmensch* was never public man, but his fall is and will be equally calamitous.

John Torpey challenges Weber’s depiction of the peasant dying sated and satisfied with the course of his life when compared to the modern professional and intellectual who can never be satisfied by his or her achievements. Although Weber was averse to the concept of progress, he would seem to discount the possibilities that science and technology have opened up to populations across the globe. Weber came up with the example of the Abrahamic peasant in his lecture *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (where Torpey elects for ‘scholarship’ as the translation of ‘Wissenschaft’). Weber was speaking directly to students—no doubt depressing them profoundly—so his pessimism was in part rhetorical. However the point of reference once again is the ideal-typical construction of ‘the professional’ the students, perhaps, aspired to become.

Sandro Segre conducts a comparison of the place of imitation in social behaviour as argued for by Gabriel Tarde and acknowledged by Weber (in chapter 1 of *Economy and Society*). With Weber there are
(just!) social action ideal types and the durability of social norms is a subsidiary concern. In his sociology Tarde searches out the social glue of society. It has a morality which is expressed through the capacities of sociability and sympathy, which in their turn are enabled through a wide range of imitative behaviours.

Peter Breiner reviews a welcome collection of Kari Palonen’s many articles on Weber’s theory of politics. The overlooked importance of Chancen, a word that Weber uses consistently when writing about the openness and contingency of outcomes is well underlined by Palonen. Politics is not linear, and writing (this editorial) in early 2019 in the United Kingdom one cannot fail to observe that politics is a matter of leadership, and parliamentary debate and rhetoric conducted within rules of fair play, topics that Palonen has long held to be crucial, along with the importance of the professional politician.

The Max Weber Gesamtausgabe continues to publish Weber’s lectures which, as the reviewer Keith Tribe notes, curiously have survived when most of the manuscripts of his published works have not. The lecture course, four hours a week given twice in the 1890s, was on finance and the history of finance treated extensively. Its importance for Tribe is that: ‘Besides impressing upon us very forcefully the sheer range and depth of Weber’s knowledge, and his stupendous intellectual energy, these lecture notes present us with more or less the only perspective we now have on his working methods: the way in which he gave shape to new subjects, how he borrowed from his contemporaries, but then forcefully revised what he borrowed.’

Lastly Andreas Buss reviews an ambitious collection of essays revisiting Weber’s comparative studies on the economic ethics of the world religions. This is a welcome addition to an ongoing assessment of Weber’s civilizational comparisons. The theoretical purpose of Weber’s writings in this field are hard to grasp in the Anglophone world, since there is no translation entity equivalent to Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen, and as Hartmann Tyrell observes this was itself a torso within the ‘Collected Essay on the Sociology of Religion’. Specialist sinologists and indologists are still, understandably, wrong-footed by Weber’s aims. His studies read as histories and, as such, are criticised in light of present knowledge; whereas—arguably—the Berufsmensch ideal type is being used as a pivot to deepen our understanding of the world as it has developed to date.

As we work through the centenaries of the studies on Confucianism and Daoism and Hinduism and Buddhism, we should flag up that Ancient Judaism is next for treatment—though nothing yet is advertised in the Weberian community.
Weber as a Reader of Rudolph Sohm, and the Incomplete Concept of ‘Office Charisma’

Jean-Philippe Heurtin

Abstract
The purpose of this article is to revisit the concept of ‘office charisma’, as Max Weber introduced it in his Sociology of Religions. Weber’s conceptualization of it seems unfinished, and used only to characterize a form of degeneration of personal charisma, and more precisely, as the form that the charisma takes when it becomes quotidian. The discussion of this hypothesis requires a re-examination of the sources used by Weber, namely Rudolph Sohm’s Kirchenrecht, published in 1892. It was from Sohm that Weber drew the opposite pair of personal charisma and office charisma. Kirchenrecht was published in a Lutheran context, and it seems that Weber, in his interpretation and secularization of the notion of charisma, remained a prisoner of Lutheran precepts; in particular, they prevented him from achieving a genuinely autonomous characterization of ‘office charisma’. But Sohm’s book has also continued to stimulate reflection on the question of charisma among Catholics; it has led them, in particular, to rediscover the pneumatic dimension in their theology of the Church and ministries. The question that arises, then, is whether Catholic theology, and more precisely its ecclesiology, might allow us to think differently about charisma, especially in its relationship to the institution—so that this ecclesiology would be a possible lateral path for the sociology of charisma. How, in the light of this Catholic reflection, could an alternative concept of office charisma be reconstructed?

Keywords: Weber, Charisma, Church-Sect typology, rational-legal legitimacy.
as its inferior sibling but also the refraction of another pair of opposites—sect and Church. The following pages discuss this hypothesis by coming back to the roots of Weber’s conceptualization of charisma. They show that this conceptualization drew heavily on two books by Rudoph Sohm, *Kirchengeschichte im Grundriss* (1887), and especially *Kirchenrecht* (1892).¹ In these two works, the German jurist and theologian developed a theory of the essence of early Christianity that strongly emphasized the spiritual over the institutional. He argued that the original Christian ecclesia was first moved by the personal charisma of a number of teachers—a charisma they owed to the divine grace gifted to them. Yet, as Sohm retraces his critical history of the Catholicization of the Church, he crucially shows that this original spiritual Church progressively became organized and legalized, with autonomous and specialized ecclesial functions and institutionalized charisma. The latter was an absolute oxymoron for Sohm, whose entire body of work as a canonist sought to demonstrate the essential incompatibility between grace and institution.

Weber occasionally followed Sohm’s seminary during his military service in Strasbourg in 1883-1884. His *Jugendbriefe* includes a rather sarcastic description of him: ‘His whole appearance makes, as long as one does not hear him speak, the impression of a religious apostle; after one has heard him speak, he gives a sense of being in the grip of one-track fanatical ideas’ (Weber 1936: 85).² Weber explicitly drew the pair of opposites of personal charisma and office charisma from Sohm. In *Economy and Society*, he names Sohm twice as the source of the concept of charisma: ‘The concept of “charisma” (“the gift of grace”) is taken from the vocabulary of early Christianity. Rudolf Sohm, in his *Kirchenrecht*, was the first to clarify the substance of the concept, even though he did not use the same terminology’ (Weber 1978: 216).³ For Weber, the discovery of charisma was of paramount importance in the construction of the concept of ‘legitime Herrschaft’. This was clearly demonstrated by Edith Hanke. Based on a detailed analysis of the compositional strata of domination theory, she showed that Weber was initially interested only in the way domination works (Hanke 2001: 33). She notes that, referring to the chapters on the sociology of domination in the third part

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1. In this article, I shall also refer to Sohm, 1912 and 1918.
2. It is likely that Weber met R. Sohm again in Friedrich Naumann’s circle and in the *Nationalsozialer Verein*.
of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, the term ‘legitimacy’ does not appear once in the chapter on bureaucracy, and is mentioned only as an incidental reference when Weber discusses the different forms of traditional domination. On the other hand, the question of legitimacy has a considerable place in the chapters devoted to charismatic domination. Hanke thus concluded that ‘charism is the birthplace of the typology of domination itself’ (Hanke 2001: 32), or in other words, of the typology of legitimate domination, as it appears in its later version of Chapter 3.

Retracing the decades-long controversy among German historian and theologians surrounding the work of Sohm lies beyond the scope of this article. Broadly speaking, it should be noted that the controversy over ministries shaped the theological debate throughout the 19th century in Germany. This controversy is, in fact, the ‘general theme’ of a multitude of theological works (Munzert 2016: 107). The later dispute between R. Sohm and A. v. Harnack, in the 1910s, put the central elements of the debate in play, while at the same time defining its terms. It is essentially a debate on the relationship between the essence of the Church, its external form, ecclesiastical law, and ministries. Sohm, as we will see, declares that the Church and ecclesiastical law, and the Church and the canonically regulated ministry are at odds with each other: the nature of the Church is determined by the guidance of the Spirit; only a command directly imposed by the Spirit is possible. Only in this way can a ministry of direction, directly called by the Spirit, be accomplished without being compelled by the observance of legal prescription. There can therefore be no function, no office, in the Church (Sohm 1892). Harnack claims that there have been legal functions and ordinances in the Church from the beginning, without this being contrary to the essence of the Church. On the one hand, he argues that sacred ordinances have been present since the beginning of Christianity:

The transformation of the Jewish church and synagogue into the ecclesia of God burdened and consolidated the Christian community from the beginning and gave it a legislative system. But the conviction that it was the Messianic community of the latter days also led to legislative enactments, for as such it was bound to keep itself pure and holy, which in the last resort could be accomplished only by punishment and excommunication. Finally, it was bound to develop new rules of life, i.e. legislative enactments, because it claimed jurisdiction over the whole of the life and thought of its members, as well as their social relations to one another, and sought to bring everything under a new and fixed order, even as regards their economic relations. […]

Our indications show that one would form a false picture of the conditions prevailing in the community at Jerusalem in the early years if one imagined it as more or less like an association of communistic Quakers. There was, of course, some thing of this, and something, to be sure, of a mild and spiritualized anarchism; but against this there must be set not only the powerful influences of the Jewish ordinances, tending towards the formation of a legal code, but also the ideal, in process of realization of a Messianic kingdom; and further, the prerogative of the “Twelve” and the power of the infallible community (infallible through the guidance of the Spirit). In addition, besides the authority of the Old Testament, there was also the authority of the sayings of the Lord, from which men deduced command upon command (Harnack 1910: 22-23).

On the other hand, ‘functions’ or ‘offices’ were also defined very early on; Harnack identifies them as a dual (or triple) organization: charismatics led the Church as a whole when particular communities were under administrative ministries. This has obviously sparked tensions:

The central organization and the local organization are in perpetual strife with one another, just because each needs the other, and the death of the one must of necessity involve the decay of the other. The whole constitutional history of the Church can be represented with the conflict of these two powers as its framework. There is, secondly, the tension between “Spirit” and office, charisma and legislative regulation, the tension between the inspired men and the officials, those pre-eminent for personal religion on the one hand, and its professional representatives on the other. The former might be spiritual men, prophets, ascetics, monks, even teachers and theologians, and were so named; the latter presbyters, bishops, superintendents, popes. [...] We find, further, a similar tension expressing itself in the opposition between spirit and letter, religious freedom and adherence to a confession of faith. The whole constitutional history of the Church can also be represented with the conflict between spirit and office as its framework. There is finally the tension between laity and clergy, between democracy and aristocracy (monarchy), which, bound up as it is in many ways with the foregoing, yet possesses a special character of its own. As factors in the work of organization which must have been operative from the beginning, we can distinguish (1) the authority of the inspired men as “speaking the word of God,” (apostles, prophets and teachers); (2) the authority of the “old” as opposed to the “young”; (3) the administrative and executive power of elected officials. The first belong to the religious sphere in the strict sense, the second have their function in the field of moral education and discipline, the third in service and administration, and at a very early period also in public worship’ (Harnack 1910: 43-44).
While the two authors agree on the diagnosis of a progressive Catholicization of the church, against the original organisation, which they characterise in similar terms—Sohm speaks of a ‘charismatic organisation’, Harnack of a ‘spiritual organisation’—, they nevertheless disagree on two fundamental points: the first bone of contention, concerning the essence of charisma, is that of its incompatability with legal ordinances and the legal structuring of the ecclesia: this is the central point of Sohm, while Harnack affirms that the ‘office’ of leadership ‘rests on charismata; but in the proper sense, i.e. as persons, only the preachers of the word are borne by the Spirit. The others are brethren who have received the gift necessary to enable them to render their services’ (Harnack 1910: 44). The second bone of contention is historical, and would have a crucial importance in Weber’s conceptualization of the routinization of charisma: while Sohm perceives the Catholicization of the early church as reflected in the gradual substitution of office by charisma, Harnack describes the historical concomitance of ‘official’ leadership functions that remain charismatic.

However, it should be noted that this is an internal debate in German Lutheran Protestantism. The hypothesis examined in this article is that Weber’s interpretation and secularization of the concept of charisma remained, indeed, bound by the Lutheran terms of the controversy. Curiously, few researchers and Weber scholars have attempted to shed light on this reference or delve into its implications. Yet, here, I would like to highlight that the way in which Weber inherited the idea of charisma from Sohm in fact conveyed a number of essential characteristics to the concept of charismatic domination: the personal character of the charismatic qualification, its authoritarian and fundamentally anti-legal dimension, its fundamentally ‘extraordinary’ character and, as a result, its instability, always and inevitably subjected to a form of routinization (Kroll 2001; Munzert 2016). That being said, the following pages are not devoted to an exegesis of charismatic domination, but to the analysis of the consequences of this origin in the formation of the concept of charisma, its boundaries as well as its limitations. In so doing, I will strive to show that Weber’s inheritance of the notion of charisma from Sohm allowed him to perceive only one aspect of charismatic

processes. In particular, it prevented Weber from fully elaborating on ‘office charisma’—an idea he again borrowed from Sohm—in his *Sociology of Religion*: by constructing the technical concept of charisma, Weber somehow chose, among the different kinds of charisma, one in particular that he made the pure type—in doing so, the other kinds of charisma could only appear as degraded forms. However, Sohm’s output has also been a constant source of inspiration for Catholics reflecting on the question of charisma, leading them especially to rediscover the pneumatic dimension in the theology of their Church and liturgy. This raises the question of whether Catholic theology, and more precisely its ecclesiology, might allow us to gain new insights into charisma, particularly regarding its relationship to the institution and to the law, its duration and its vulnerability to routinization. Catholic ecclesiology seems likely to open a possible lateral path for the sociology of charisma, and for the sociology of charismatic authority.5 This article thus investigates the impact of Catholic thinking on the links between Spirit and institution have had on the Weberian sociology of charisma, and how we can use these insights to reconstruct the concept of office charisma.

The pneumatic essence of the Church

Rudolph Sohm and the critique of the Church’s institutionalization

If we take seriously the idea that Weber’s concept of charisma is rooted in his reading of Rudolph Sohm, we need to begin by going back to the latter’s work as a canonist.6 His is not a strictly historical analysis; at the core of his argument lies a theological approach to the essence of the Church. Sohm viewed the Church as an essentially spiritual reality that cannot adequately fit within worldly institutions. As he puts it in the first page of the *Kirchenrecht*: ‘The essence of the Church is spiritual […]. The Church wants to be governed by the rule of the divine spirit’ (Sohm 1892: 1). In this sense, the Church

5. The concept of office charisma does not solve all the problems raised by the Weberian conceptualization of charismatic *Herrschaft*. This is particularly true of lineage or hereditary charisma—especially of Indian princes. This is a routinized and hereditary charisma, but it probably has little to do with office charisma. I will therefore leave aside this matter, as it goes beyond the limited purpose of this article. On lineage charisma, see a clear detailed commentary in Kalinowski 2016. For a critique of the Weberian approach to this lineage charisma, cf. Friedrich 1961.

6. Sohm’s large body of work was not limited to canon law. He remained first and foremost a Romanist and a historian of Germanic laws.
is invisible—or only visible through worship—and does not belong to the world: ‘The Church in early Christianity was visible Christianity, not an “ecclesial” community organized according to human nature, but the Church in the religious sense, the Church of Christ, the body of Christ, through which it is not Christianity as a corporative organization, but Christ himself, without mediation, who acts, lives and rules over the earth […]. Thus, the Church in early Christianity is visible Christianity as the people of God, ruled by the Spirit of God’ (Sohm 1892: 536-37).’

In practice, the Church becomes reality when believers come together. According to Matthew (18:20), ‘where two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, there is the people of Christ, the New Testament of Israel; there is the whole of Christendom with all the promises made to it, for Christ is in the midst of all things. Where Christ is, there is the Ekklesia (the people of God)’ (1892: 20) ‘The Church, the people of God, signifies a spiritual people; the kingdom which is established in the Church is a spiritual kingdom; Christendom forms not a state nor a political union, but a spiritual power’ (Sohm 1887: 27; 1958: 34). Drawing on Paul, and in particular on his Epistle to the Corinthians, Sohm believed what makes the Church is the Spirit, which is manifested in gifts: ‘God, that is, Christ, rules and binds together all the members of Christendom solely through the gifts of grace (charismata) given by Him’ (Sohm 1887: 26; 1958: 33). Strictly speaking, what binds these individuals together is the recognition of God’s intervention in others’ charisma.

The community surrenders itself to charisma in love, but this obedience is somehow impersonal: one obeys the word of God, recognized in whoever conveys it. ‘God’s people, the ecclesia, is to be ruled, not by man’s word, but by the Word of God proclaimed by the divinely gifted teacher; and the ecclesia obeys the word of the teacher only if, and so far as, it recognizes therein the Word of God’ (Sohm 1887: 26; 1958: 33). This shows that these holders of charisma have no legal power to speak with authority. This is a case of obedience without compulsion: free obedience, in the words of Sohm, without legal authority (Sohm 1887: 27; 1958: 33). Only he who is directly called

7. The theme of the visible/invisible church is also expanded upon in Sohm 1912. According to Adair-Totef, the distinction between the ‘sichtbare und unsichtbare Kirche’ was laid out in detail in Albrecht Ritschl’s 1859 article “Ueber die Begriffe: sichtbare und unsichtbare Kirche”. See Adair-Totef (2015: 62, 174 n. 4). We can also find in Ritschl the first lineaments of a reflection on personal charisma. See Ritschl 1850.
by God, and armed with the Spirit—and therefore charismatic—can accomplish a ministry of leadership. He makes his decisions through the Spirit and is free from compliance with legal prescriptions. There can accordingly be no ‘office’ in the Church: ‘The guidance of the ecclesia comes from above, through the medium of the individual who is personally endowed by God’ (Sohm 1892: 54). Those who hold authority are those who manifest a pedagogic charisma: ‘The office of bishop, as that of the administrator of the Word, belonged properly to one who had received the gift of teaching: an apostle, a prophet, or teacher. But such teachers, in the apostolic sense, were rare in the Christian community; so that as a rule the office of bishop was committed to one of the elders. It changed from hand to hand’ (Sohm 1887: 27-28; 1958: 37).

This approach to the essence of the Church entails that ‘in place of legislation, there is the teaching of the Lord’s word, which should also regulate the organization and life of Christendom […]. This teaching, however, is the responsibility of the teacher, who, by virtue of his charisma, proclaims authoritatively the Lord’s word and the consequences one must draw from it’ (Sohm 1892: 25-26, 29). The main outcome of this, which is usually what Sohm’s approach is known for, is that ‘once and for all, a legally constituted Church cannot be’ (Sohm 1887: 28; 1958, 34). The Church and law, the Church and the canonically regulated ministry are completely at odds with one another: ‘There can be no legal constitution or legal legislation in the Ecclesia. Drawn from the divine word, the truth of the apostolic teaching on the constitution of the Ecclesia is that the organization of Christendom is not legal, but charismatic’ (Sohm 1892: 26). If the nature of the Church is determined by the conduct of the Spirit, only an order directly imposed by the Spirit is possible. However, ‘the law is worldly’ (Sohm 1892: 1) and it follows from this (the most famous sentence in Kirchenrecht, repeated twice) that ‘Church law is incompatible with the essence of the Church’ (Sohm 1892: 1, 700).

‘Christianity has entered the world, supernatural. You will never understand it, if you have not drunk yourself from the miracle-cup, the content of which quenches the thirst of the soul. Drink, and you will never have thirst. Drink, and you will discover a new world that you have never seen before, the world of the spiritual, overpowering the world of the earthly […]. But this world of the spiritual cannot be grasped by legal concepts. Even more, its essence stands in opposition to the essence of law. The spiritual essence of the Church excludes every ecclesiastical legal order. The formulation of Church
law arose in contradiction to the essence of the Church’ (Sohm 1892: X).

The Lutheran background of the critique of the Church’s institutionalization

The Kirchenrecht was published at a particular historical juncture. It was mainly marked by the Kulturkampf of the 1870s, where tension between Catholics and Protestants came to a head. It is in this context that the Lutheran community of historians and theologians has focused in analysing the ‘essence of Christianity’ (Das Wesen des Christentums, to use the title of A. v. Harnack’s famous book). Although there were controversies, all concurred that it was necessary to fight the corruption of the Gospel through its Catholicization, the expression of which is the legalization of religion: ‘The religion of strong feeling and of the heart passes into the religion of custom and therefore of form and of law […]. The original enthusiasm, in the broad sense of the word, evaporates, and the religion of law and form at once arises’ (Harnack 1900: 197; 199). In the context of this debate on the ‘reform of the Reformation’ (Perrin 2012), of which the Lutheran renaissance (lutherrenaissance) is only one aspect, the aim was to fight both against the ‘secularization’ of the Church (meaning the process of adjusting to worldly values, therefore corruption) and against the transformation of ‘the ministers of the Spirit, into clerics’ and the ‘Spirit’ in ‘law and compulsion’ (Harnack 1900: 193).

Sohm’s positions can thus be interpreted in the light of dogmatic Lutheran assumptions, against the institutionalization of churches, and symmetrically as a plea for an ecclesiology built around the individual believer. As Sohm emphasized, ‘the fundamental assumption of the conception of the [early] Church’ is ‘absolute religious individualism’ (Sohm 1892: 36). The ‘spiritualist’ conception of the Church that Sohm traced back to early Christianity was also rooted in invisibility as a fundamental component of the Lutheran notion of the Church: the Church is first and foremost, as Sohm put it, the ‘mystical body of Christ’. Sohm’s work clearly contains the obsessive idea of a spiritual kinship between the early times and the Reformation: he systematically refuses any kind of institution and organization, focusing instead on a purely prophetic mission of eschatological reunion.

8. See also Adair-Toteff (2015: 139).
However, and this is the root of the idea of ‘routinization of charisma’, the Church actually exists as a community and an institution in a highly visible way. Sohm undertook to explain this phenomenon, and in doing so proposed a kind of natural history of the ecclesia’s transformation into the Catholic Church: ‘Early Christianity sought to turn the laws of religious life into the very laws of social life. Ensuring this on the long term required the legalization of ordinary life and the formalization of religious life, i.e., a Catholicization, and therefore a deformation of Christianity’ (Sohm 1892: 57). Sohm’s interpretation was anthropological in nature: natural man desires to remain under law, and balks at the freedom offered by God’s call. Thus he introduces laws and regulations within the spiritual realm. The Church as a gathering in the name of God is unnatural: ‘The natural man is a born Catholic’. In the first chapter of Kirchenrecht, Sohm described the institutionalization of the Church—or, one might say, its Catholicization—explaining that around the 60s AD, there were two competing organizations within the ecclesia. One was an organization of teaching based on charismas; the other was an organization of leadership over the community, taking a legal form and relying on governmental bodies. The legal organization was only found in local communities, and Sohm therefore argued that ‘in early times, only local communities presented themselves as organized, not the Church’ (Sohm 1892: 12). Progressively the two organizations merged, and beginning in the mid-second century, the episcopate became a ministry of the Church and no longer only of the community—a Kirchamt. Sohm argues that the legal constitution of the Church developed ‘in the beginning of the second century’, when ‘belief in the free exercise of grace declined’ (Sohm 1887: 28; 1958: 38).

The ‘Catholicization’ of the ecclesia—which Sohm describes as a spiritual catastrophe—first consisted in its legal constitution: ‘In lieu of the obedience of faith founded on an inner belief in divine truth, for outside reasons a demand of obedience to the law suddenly appeared at all levels of organization of the Church. In the hands of Catholicism, what once was a spiritual community became a legal community; what was the Body of Christ became a body constituted and ruled by an earthly power’ (Sohm 1892: 456). This triggered a transformation, or rather a degeneration of charisma: ‘Previously, the office […] was based on charisma. Now, on the opposite, charisma is based on the office. Previously, it was only the charisma recognized by the church as truly present, now it was a force of law, i.e.,
a fictitious charisma, which subdues the community. The legal sentence (founded on an alleged *jus divinum*) from the charisma of the bishop’s office, signified a fiction that both veiled and expressed the break from the origins’ (Sohm 1892: 216).

*Catholic ecclesiology and the question of the ministries*

The publication of Sohm’s book sparked a long and intense dispute that peaked between 1880 and 1910. One of the distinguishing features of the controversy is that it involved primarily Protestant historians, theologians and sociologists, with no immediate Catholic response to Sohm’s critique (Haley 1980). The contemporary Catholic ecclesiology arguably partly relied on Sohm’s provocative thesis in its development (Rouco-Varela 1969). In short, Catholic (and Anglican) theologians denied the presence of any form of leadership by the Spirit in the early Church—depicting the Church as originally a hierarchical Christocracy. The appearance of the twelve apostles led to the distinction of ‘offices’. Paleochristian history is strikingly characterized by the abundance of titles derived from the practices of highly diverse cultural groups—Palestinian Jews and Hellenists—and services within the communities: teaching, mission, leadership, table ministry, etc. Some founding titles are however evidently linked to the apostolic mission: the Twelve, the Seven, the apostles, the *diakonoi*, and local titles, referring to sedentary duties: the pastors, the *presbyteroi* (elders or presbyters), the *episcopoi kai diakonoi*—the elders who ‘supervise’ (*episkopéō*) and are also *diakonoi*.10

However, I believe that these historical and exegetic arguments do not address the core of Sohm’s argument—besides, the Catholic exegesis remains controversial. Sohm indeed focused on the idea of the *essence* of the Church, which makes historical or textual interpretations inadequate. Yet, in Erik Peterson’s work (Peterson 2011), we find a historically informed basis for a general debate on the Catholic essence of the Church that provides a forceful response to Sohm’s position—but without mentioning him!

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9. The Twelve, the Seven, the apostles, didascals (teachers), *diaconoi*, presbyters, *episkopoi*, *hégoumenoi*, *proistamenoi*, etc. On these questions, see the general overview in Faivre 2007.

The role of the Spirit in the constitution of the Church according to Peterson

The central point, although hidden in two interpolations of Peterson’s text on the Church, is probably that of the ‘Marcionism’ of the positions that make a sharp distinction between law and Spirit, like Sohm’s. This Marcionism is condensed in a phrase borrowed by Weber: ‘It is written... but I say unto you’. Marcion’s gnostic doctrine proposed as a theodicy the idea of two gods: the creator, and the God of the new Alliance. Based on the biblical sentence ‘Christ is the end of the law’ (Romans 10: 4), Marcion, who called himself a disciple of Paul, argued that the Old and the New Testaments were irreconcilable, and so were Law and grace. The coming of Christ heralded universal redemption as opposed to the election of the Jewish people only, and in the process abolished the Law and the prophets. This led him to bring the contradiction between Grace and Law to a head, and consequently to reject the legacy of the Old Testament and its Jewish reality. This reflects Sohm’s idea of a ‘pure Christianity’, shared by an entire current of German Lutheranism at odds with the Old Testament and the Law.

Peterson views the historical and theological reality of the origin of the Church as far more complex: ‘There is [a] “Church” only under the assumption that the Jews, as the people chosen by God, did not come to believe in the Lord’. Because of this, the Church is a church of pagans for pagans. Unlike in the Jewish Christian eschatology of the Kingdom, the path to the Church begins with the Pentecost, where through the Spirit the apostles received the gift of languages, which indicated ‘the path to the nations, [...] and thereby the path to that which we call the “Church”’ (Peterson 2011: 34). With the Pentecost comes the idea that ‘there is a “Church” only under the assumption that the twelve Apostles have been called in the Holy Spirit and had arrived at the decision, on the basis of the Holy Spirit, to go to the Gentiles’ (Peterson 2011: 35). From this seemingly innocuous thesis, Peterson inferred a major and radical consequence, namely that ‘Jesus himself neither directly founded the Church, nor himself instituted the offices in the Church. Jesus preached the Kingdom to the Jews, but he did not preach the Church to the Gentiles’ (Peterson 2011: 35). This means that if Jesus did not appoint bishops or ordain priests, this hierarchy must be related to the Holy Spirit, embodied by the twelve apostles.

Peterson’s Catholic ecclesiology thus rests on the interpretation of the role of the Twelve. The latter are ‘Jewish Christians’, appointed
by Christ and called to ‘rule on the tribes of Israel’. On the one hand, they received their power from Jesus through a delegation of authority. They were rooted within Israel, and their mission related to the eschatological gathering of the Jewish people alone. On the other hand, the narrative of the Pentecost, i.e., a communication from the Holy Spirit, gave them the gift of speaking the languages of all peoples. From that point on, the Twelve were destined to go to the pagans, became the ‘Twelve Apostles’, and left Jerusalem. According to Peterson, these events form the basis of the two constitutive components of the notion of Church: ‘The legitimacy in the succession by right of the “Twelve”, derived directly from the Lord’ (the leaders of assemblies of worship are legitimized by the apostles’ laying on of hands, and there is no episcopal succession founded on Paul), and a faith that, as for the twelve apostles, is ‘obligated to make independent decisions, due to the Holy Spirit’. As Peterson notes, ‘there is thus an apostolic law, and a pneumatic freedom in dogmatic matters’, manifested in the phrase ‘it pleased the Holy Spirit and us’ (edoxe to pneumati to agio kai enin). In other words, the ‘Twelve’ belong to the legal order, and the twelve apostles to the charismatic order.

Thus Peterson provides us with another ‘solution’ — specific to the Catholic tradition — to comprehend the role of the Spirit. This article uses it in two ways. The first is critical: the explication of the notion of ‘essence’ in the Catholic Church and of the Catholic meaning of office charisma enables us to reconsider a number of Weber’s proposals, which might now seem overly dependent on sources heavily influenced by Lutheran tradition. This brings us to a second use, following Weber’s secularization of the concept of personal charisma, and allowing us to trace the outlines of the concept of ‘office charisma’ as independent from personal charisma, opening up new theoretical opportunities.

A critique of Weber’s conception of ‘office charisma’

Should the Church be analyzed as the ‘development’ of a sect?
In Weber’s work, the concept of charisma fits within the typological dichotomy between sect and Church. It may seem odd to use the church-sect typology in an analysis of early Christianity, as it is so common to use it to analyse, as Troeltsch did, the emergence of Protestant sects at the end of the Middle Ages. But, first, as indicated by A. Molendijk (1996), if the (triple) typology of religious bodies in
Troeltsch’s work aimed at reflecting the history of Christian groups and nothing else, Max Weber proposed in his famous dichotomy and more generally in his typology an interreligious and historical comparative perspective beyond the scope of Troeltsch’s approach. Secondly, as B. Nelson put it: ‘The decisive phenomenon for Troeltsch, as for most other leading German theologians, philosophers, and historians throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries seems to have been the institutionalization of primitive Christianity. These writers and thinkers wanted to know how the charismatic fellowship of the apostolic Church had been bureaucratized, how an otherworldly “sect” gave rise to the Roman Church’ (Nelson 1975: 232 n. 5). For Troeltsch, this phenomenon was only possible insofar as sect and church types, undoubtedly still largely indistinguishable, were at the origin of Christianity:

All these differences, which actually existed between the late Mediaeval Church and the sects, must have had their foundation in some way or another within the interior structure of the twofold sociological edifice. If, then, in reality both types claim, and rightly claim, a relationship with the Primitive Church, it is clear that the final cause for this dualistic development must lie within primitive Christianity itself. Once this point becomes clear, therefore, it will also shed light upon the whole problem of the sociological understanding of Christianity in general. Since it is only at this point that the difference between the two elements emerges very clearly as a permanent difference, only now have we reached the stage at which it can be discussed. It is also very important to understand this question thoroughly at this stage, since it explains the later developments of Church History, in which the sect stands out ever more clearly alongside of the Church. In the whole previous development of the Church this question was less vital, for during the early centuries the Church itself fluctuated a great deal between the sect and the Church-type; indeed, it only achieved the development of the Church-type with the development of sacramental doctrine; precisely for that reason, in its process of development up to this time, the Church had only witnessed a sect development alongside of itself to a small extent, and the differences between them and the Church were still not clear. The problem first appears clearly in the opposition between the sacramental-hierarchical Church conception of Augustine and the Donatists. But with the disappearance of African Christianity this opposition also disappeared, and it only reappeared in a decisive form after the completion of the idea of the Church in the Gregorian church reform (Troeltsch 1931: 1, 333).

Third, in pursuit of Troeltsch’s intuition, many interpreters have analysed early Christianity as a sect, emphasizing the charismatic
dimension of the early Christian leaders, and their observable tendency to revoke the law (Scroggs 1975; Holmberg 1990). That this kind of interpretation is subject to discussion and controversy speaks to the mixed character of early Christianity, between sect and church—which is, in fact, central to our discussion—but also to the internal struggles already present between the charismatics and the official ministries.

The typological dichotomy between sect and Church is defined primarily around their doctrines of salvation. A sect is an ‘association of salvation’, a voluntary grouping of ‘persons qualified in a purely personal and charismatic way’ (Breuer 1996: 1293), based on the principle of free membership. They appeared during the early development of the Church, with such groups as the Montanists and the Donatists. Unlike the Church, sects are naturally at odds with the rest of society. They require their members to behave beyond reproach and enforce very strict admission criteria. They strive to establish an earthly order that resembles the celestial kingdom as much as possible. A sect rejects the idea that membership in an institution and sacramental mediation can give access to salvation which is only guaranteed by a life centered on the founder’s original teachings, and modeled after his. As Stefan Breuer puts it, a sect is thus ‘an aristocratic institution, a community of saints’ (Breuer 1996: 1293), preparing and waiting for their eventual salvation. On the other hand, the Church is a ‘salvation institution’, which has received from God the temporal power of granting salvation and grace: in the Church, charismatic sanctity is transferred to the institution. Thus, the institution partly or entirely inherits the power given to the founder by the divinity in order to continue the work of redemption and ensure the diffusion of the message of salvation. The Church claims to be the channel through which the divine mysteriously and miraculously intervenes in the world. Accordingly it demands the submission of believers in exchange for salvation goods (and for the sacraments in particular). In the words of Annette Desselkamp, ‘its members enjoy the grace inherent in the foundation, due to their participation in the sacraments, whose saving effect is immediate, regardless of whether the person receiving them and the person administering them are personally virtuous or not’ (Desselkamp 2006: 460).

Weber however notes that this ideal-typical pair is linked by a dynamic of development—which is also obviously essential for Töreltsch. Indeed, the religious forms falling under the ideal-type of the Church are to a large degree extensions of forms that may be
described as sects: ‘If a religious community (Gemeinschaft) emerges in the wake of a prophecy or of the propaganda of a savior, the control of regular conduct first falls into the hands of the charismatically qualified successors, pupils, disciples of the prophet or of the savior. Later, under certain very regularly recurrent conditions […], this task falls into the hands of a priestly, hereditary, or official hierarchy (amtlich) […]’ (Weber 2009a: 327).

To Weber, the most decisive feature of the ideal-typical opposition between sect and Church, and even more so of the idea of a line of development between them, was the transformation of charisma, which is attached to the person in a sect and to the office in the Church:

Four features characterize the emergence of a church out of a hierarchy: (1) the rise of a professional priesthood removed from the ‘world’, with salaries, promotions, professional duties, and a distinctive way of life; (2) claims to universal domination; that means, hierarchy must at least have overcome household, sib and tribal ties, and of a church in the full sense of the word we speak only when ethnic and national barriers have been eliminated, hence after the levelling of all non-religious distinctions; (3) dogma and rites (Kultus) must have been rationalized, recorded in holy scriptures, provided with commentaries, and turned into objects of a systematic education, as distinct from mere training in technical skills; 4) all of these features must occur in some kind of compulsory organization. For the decisive fact is the separation of charisma from the person and its linkage with the institution and, particularly, with the office (Amt) (Weber 1978: 1164).

Thus, in Weber’s work, the Church is essentially defined in terms of charisma, as the ‘bearer and trustee of an office charisma’ (Amtscharisma) (Weber 1978: 1164). As it turns out, this charisma is only ever really defined tautologically in relation to the ‘Church’ type: office charisma is defined as the ‘belief in the specific state of grace of a social institution’ (Weber 1978: 1140).

Yet, following Peterson, if there were ministries from the beginning, and Christ effectively entrusted the Twelve with their first apostolic mission—if, in other words, from its earliest days Christianity took on institutional forms—this means that religious communities that may fall under the ‘Church’ type are not necessarily the result of a transformation of those falling under the ‘sect’ type. The idea of a development from sect to Church carried with it the idea of a progression from personal charisma to office charisma—which Sohm had also attempted to demonstrate in a critical manner. Historically, there are many examples of the routinization of personal
charisma, in particular through the progressive separation between person and charisma, yet depicting office charisma as the inevitable outcome of a development of personal charisma seems excessively simplistic. The two models are opposed, but contrary to Weber and Sohm’s linear supposition of their sequential relationship, they are arguably independent from one another.\(^{11}\)

Whereas ‘it is the hierarchical office that confers legitimate authority upon the priest as a member of an organized enterprise of salvation […] the prophet, like the magician, exerts his power simply by virtue of his personal gifts’ (Weber 1978: 464). The contradictory character of the possession of office charisma and personal charisma finds its roots in the source—and accordingly in the legitimacy—of charisma. In the case of personal charisma, charisma is conferred upon the individual directly by the divine pneuma. In the case of office charisma, the objectification of charisma allows for its transmission without consideration to the person holding the office; likewise, the effectiveness of the sacraments relates not to the individual, but only to the accomplishment of the rite (ex opere operato). The feud among the Donatists discussed by Weber attests to this.\(^{12}\)

On the opposition between these two forms of charisma, Weber notes that ‘the rational organization for administering divine blessings is an institution (Anstalt), and charismatic sanctity is transferred to the institution as such; this is typical of every Church. Hence fully developed office charisma inevitably becomes the most uncompromising foe of all genuinely personal charisma, which propagates and preaches its own way to God and is prophetic, mystic and ecstatic. Office charisma must oppose it, in order to preserve the dignity of the organization’ (Weber 1978: 253-54).

\(^{11}\) However, it should be noted that the other text quoted by Weber as the source of the concept of charisma, K. Holl’s Enthusiasmus und Bußgewalt (1898), focuses on a later moment in the history of Christianity—namely the Byzantine Church. It describes the figure of the mystic Simeon, called ‘the New Theologian’, as the exemplary witness to conflicts between the ‘gift of grace’ of a monk and priestly power. As I. Kalinowski (forthcoming) suggests, the reference to Holl changes Sohm’s model: it implies, in fact, the possibility of not approaching the tension between charismatic and hierocratic figures as a simple linear succession (corresponding to a process of routinization of charisma) but looking at it in a synchronic perspective where the charismatic option appears as an always possible alternative to institutionalized forms of power.

\(^{12}\) Under the rigorist conception of the Donatists, the validity and effectiveness of the sacraments were linked to the purity of the ministers (ex opere operantis). Cf. Weber (1978: 254).
'The specific state of grace of a social institution'
The characteristic feature of the ‘Church’ form, as Peterson argues, is its internal relation between charisma and law. We now need to examine how this relation was institutionalized and ultimately came to constitute the Church. This raises the central question of how an institution can be considered as pneumatic. To Weber, office charisma is constructed first by contrast to personal charisma, as an objectified charisma (he writes of Versachlichung des Charisma)—the Church is precisely characterized by the separation between person and office. This separation entailed the appropriation of the apostles’ charisma by the institution and the possibility of transmitting it to the holder of a specific office. The concepts of order (ordo) and apostolic tradition are in effect suited to achieving this appropriation. Order refers to a place in the hierarchy, or even simply to an ecclesiastic office (Gaudemet 1994), requiring the individual to be legally qualified for this office or ministry. But order is also a pneumatic apparatus. Paul’s operation is the first key to understanding this. Indeed, contrary to Sohm’s univocal interpretation of the early Church, charisma is not simply valued in the Pauline Epistles; it is also rationalized, and crucially limited to ministerial offices. While Paul does not deny the importance of charismas, he perceives ‘spiritual fervor’ as a potential factor of division in the Church: some ‘spiritual gifts’ (pneumatikà) create internal hierarchies within the community and trigger conflicts. Remarkably, Paul does assert the existence of a hierarchy, but places at the top of the Church instituted offices, also presented as pneumatikà, ahead of the heterogeneous group of the other charismas: ‘And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues’ (1 Corinthians 12:28).

In contrast, the relation between charisma and office is a very specific one. What happens is not that individuals endowed with charisma are appointed as ministers; on the contrary, the ministry endows them with charisma—which is precisely what Sohm denounced in the catholicization of the early Christian Churches. This is revealed in the Pastoral Epistles—specifically in the First Epistle to Timothy: ‘Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you’ (1 Timothy 4:14). This passage is traditionally interpreted as a reference to ordination—in particular due to the mention of the laying on of hands. Ordination confers charisma, which becomes ministerial
charisma. This charisma—or these charismas—are passed on from person to person, following a ministerial chain from the Apostles to the disciples and from the disciples to the local ministers. Thus the essential component of office charisma is a legitimacy derived from ‘tradition’, i.e., apostolic succession.

**Pneumatic ministries**

What is decisive in the way the pneuma operates is that it links the ministries and the community together. Here I will examine two examples of this: ordination and the promulgation of dogma. Regarding ordination, the appointment of bishops initially required the laying on of hands. However, this operation is not in itself charismatic. To speak of office charisma in a relevant way, the presence of the Spirit is required. To be interpreted in charismatic terms, the sacrament of the holy orders requires a ‘recognition’, and the presence of the Spirit can only be attested by the ‘unanimous’ intervention of the Church, by acclamation or election. The meaning of election in this process is obviously not the current democratic one. It is to be understood as the mark of the Spirit’s work: such an ‘election’ can only be analyzed as the ‘manifestation of a group’s will’, ‘it is a “sign” that “signals”, besides other signs of a prophetic or miraculous nature’ (Gaudemet 1979: 9). The two elements of manumission and election, sometimes merged under the term ‘chirotony’, relate to the two aforementioned meanings of apostolic succession: the laying on of hands is the formal process that signals succession in the historical sense, making each bishop a link in the chain that started with the Apostles, thereby rendering the sacrament valid. The charismatic dimension of the bishop’s office is also revealed by the importance of the epiclesis in ordination. In this liturgical act, the gathering of believers is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, which has an eschatological dimension. This gathering is manifested in (unanimous) election and in the accompanying Eucharist. This dual mode of appointment of bishops is another example of the continuity between charismatic order and legal order, and of the very construction of office charisma.

For dogma to be true, as Maurice Sachet argued, it needs to respect both tradition and succession: ‘man’s sole path of access to truth, the very path that God walked upon to convey it to him; the truth of the revelation since the origin of the world, the truth that initially travelled through Moses and the Prophets and reached its apex and reached its apex and reached its apex.

13. The epiclesis is the prayer invoking the Holy Spirit.
realization with Jesus the Christ, and then endured and spread, in uninterrupted succession, from the Apostles to the current presbyters and episcopate and their successors. “It is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church, writes St. Irenaeus […] those who possess the succession from the Apostles […] those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father” (Against Heresies, IV, 26, 2) (Sachot 2011: 209-10). Tradition and succession thus institute the Church, create a space for authority in which obedience is to due to those who have been legally appointed to speak about God. Yet complying with formal criteria of validity is not enough. The dogma is indeed the work of the apostolic synod and of the Holy Spirit, as is attested by the passage from the Acts of the Apostles reproduced by Peterson: ‘it pleased the Holy Spirit and us’ (Acts 15:28). The presence of the Spirit is manifested in a unanimous collegiality. Yet it also requires recognition from the Church as a whole. This may take the form of a simple “Amen”, without which ministers can perform no authentically liturgical act; it also relates to the tradition of receptio—at least in the Latin Church. Receptio confers no validity on a decision or proposition, but recognizes and attests that it is effectively for the good of the Church. This is also a pneumatic process, where, once again, the Spirit marks its presence through unanimity.

The internal relation of the community and of the ministers further specifies the nature of the bond created by office charisma. In the Early Church, at least, clearly the ‘recognition’ manifested by the unanimous expression of the community is necessary to attest to office charisma and its authority. Yet it is also an essential condition of obedience. Obedience was then bound by no punishment and was in principle just as free as the obedience described by Sohm in his own version of the Early Church. In this sense, before the medi eval transformation of Church law—before it became a ‘hierocracy’ strictly speaking—this law had no fundamentally binding character; rather, it was entitling.

From the authority of office charisma to hierocratic domination
In Catholic ecclesiology, there was initially a combination of institution and grace: charisma was framed by the institution, and the Spirit only expressed itself in legally instituted forms. What kind of law was at work there, however? In a footnote of his paper on the Church, Peterson first notes that “‘Law’ here naturally has the meaning of jus divinum’ (Peterson 2011: 196 n. 19), and the centrality of
the Eucharist illuminates its nature: the liturgical character of these acts indicates that this is essentially a sacramental law—defined as such by Thomas Aquinas: ‘Fundamentum cujuslibet legis in sacramentis consistit’.\(^\text{14}\) Under certain aspects this ties in with Rudolph Sohm’s position. While the latter was critical of canon law as organization law, he had no such qualms about ‘sacramental law’.\(^\text{15}\) He repeats that ‘the very order of the Church (its fundamental constitution) was born out of the very order of Eucharistic celebration’ (Sohm 1892: 1, 700).\(^\text{16}\) Sacred law consists in status-giving acts, through which Christians are introduced to their new status by God. These acts include Baptism and the Eucharist, which introduce them to Christian communion. This law is bound with the sacrament of Holy Orders. Ordination—which, as we have noted, is also a charismatic operation—qualifies its recipients legally, gives them authority and jurisdiction to validly administer some sacraments. In this sense, it is a legal delegation: ‘Ius divinum exists in the Church because it was the Son of God who legally delegated it to “the Twelve”’ (Peterson 2011: 196 n. 19). By virtue of tradition, the Church ordains, baptizes and excludes members; essentially, therefore, it administering sacraments.

However, this competence—or authority—has been progressively interpreted as a power. While it is not within the scope of this article to retrace the history of this shift, it is worth noting that it was undoubtedly informed by the progressive distinction, completed in the late eleventh/early twelfth century, between two types of acts and competences: ordinatio and juridictio.\(^\text{17}\) Jurisdiction refers to the decision-making process itself, and to the capacity of laying down the law and ruling. It is accordingly a power to include and exclude, to link and to sever. Thus Laurent Villemin argues that this jurisdictional power ‘covers a much broader reality so that it would be more accurate to call it power to govern’ (Villemin 2003: 61). While according to the school of Laon, this power to govern was to be entrusted to those who have

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14. IV Sent., d. 7 q. 1 a. 1 qc. 1 ad 1: ‘The foundation of all laws lies in the sacraments’.
15. ‘Sacramental law is a law of God’s action, not a law laid down by a legislator on his own authority’ (Congar 1973: 266).
16. As Y. Congar (1973) noted, saying that the Church is sacramental means that ‘all the life of the Church is “sacramental” because God intervenes in it’, but also that ‘the law of the Church is a sacramental law’: ‘What the Church recognizes as operated within by God constitutes a sacramental and divine law, *jus divinum.*’
17. On the concepts of ordination and jurisdiction, see Villemin 2003.

been ordained and ‘preside over a people’, i.e., ‘those who accomplish such divine sacraments’ and who ‘gather before them an assembly of the people’ (Villemin 2003: 61), the fact is that juridictio also progressively moved away from ordinatio: ‘Such authority, derived from jurisdiction, could be exercised by anyone to whom it had been lawfully delegated. The Pope could appoint a deacon, for example, to sit as a judge in a dispute between two bishops’ (Berman 1983: 206). Likewise, ‘prince-bishops’ from the nobility could be appointed to head a diocese without being ordained, and without having any sacramental power.

In the twelfth century, canon law scholars systematized the distinction between the powers of ordination and jurisdiction, thereby contributing to separating powers over the sacraments and government of the Church, but also separating the principle of hierocratic domination from all forms of charismatic office (Gaudemet 1985; Villemin 2003). Only in the late twelfth century had the ecclesial order fully developed as a ‘Law’, as it was ‘externally guaranteed by the probability that physical or psychological coercion will be applied by a staff of people in order to bring about compliance or avenge violation’ (Weber 1978: 34). The peculiarity of this order is that the coercion used to ‘guarantee its regulations’ is psychological in nature, ‘by providing or denying the spiritual goods of salvation (hierocratic coercion)’ (Weber 1978: 57).

Office charisma and the spirit of bureaucracy

The contribution of office charisma to the development of rational-legal bureaucracy

The term ‘office charisma’ would be limited in scope if it only referred to an implicit sociology of Catholicism—not to mention a Catholicism probably predating the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. But Weber himself indicated a path for augmenting the concept’s relevance, by referring to it as the initial locus of the development of bureaucracy. As Wolfgang Schluchter noted, the development of Early Christianity was completed with ‘the formation of the Christian Church, the first rational bureaucracy in world history’ (Schluchter 1988: 248). Office charisma was arguably the driver of this shift towards bureaucracy in two ways. Its first contribution consisted in the configuration of a rational organization conforming to a legal mode of functioning; the second consisted in offering a foundation for bureaucratic domination.
From the rational-legal standpoint, the first contribution of office charisma to the development of bureaucracy is that it led to the separation between office and person, resulting in a de-personalization that prevents any form of appropriation of the office. The model of legal delegation of apostolic succession that underpins office charisma then contributed to rationalizing and formalizing access to the office, by introducing forms of verification of competencies through a charismatic education and replacing an initially ‘magical’ operation of ordination by a formal procedure (Weber 1978: 1139). Perfected by the canonists, this system also organized ministries around a cosmos of abstract rules, defining an internal hierarchy of offices in the Church, competencies, and more generally a legitimate, rational and legal model of conduct.

Lastly, and perhaps even more crucially, office charisma paved the way for the idea and practice of the ‘rationally known, rationally created and rationally controlled’ law (Weber 2012: 301) that characterizes legal domination. Under this type of legal domination, Weber writes that ‘every body of law consists essentially in a consistent system of abstract rules which have normally been intentionally established. Administration is held to consist in the application of these rule to particular cases… following principles which are capable of generalized formulation and are approved in the order governing the group, or at least not disapproved in it’ (Weber 1978: 223). However, we have seen that the charismatic authority of Catholic ministers as they promulgate the dogma and perform the sacramental acts for which they are competent requires a manifestation of the spirit in the form of a reception. In his anti-authoritarian reinterpretation of charisma, Weber stressed that the dimension of approval and control was inchoate in the recognition of charismatic directives:

Correspondingly, the recognition of charismatic decrees and judicial decisions on the part of the community shifts to the belief that the group has a right to enact, recognize, or appeal laws, according to its own free will, both in general and for an individual case. Under genuinely charismatic authority, on the other hand, conflicts over the correct law may actually be decided by a group vote, but this takes place under the pressure of feeling that there can be only one correct decision, and it is a matter of duty to arrive at this. However, in the new interpretation the treatment of law approaches the case of legal authority (Weber 1978: 267).

Here I suggested that this dimension is not the result of a non-authoritarian development of charisma, but actually the very
translation of the pneumatic character of ecclesial acts signified by the receptio procedure.

Office charisma as an invisible foundation of rational-legal legitimacy

Office charisma also contributed in a second way to the historical formation of Western bureaucracy, by offering a foundation for the type of authority it sought to impose. In some respects, one could argue that the model of the Catholic Church and its office charisma might have cleared up some of the ambiguities and aporias of the ideal-type of rational-legal domination as it was conceived by Weber. The major and oft-reported issue with Weber’s construction of this type is that it fails to account for the foundations of domination. This issue relates to the place of belief. In this type, indeed, belief seems oriented according to an impersonal order of compliance with rules:

The validity of the claims to legitimacy may be based on: Rational grounds—resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands (legal authority) […] In the case of legal [satzungsmäßiger] authority, obedience is owed to the legally established impersonal order. It extends to the persons exercising the authority of office under it by virtue of the formal legality of their commands and only within the scope of authority of their office (Weber 1978: 222).

Under this system, obedience is not due to the authorities as individuals, but as representatives of an impersonal order. In the purest type of legal domination—through a bureaucratic administrative staff—this domination is exclusively identified by the means it implements: ‘the members of the organization, insofar as they obey a person in authority, do not owe this obedience to him as an individual, but to the impersonal order. Hence, it follows that there is an obligation to obedience only within the sphere of the rationally delimited jurisdiction which, in terms of the order, has been given to him’ (Weber 1978: 223). Under the same logic, none of the criteria applied by Weber to administrative staff relates to belief. This does not shed light on the real foundation of belief in the legitimacy of the authorities. In legal authority, the holders of authority are defined with no consideration to the nature of the type, whereas in traditional or charismatic domination, their definition is inherent in the

type of domination. Thus, in traditional domination, ‘the holder of power (or various holders of power) is considered to conform to the traditional order. Obedience is owed to him by virtue of the status conferred by tradition’. In charismatic domination, similarly: ‘The term “charisma” will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.’

In a pure rational-legal logic, this type of domination has no chance of being recognized. For legal domination to be fully legitimate, rational-legal domination must be complemented with individual reasons and collective justifications that give an object to belief, and by extension to recognition, in other words, it needs a ‘spirit’. This is the sense of Weber’s remark that ‘at the top of a bureaucratic organization, there is necessarily an element which is at least not purely bureaucratic’ (Weber 1978: 227). Everything happens as if bureaucratic rationality is a limited rationality that functions within a system that follows different rules, as Ricoeur suggests (Ricoeur 1986: 209). This ‘element which is at least not purely bureaucratic’ can be of a traditional nature (as in the case of constitutional monarchies), but it is also possible to conceive it by relying on the concept of office charisma. Here my hypothesis is that office charisma, in modern societies in particular, provides the foundation for the legitimacy of organizational forms that fall under rational legality—obviously, at the price of its secularization.

Weber himself made such a construction possible by paving the way for a secular acceptance of the concept. As in Weber’s development of the personal charisma concept, these paths of secularization involve the transformation of the economy of recognition. The latter is addressed in section 2 of Chapter IX of Book II of Economy and Society. In that section, Weber retraces the development of appointment procedures, discussing Roman magistrates, emperors, Germanic kings, popes and bishops, up to plebiscitary and democratic forms of choice of party leaders in parliamentary regimes (Weber 1978: 1121-133). Some light on this line of development is shed by Section 7 of Chapter III in Book I (Weber 1978: 266-71), entitled ‘The Transformation of Charisma in a Democratic Direction’. Characteristically, the secularization of the concept of charisma, precisely as it
abandons the reduction of charisma to a system of domination, leads to a non-authoritarian interpretation of charisma:

The basically authoritarian principle of charismatic legitimation may be subject to an anti-authoritarian interpretation, for the validity of charismatic authority rests entirely on recognition by the ruled, on “proof” before their eyes. To be sure, this recognition of a charismatically qualified, and hence legitimate, person is created as a duty. But when the charismatic organization undergoes progressive rationalization, it is readily possible that, instead of recognition being treated as a consequence of legitimacy, it is treated as the basis of legitimacy: *democratic legitimacy* [...]. Now he is the freely elected leader (Weber 1978: 275).

This reinterpretation of charisma requires, as we can see, a shift in the basis of charismatic authority, as it was defined by Weber in his typology of the forms of domination: recognition is no longer in a position of consequence, but of cause. However, this only makes sense if charisma is no longer personal, but if it is an office charisma. Indeed, this inversion of cause and effect is quite incomprehensible in regard to the economy of the personal charisma concept. Personal charismatic qualification, in fact, does not depend, as Weber argues, on recognition (this recognition is not the ‘basis’ of charismatic legitimation): it is the sole extraordinary quality—the ability to perform ‘miracles’—which is the source of charisma. Only then, can this charisma become the source of authority, through its recognition: recognition is the ‘consequence’ of charismatic legitimation. Conversely, as we have shown, it is within the framework of office charisma that recognition becomes the basis of legitimacy: it *precedes* and is at the source of legitimacy. This is the whole meaning of election, which at the price of its secularization and henceforth devoid of its quality as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, becomes the procedure that *confers* charisma: ‘The personally legitimated charismatic leader becomes leader by the grace of those who follow him since the latter are formally free to elect and even to depose him—just as the loss of charisma and its efficacy had involved the loss of genuine legitimacy’ (Weber 1978: 275).

These changes have resulted in the loss of both what Weber calls the ‘outside the everyday’ (*außeralltäglich*) and the ‘extraordinary’ (*außerordentlich*).20 In his passages on the objectification of charisma, Weber only uses the term *außergewöhnlich* (out of the ordinary), which

20. Significantly, Weber does not use those terms in his passages on office charisma.

relates to the idea that these offices are not ‘accessible to all’ (Weber 1922: 771) and that ultimately they fall on an elite that is in particular selected by a ‘charismatic education’ (Weber 1978: 1143-145). Because of this character Weber considers that yet another form of charisma is at work here.

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To conclude, I believe I have pinpointed the specificity of the office charisma in relation to the personal charisma in this article. I have tried to show that office charisma cannot be considered either historically or conceptually as the development—or degradation—of personal charisma: office charisma seems to be an autonomous way of founding an authority, combining charisma and institution; one cannot analyse the development of office charisma as a routinization and objectification of the personal charismatic qualification. So it is probably problematic to treat personal charisma as the pure form of charisma and, symmetrically, to consider ‘office charisma’ as an oxymoron. In this article, I have therefore made the case for a conceptual plurality of charismas, of which office charisma is one type—but undoubtedly ‘lineage charisma’ would be another, whose construction would require further developments. However, somewhat different characteristics are required in the analysis of charismatic authority, and I would like to discuss two of them in this conclusion. The first one pertains to the constitutive instability of charisma. As noted by T. Kroll, ‘the instability of the charismatic authority structure emphasized by Sohm was regarded in the scientific debate of his contemporaries as a particularly serious theoretical and logical deficiency of his legal-historical reconstruction of the constitution of the early church. Such a structure, as Harnack objected to Sohm, could never have survived in the long run, even if its existence had been acknowledged. Harnack found the Sohm characterization of the purely charismatic organization completely implausible, because the original christianity could never have done without the “constant regulation” of its institutions’ (Kroll 2001: 64-65). The linkage between the institution and charisma—through the idea of pneumatic ministry, in particular—allows, on the contrary, to conceive charisma as something durable, and offers a historical explanation of the survival of primitive Christianity, through a church—in the conceptual sense—which did not—or at least not immediately—abandon its charismatic foundation.
The second characteristic of office charisma is a consequence of the first: it relates to the place of law. As Harnack pointed out, far from being incompatible, charisma and law are likely to be strengthened through the charisma of the office: ‘The spiritual factor is not eliminated but protected, for it is strengthened by being confined to the legal channels and has the influence of the law behind it. Everything is still based on God and on the Spirit, but the spiritual element is legalised and formalised’ (Harnack 1910: 220, also quoted by Kroll 2001: 67). Through Peterson’s interpretation—which was close to Harnack, as their correspondence shows—I have shown why jus divinum and the spirit should be conceived jointly. This association, which the type of personal charisma rejected, also made it possible to reveal office charisma as an underlying yet invisible element in the conceptual construction of rational-legal domination. It also outlines the place of ‘democratic legitimacy’ in modern bureaucracies. We have seen that Weber introduced this phrase in his original wording on the ‘reinterpretation of charisma outside of all relationships of domination’. The introduction of this democratic legitimacy is explicitly an attempt to conceive an organization (Verband) that falls outside the framework of domination, a relationship described somewhat ambiguously by Weber as one where the leader ‘becomes the “servant” of those under his authority’ (Weber 1978: 352). Yet this characterization relates to the symbolic form, developed with office charisma in early Christianity, where the holder of an ecclesiastical office was elected through a somewhat aristocratic process but presented himself as serving the community—it is worth remembering that ‘minister’ means ‘servant’. A historical translation of this conception is found in Weber’s descriptions of ‘direct democracy’ in North American townships or some Swiss cantons: ‘Once applied to the leader, the principle of “election” as an interpretation of charisma can also be applied to administrative leadership. Elected civil servants, who draw their legitimacy from the trust of those under their authority, and who can subsequently be dismissed through a vote of no confidence, are entirely representative of a certain type of “democracies”, for instance in America’ (Weber 1978: 350).

Weber arguably remained skeptical as to the scope of such examples and their ability to serve as models for bigger administrations. More profoundly, as C. Colliot-Thélène shows, these models tend towards reducing domination, or making it invisible, but not eliminating it (Colliot-Thélène 2014). This skepticism might also have
been due to Weber’s difficulty in distinguishing domination and authority. Yet, office charisma, at least in its primitive form, relates to a form of polity that is undoubtedly authoritarian, but involves no coercion: it entails the recognition of an authority, and generates obedience, but obedience without compulsion, ‘free obedience’. In this respect, forms of direct democracy do seek to minimize domination and authority (in particular through the technical means described by Weber: reduced duration of office, right of recall, imperative mandate, etc.), but the electoral procedures of modern representative democracies, particularly in cases of ‘free representation’, minimize domination without denying the authority of the organization. In the latter cases, as Weber writes, the representative is ‘the master chosen by voters and not their “servant”’ (Weber 1978: 301). This can only be understood if elected representatives are recognized to have office charisma. In this sense, Weber’s plea for a plebiscitary democracy can be interpreted as a desire to counter the deadly power of bureaucracy by (re)introducing in it a holder of office charisma, whose authority has elective roots and does not relate to the mechanisms of bureaucratic rationality.

References


Heurtin, Weber as a Reader of Rudolph Sohm


Max Weber on the Market’s Impersonality and Ethic

Virgil Henry Storr and Solomon Stein

Abstract
Market exchange is often depicted as devoid of traditional feelings of community, and perhaps as being destructive of those feelings. Max Weber’s ideal typification of the market is one particularly clear exposition of this perspective on market activity. In the context of Weber’s broader contributions to an understanding of social life, however, this impersonal ideal type seems inconsistently applied. This paper examines this internal tension regarding how to conceptualize the market throughout Economy and Society. We argue that Weber’s picture of actual market activity reflects a distinct ideal typification, one where economic relationships have both personal and impersonal orientations.

Keywords: Max Weber, market relations, ideal types, types of social relationship, the market community, orientations towards market exchange, opposition to the market order.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Nature of the Market
Questions about the essential nature of market activity and its relation to other forms of social action are among the central questions of political philosophy, political economy, and sociology. The answers along nearly all margins are contested: the theoretical properties of economic systems, the desirability of market systems compared to other types of social organization, and nearly every related particular are subject to disagreements. That some elements of the broader structure of human sociability are in tension with economic activity is, however, as close to a universal element to these conceptions as can be imagined. Exchange, in contrast to other ideal-typical social relationships, is often seen as fundamentally impersonal; its impersonality is hailed as a virtue by proponents of markets and is condemned as a fundamental vice by those critical of commercial society.
This impersonality of the market is a rare point of general agreement among accounts of markets whether historical or contemporary, polemical or apologetic. Max Weber’s account in *Economy and Society* of the nature of market relationships, and their relation with other forms of social action, follows in this broad tradition. Yet, Weber’s broader body of work in sociological analysis illuminates the ways that market social relationships are personal and take on meanings that can be quite significant. Weber presents us with a contrast between the market as not only an impersonal form of interaction, but ‘the most impersonal relationship of practical life’ (Weber 1978: 636) and other descriptions illustrating the ways in which activity within markets is personal and market interactions form a sphere in which personal relationships develop.

This paper explores this dichotomy and suggests that the ideal typification Weber presents of the wholly impersonal nature of market relationships is inadequate for Weber’s own purposes: discussing historical markets and developing other ideal types that relate to market activity. Weber deviates from the purely impersonal type in favor of implicitly incorporating consubstantiality between market interactions and relations with subjective meanings typically associated with other, personal types of social action. This inadequacy (i.e., Weber’s abandoning the impersonal market whenever he discusses actual markets), we argue, is a reason to criticize the purely impersonal ideal-typical market in Weber (and in others) in favor of one that takes into account the ways markets can both personalize and depersonalize our exchange relationships.

While others have explored Weber’s economic sociology and even his view of market relationships, the inconsistency between Weber’s account of the impersonal nature of the ideal-typical market relationships and his use of an alternate ideal type when in his applied sociology and history (even within *Economy and Society*) has not been highlighted. For instance, Swedberg’s (1994, cf. Swedberg 2000) analysis of the division within Weber of the distinction between competition and exchange interactions acknowledges the impersonality of markets as a distinctive feature but does not otherwise comment upon this aspect. In *Max Weber and the Idea of Economy Sociology* (Swedberg 1998), the impersonal nature of the market is similarly noted but not seen as problematic to the coherence of Weber’s economic sociology. Gane’s (2012) discussion of Weber’s conception of the market likewise identifies the impersonality of exchange relationships, and notes this may be of particular interest.
given the increasing prevalence of exchange in which one (or both) counterparties are computers executing trading algorithms. Gane’s assessment of that concept primarily addresses another aspect of Weber’s account of market social action: whether the significance of crowd behavior (particularly in the context of stock and commodity exchanges) implies the predominance of mere imitation rather than meaningfully-oriented social action. Similarly, Kangas (2009) discusses the congruence between the social conceptions of the market between Weber, Adam Smith, and F.A. Hayek, noting their similar discussions of the market’s impersonal nature. Our analysis also compliments other works focusing on particular tensions or omissions within Weber’s theoretical structure (Runciman 2001; Oakes 2003; Barbalet 2010).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents an account of the ideal type of the market as a purely impersonal social relationship, drawn from the fragmentary chapter on the market and related passages in Economy and Society. Next, Section 3 examines other discussions of market relationships and economic activity in Weber, and argues that the inadequate nature of the ideal type of the purely impersonal market relationships is reflected by its absence when he relates market activity to other elements of his wide-ranging thought on sociological concepts and historical cases. Section 4 concludes that the greater conceptual understanding given by the (implicit) ideal type that Weber in fact employs (rather than the one advanced in the fragment in Economy and Society) suggests that a purely impersonal view of market activity should be criticized in favor of this alternate one that is also advanced by Weber.

2. ‘The most impersonal relationship of practical life’¹
Weber’s Impersonal Typification

2.1. The Impersonal Market Ethic
The fragmentary chapter on the market² within Economy and Society describes one particular ideal typification of the nature of market activity. Despite its fragmentary nature and brevity, the description it presents, as we will see, is referred to in numerous other discussions in the work and so serves as one foundational source for an exposition of Weber’s description of the sociologically relevant elements of

markets. This section will explore the picture of the nature of market relationships discussed in this fragment, and connect it with discussions elsewhere in *Economy and Society* to present the elements of this ideal-typical market in Weber’s thought. Foremost among these elements is that the market occupies a distinct theoretical space, as the ‘archetype of all rational social action’, in which the market itself is conceived as ‘a coexistence and sequence of rational consociations’ (Weber 1978: 635).

These rational consociations are, thus, a particular (and peculiar) form of social relationship for Weber, one of the maximally limited temporal duration, as in this account each particular such consociation in the sequence ‘ceases to exist with the act of exchanging the goods’ (635) and even during its brief existence is dominated by ‘its matter-of-factness, its orientation to the commodity and only to that’ (636). The most distinctive characteristic of market social activity, haggling,\(^3\) emerges in full when these relations are concentrated in a single physical location, but even then haggling is a social action (that is, oriented towards the existence and actions of others) only insofar as one’s bargaining must take into account the potential actions of any and all potential competitors.\(^4\)

Along with this concern for one’s competitors, the other feature of market exchange that constitutes social action is the use of money, since the willingness to accept money payment or the desire to acquire monetary balances is dependent upon the socially oriented expectation that the particular money at hand will continue to function as a commonly accepted medium of exchange. However, the social relation between all users of the same monetary unit, Weber emphasizes, ‘is the exact counterpart to any consociation through rationally agreed or imposed norms’ (636). The initially puzzling nature of this claim is best understood in reference to Weber’s discussion (29-30) of action orientations, that is those structures of subjective meaning that are typically regular among a group, and that give rise to observed uniformities in action based in those meanings. In that discussion, Weber distinguishes between uniformities

\(^3\) Referred to in the 1978 translation as ‘dickering’.

\(^4\) In an interesting juxtaposition from theories of perfect competition, for Weber the greater the extent of these potential competitors that must be taken into account, the more market bargaining constitutes social albeit impersonal action. In theories of perfect competition, by contrast, the greater the amount of other competitors involved in a market, the less any individual consumer or firm engages in Weberian social action.
based in conventional practice or habituation to custom, and those based instead ‘entirely on the fact that the corresponding type of social action is in the nature of the case best adapted to the normal interests of the actors as they themselves are aware of them’ (30). The ‘rationalization’ (30) of social action as more of it becomes oriented towards recognition of the instrumentally useful nature of certain forms of conduct, and thus away from customary practice, explains group formation based on monetary exchange’s position with respect to group formation based on imposed norms, insofar as those norms are often ‘imposed’ by the force of traditional modes of association and notions of community. The antipathy to group formation based on rationally agreed upon norms also rests on this process, since orientation to consciously pursued self-interest ‘by no means exhausts the concept of rationalization of action’ (30), with deliberate selection of ‘ultimate values’ (30) being one of the primary alternative modes of rationalization. The modes of association and conduct associated with devotion to rationally adopted values are thus fundamentally opposed to their counterparts based in economic rationality as each represents a mutually incompatible subjective meaning-construct when traditional or customary orientation diminishes in importance. Unless, of course, the set of values rationally adopted and towards which social action was therefore oriented were those of economic self-interest, in which case only the process of development would distinguish one from the other. As Weber explains, ‘At the fully developed stage, the so-called money economy, the resulting situation looks as if it has been created by a set of norms established for the very purpose of bringing it into being’ (636).  

The particular content of the subjective meaning-construct in the ‘rational, purposeful pursuit of interests’ (636) that determines market behavior is, according to Weber, opposed to personality and fraternity, as mentioned above, because of the focus within the exchange relationship on the commodity. One source of this exclusive orientation towards the exchanged objects (and thus not towards the counterparty) is the interconnected nature of all market exchanges since each individual instance of exchange is based in the consciously

5. Without inclusion of both deliberate and emergent processes of rationalization of social action within the typology Weber develops, it would be unable to capture Weber’s own observation made here in the fragment. (We thank the editor for drawing attention to the composition history of these sections and therefore to the potential significance of this point.)
pursued self-interest of each party, and self-interest requires consideration of the alternative exchange opportunities potentially available. Given the economic processes of price determination, rational pursuit of self-interest thus requires making decisions based on the aggregated and often totally anonymous interests reflected in the current structure of relative prices, information oriented towards the alternative uses the economic objects at stake could be deployed towards, and indifferent towards the relation between the current parties to the trade. Such personal relations, ‘obligations of brotherliness or reverence…would just obstruct the free development of the bare market relationship, and its specific interests serve, in their turn, to weaken the sentiments on which these obstructions rest’ (636).

This is not to read Weber as seeing the market as a perpetual Hobbesian jungle of anything-goes, since the same orientation of deliberately pursued self-interest that creates money economies also gives rise to norms of conduct that regulate the ‘competition for economic advantages in exchange relationships’, since such relationships are ‘bound…by the order governing the market’ (38). But even the adherence to and legitimacy of these regulations are based upon the recognition of the instrumental value of ‘good faith and fair dealing’ to the future deliberate pursuit of self-interest in the market. When this instrumental orientation of interests is absent, as in the case of groups that are not regularly engaged in economic transactions, the subjective orientation towards the regulative legitimacy of market ethics⁶ is replaced by a notion that exchange is ‘an activity in which the sole question is: who will cheat whom’ (638).

The internally impersonal orientation of participants in the market nexus of exchanges also acts as a force leading to the perpetual expansion of the sphere of economic relationships, thus increasing the opportunities for gains from trade, specialization and division of labor, and rendering the production and exchange of economic resources more deliberately oriented towards satisfaction of ends. This ‘continuous onslaught of the market community’ (638) seeks to remove all traditional restrictions on exchange, and indeed only to restrict exchange when the economic self-interest of individuals coincides in such a way as to enable them to deliberately establish a monopoly. As Weber

6. That this ethic is legitimate even when breached by regular participants is suggested by the way most individuals engaged in breaches of economic honesty orient themselves. Just as Weber points out that the burglar indicates the sociological legitimacy of the criminal law by concealing his activities, the deceptions involved in situations of economic fraud demonstrates the legitimacy of the market ethic.
explains, ‘the beneficiary of a monopoly by a status group restricts, and maintains his power against, the market, while the rational economic monopolist rules through the market’ (639).

One final element of the nature of the market ethos and the market community that renders it antithetical to personal community is the complete rejection of the use of coercion in market exchange: since ‘rational free-market exchange... constitutes a compromise of opposed but complementary interests’, the orientation of action is always towards a recognition of that complimentary and opportunity for gain, and away from the use of force, either towards outsiders or within the market community, as a means of resolving those opposed interests, something reflected both in his conclusion of the fragment as well as in his taxonomy of the sociological features of economic action. As Weber writes, ‘The appropriation of goods through free, purely economically rational exchange, as Oppenheimer has said again and again, is the conceptual opposite of appropriation of goods by coercion of any kind, but especially physical coercion, the regulated exercise of which is the very constitutive element of the political community’ (640). And, ‘The use of force is unquestionably very strongly opposed to the spirit of economic action in the usual sense. Hence the term ‘economic action’ will not be applied to the direct appropriation of goods by force and the direct coercion of the other party by threats of force’ (64). The market basis in deliberate pursuit of interests in the fragment is consistent with Weber’s later account of economic rationalization, which reaches its culmination in situations of monetary calculation and explicit capital accounting. We see similar continuity in the antagonism of market action to coercion in his discussion of the institutional preconditions for the maximally deliberate state of affairs (161-62) predicated upon the absence of structures that restrict the ability to engage in voluntary economic exchanges, or that subject the outcome of those exchanges to potential challenges from non-economic considerations.  

7. The extent to which this element of the essence of market activity is in tension with the treatment of the rational economic monopolization of opportunities for economic advantage is not explored here.

8. These conditions are: (1) complete market freedom, (2) complete autonomy of managerial functions, (3) free labor and an unregulated labor market, (4) complete substantive freedom of contract, (5) mechanically rational technology to facilitate calculation of technical conditions, (6) a completely formally rational administration of law, (7) a complete separation between personal and enterprise budgets, (8) a monetary system of maximum formal rationality.
2.2. Sources of Social Antagonism towards Markets

As mentioned above, the orientation of the deliberate pursuit of self-interest in the market towards considerations of exchange and the objects of exchange in an impersonal manner is essential in understanding the antagonism of particular social groups and social orders towards economic or commercial considerations. What Weber refers to as status groups, systems of religious ethics, and the simple community of the rural neighborhood, all rely upon a structure of relationships founded in personal characteristics and reciprocal obligations of conduct based in the nature of those characteristics. The nature of these personal characteristics and reciprocal obligations of conduct not only cannot be reconciled with the market’s orientation towards conduct based in deliberate pursuit of self-interest, but also, insofar as it presents a static and stereotyped division of economic advantages, any expansion of the sphere of conduct pursued in markets would be viewed as destabilizing. Thus, as Weber points out, periods of economic or technological dynamism tend to increase the subjective meaningfulness of divisions based on current economic status (that is, class divisions) rather than those based on personal status (938).

Indeed, the entire nature of status groups versus that of classes, as defined by Weber, illustrates the conflict between the personalized and impersonalized understandings of social action. Class ‘membership’ is based in one’s current economic situation and is created from ‘only those interests involved in the existence of the market’ (928). Membership in a class requires no personal relationship with any other class member, and any personal relationships that do exist between class members likely do not have subjective meaning to the participants as being in virtue of ‘class identity’. In contrast, status groups, as Weber emphasizes, are usually in fact groups, and relationships based in notions of status groups or status-honor are subjectively understood as such. The establishment of these groups, and the regulation of acceptable forms of social relationships internal to the group and between individuals of different statuses, also puts status groups in tension with the economic orientation to engage in whatever seems to be the appropriate action to deliberately pursue one’s self-interest whenever status-based regulations would prevent otherwise undertaken exchanges.

Feudal systems, similarly, based in an ethos of status honor and where social relationships of fealty dominate, tend to view economic relationships as ‘undignified and vulgar’ (1105). Feudal systems are
distinct in that, while this clash between personal status honor and the status-blind orientation towards economic advantage is present, it represents only one part of the sources Weber identifies for the antagonism between the two systems: the other is dominance of individual, rather than collective military technology, which shapes the entire constellations of subjective meaning of the knightly status groups away from fundamental elements of the market ethos. These include ostentation over utility in consumption as well as ideal-ized rather than functional understandings of social and individual action, on top of the obvious conflict between the emphasis on individual martial skill and the aversion to physical coercion essential to the market (1105-106). Perhaps the only ideal-typical social organization that has strong affinities with the impersonal character of the market, for Weber, is his characterization of the rational administrative bureau, whose push towards objectivity in the conduct of administration also depersonalizes the relationship between an official acting in his administrative capacity and anything outside the formal rules of his office. For the bureaucrat, both his own personal life and the personalized treatment ‘due’ to status groups is removed when subject to universal bureaucratic domination. The drive towards action ‘without regard for persons’ (975) is shared between the market and the bureaucratic administration, and indeed, the market economy for Weber is the primary source for ‘demands that the official business of public administration be discharged precisely, unambiguously, continuously, and with as much speed as possible’ (974).

Although requiring a different set of obligations between individuals in social relationships than that of feudal status-honor, the impersonal orientation of the market stands directly at odds with the subjective meanings given to relationships by religious ethical systems.

Beyond the tendency for commerce to lead to breakdown in traditional authority, including that of religious commands (as has been noted at least since Plato), the market’s impersonality presents an existential threat to the religious law’s extension of the

9. This relationship between the market and a formally rational administrative bureaucracy is not the only area where the two structures are linked for Weber, as both represent systems concerned with formal, predictable legal rules rather than the ‘substantive’ jurisprudence he associates with systems of ‘kadi-justice’. The commodity orientation shares with the legal specialist ‘matter-of-factness’, although interestingly contrasted in the legal case with the ‘interest orientation’ of jurors (892).
neighborhood’s ethic of mutual assistance represented to the sacred community of believers.\(^{10}\) For Weber, any social relationship that is personal can be subjected by the religious ethic to its regulatory power over intrapersonal conduct, which becomes all but impossible ‘in the realm of economically rationalized relationships, where personal control is exercised in inverse ratio to the degree of rational differentiation of the economic structure’ (585).\(^{11}\) Weber’s elaboration of this point culminates in his explanation of the nature of the effect of the elimination of the personalized relationships that could be regulated by sacred ethical dictates, and is quoted in full:

There is no possibility, in practice or even in principle, of any caritative regulation of relationships arising between the holder of a savings and loan bank mortgage and the mortgagee who has obtained a loan from the bank, or between a holder of a federal bond and a citizen taxpayer. Nor can any caritative regulation arise in the relationships between stockholders and factory workers, between tobacco importers and foreign plantation workers, or between industrialists and the miners who have dug from the earth the raw materials used in the plants owned by the industrialists. The growing impersonality of the economy on the basis of association in the market place follows its own rules, disobedience to which entails economic failure, and, in the long run, economic ruin.

Rational economic association always brings about depersonalization, and it is impossible to control a universe of instrumentally rational activities by charitable appeals to particular individuals. The functionalized world of capitalism certainly offers no support for any such charitable orientation. In it the claims of religious charity are vitiated not merely because of the refractoriness and weakness of particular individuals, as it happens everywhere, but because they lose their meaning altogether (585).

10. We can see this in Weber’s description of interest paid to lenders of capital as being characteristically impersonal within his explanation of the stock and commodity exchanges intended for the lay audience (Weber 2000a). Interest-payments outside of the capitalist economy were, Weber points out, rooted in a differential of status between the two parties such as conqueror/conquered or lord/serf and would therefore involve knowledge of the individual to whom one owed or was owed by. The presence of the interposing institutions of banking and finance render the obligation and receipt of interest impersonal, in this account via making borrower and lender unknown to each other, as well as by making their identities beyond their contractual obligations irrelevant.

11. To what extent this claim is accurate about the relationship between personal control (however it is interpreted) and the extent of division of labor presents an interesting series of questions, but it is primarily important here insofar as Weber thought it accurate enough to base his argument upon it.
Given Weber’s pervasive use of the antagonism between the personalized nature of these social organizations with the impersonality of the market, his discussion of the relationship between charismatic authority and economic considerations actually presents somewhat of a puzzle: despite the fact that charismatic authority represents the ultimate in personalized relationship, the impersonality of the market that features so prominently in these other discussions is absent. Charisma and the ethos of the market, particularly ‘rational everyday economizing, the attainment of a regular income by continuous economic activity devoted to this end’ (244), are still opposed, but as the quotation suggests, it is the continuity and routine of the economic pursuit that put it at odds with the revolutionary novelty the presence of the charismatic figure introduces into social life among the charismatic community of followers. Whatever the reason why impersonality is absent in Weber’s discussion, social relations based on impersonal considerations deprive charismatic authority of meaning even more directly than in the case of religious duties, rendering as it does the entire basis of the authority a moot irrelevance to the deliberate pursuit of self-interest by market participants oriented towards competitive prices of commodities. The additional elements of the organization of charismatic communities that often sets them as opposed to economic orientations, such as the granting of legitimacy to acquisition of resources by force, or the rejection of any predictable or systematic approach to legal conduct, seem in light of this feature to be byproducts rather than independent features. The final distinguishing feature of the relation between charisma and economic activity and its market ethos is that the subjective orientation of the charismatic community towards ‘acquisitive acts’ is one of ‘complete emotional indifference’ (245). This indifference serves to differentiate pure charismatic communities from the organizations that result from the transformation (particularly when it results in rationalization) of charisma: Weber’s contrast between the antipathy between ecclesiastical courts and

12. Although for the elements of charisma that manifest in modern economic systems see the discussion of ‘robber capitalism’ (1118) as the commercial manifestation of the colonial/exploitative enterprise.

13. Supporting the charismatic sect via residual income is in some sense indicative of this same indifference, insofar as this is, from the point of view of the sect, an endowment ‘brought in’ to the charismatic community- the transition of a charismatically organized community to operation as a stable landlord would then factor into the routinization of the charismatic order.
capitalist interests (1186), and the ‘complete eschatological indifference’ (1187) towards economic affairs evidenced in the New Testament serves as a particularly clear instance of this differentiation.14

3. The Impersonal Market as Insufficient:
Weber’s Abandonment of the Impersonal Ideal-Type

In judging the value of any particular formulation of an ideal type, the basis for evaluation is the usefulness of that typification for rendering meaningful aspects of concrete historical cases in which the phenomenon is present. Considered in this way, the ideal type of market relationships as ephemeral and impersonal exchanges of commodities is highly useful in understanding the perennial tension between economic interests and the opportunities for mutual gain through exchange, as well as social groups and ideals that rely on the maintenance of certain forms of conduct despite (or because) they are contrary to the interests of at least some involved parties. However, if the desired object of study is the everyday experiences of engaging in commercial and market activity, the impersonal typification is incomplete since the day to day subjective meanings within economic relationships are, in many respects, experienced as personal relationships of lasting duration. The best argument for recognition of the limitations of this ideal type in accounting for these meanings-structures is given by Weber’s own discussions of economic action in which these elements are ever-present.

It is additionally important to note that, in contrast to some of the other presentations of the market that embrace impersonality as an essential feature, Weber emphatically does not consider impersonality to be identical with the claim that economic behavior is or ought to be atomistic. That these social relationships are always abstractions of certain types of subjective meanings that enter into action by particular individuals also implies, as Weber points out (27), that the character of a social relationship need not be identical between the two parties involved, or indeed need not have any such meaning to one party at all, so long as the expectations of the acting individual

14. This distinction does suggest one possible, but not entirely satisfactory, resolution to the absence of the impersonality from the discussion of pure charismatic authority: the subjective indifference of the pure charismatic community rests partially in the limited temporal duration, and only in the process of routinization does the incompatibility become a pressing concern.
are oriented toward what they perceive is the relationship between them and the (totally oblivious) other.15

4.1. The Sociological Relevance of Contractual Relationships
One of the first instances of Weber’s modification of the ideal type when examining actual commercial behavior comes from the conceptual distinctions and terminology developed in the opening chapter of *Economy and Society*. In distinguishing between communal relationships (built upon emotional or traditional feelings of community) and associative relationships (based on a congruence of interests recognized by the parties), Weber does present the ‘rational free market exchange, which constitutes a compromise of opposed but complementary interests’ (Weber 1978: 41) as a purely associative relationship, but in the subsequent paragraph uses commercial relationships and communality arising within them as an implied *a fortiori* for the pervasive intermingling of the two sorts. ‘No matter how calculating and hard-headed the ruling considerations in such a social relationship—as that of a merchant to his customers—may be, it is quite possible for it to involve emotional values which transcend its utilitarian significance. Every social relationship which goes beyond the pursuit of immediate common ends, which hence lasts for long periods, involves relatively permanent social relationships between the same persons, and these cannot be exclusively confined to the technically necessary activities’ (Weber 1978: 41).

The implication for examination of market activity when such extended periods of interaction are a plurality if not the norm, can only be that our understanding of markets, and the subjective meanings of the individuals who are acting in market contexts, cannot be complete when examined entirely through an ideal-typical lens that treats that context as the antipode of these meanings. The patterned, regular orientation of economic activity may originate from the fact that it is in the mutual interest of the parties to act in a certain

15. One important implication of this is that a sociologically relevant relationship can occur even when, from a sociological perspective, one side of it is incapable of ever having the sort of action orientations that would be expected of it given the belief in a relationship. In the commercial context, this means that entities like corporations or brands, which have no independent existence and so cannot act, can still be entities that individuals have relationships towards (with?), and that are perceived as being toward (with?) that entity, which can create expectations of action orientation for third parties (employees, for instance,) only insofar as they represent agents of the corporate entity.
fashion, rather than any customary practice or deliberate agreement (and as a result situations of exchange can be self-enforcing), but it is the social relations that arise from each member of the market community’s deliberate pursuit of their self-interest that acts as the soil out of which other, more communally-oriented sentiments, grow. Weber’s characterization of the modern market system of his own time period, for instance, is that ‘a modern market economy essentially consists in a complete network of exchange contracts, that is, in deliberate planned acquisitions of powers of control and disposal’ (Weber 1978: 67). That the essential components of the market system are contractual relationships already suggests the insufficiency of the impersonal ideal typification, both with respect to the temporal structure of relationship formation and dissolution, and the orientation within the relationships of the parties towards each other.

Recall, that in the fragment on the market in Economy and Society, Weber presents the market relationships, those underlying social actions whose ‘coexistence and sequence’ (Weber 1978: 635) constitute the market, are of a particularly limited temporal nature. While exchanges are connected to the rest of the market community through the consideration of the general interests of all potentially interesting parties, and the use of a common monetary standard, the essential relationships in the pure market arise from the meeting of two potential exchange partners, the haggling that proceeds the exchange, and then the formal completion of the act of exchanging.

16. The underlying term (Verfuegungsgewalt) here translated as ‘powers of control and disposal’ is intended to emphasize the predication of these economic activities upon the acquisition of the needed powers, in this case via the legal system of property rights: ‘the modern economic order under modern conditions could not continue if its control of resources were not upheld by the legal compulsion of the state’ (Weber 1978: 65). Cf. Swedberg and Agevall (2016:98-99) whose discussion of this term is part of their entry on ‘economic power’. We find precisely such a network described in Weber’s (2000b: 351-53) illustration of the operation of commodity futures exchanges, in which ‘under the influence of the most diverse interests and expectations of those taking part [Persons] (A, B, C, D, E), there develops a series of sales and purchases, which are interlinked, one to the other’ (Weber 2000b: 352). For many of these individuals, their mutual participation in the chain of transactions mediating between production and the ultimate purchaser is the only connection between them, oriented purely towards the objects of exchange as per the fragment. The inadequacy of that typification we suggest arises in the numerous cases where the parties to particular transactions taking place along such a chain are not only known to one another, but also meaningful to those participants beyond its significance for the disposition of the goods to be exchanged.
After the exchange has taken place, Weber states that the relationship is terminated except, Weber notes, in the case of the existence of warranties or other such ongoing obligations regarding the commodities exchanged. Absent the presence of such obligations or the need to invoke them, however, the culmination of the bargaining process in a realized exchange signals the termination of the relationship between the two parties.17 This highly limited relationship, bounded in duration clearly reinforces the orientation of market relationships towards only the objects of exchange, an orientation which in turn serves to explain why these relationships terminate abruptly with the completion of exchange in the impersonal ideal type of markets. Even if, as discussed above, sentiments outside those technically necessary activities would emerge given enough time, the meeting, haggling, and exchange is in the pure ideal typification of the market too brief to give rise to any such additional affective meanings.

This neat portrayal, however, breaks down in a market economy dominated not by temporally limited commodity exchanges that arise, are consummated, and vanish, but by systematically planned contractual relationships, which are often of a long if not indeterminate duration. Perhaps the most obvious sources of deviation among contracts for the above-mentioned ‘acquisition of powers and control and disposal’ (Weber 1978: 67) are employment contracts. Even if labor contracts create the same temporally-limited relationships as exchanges of commodities, and so terminate with the completion of the exchange, the performance in between agreement and that terminal point can be weeks, months, or years. The opportunity for (or perhaps, inevitability of) relationships of such duration to evolve to contain both the associative pursuit of common interests in the gains from the ongoing exchange and some personal feelings of affection or community seems to become an unavoidable part of economic interaction, and so makes the use of an ideal type which is notable for its explicit exclusion problematic. Only in a few, highly structured environments such as the stock and commodity exchanges are the contractual relationships of the starkly limited type implied in the ideal typical market. And, even here the relationships between

17. At least as directly towards one another: insofar as they both use the same monetary system or remain as potential counterparties to exchanges they enter indirectly in subsequent action, but the relationship based in the act of exchanging itself has no durability: having consummated the transaction each party fades back into the impersonal mass of interests that comprise the market community.
brokers and clients, brokers and the investment banks that employee them, and brokers and exchanges where they trade are temporally-limited but long-lived.¹⁸

4.2. Economically Conditioned Formation of Community and Identity and Economically Relevant Aspects of Community and Identity

Still another form of relationship in the market dealt with by Weber is that between the many competitors who remain consistently within the same industry. Again here there is a long-term structure of relationships that exists in the market, and has elements that fundamentally reflect the simultaneous potential coordination and opposition of interests between members of the same trade. In the market’s impersonal typification, these interests are presented by Weber as a rational, economic monopoly, in opposition to the monopolies and restrictions on competitive activity created outside the market by status groups or other figures. Thus, even the tendency for the formation of cartel or monopolistic arrangements, argues Weber, is dominated ultimately within the pure market by the creation of formally free competition subject to deliberate economic domination by ‘purely economically conditioned monopolies’ (Weber 1978: 639). Yet, the same considerations of interest that bring forth this sort of monopoly in Weber’s impersonal market ideal type, in other passages in Economy and Society act to create different sorts of relationships.

Guilds, for instance, are a constant feature of Weber’s historical accounts of the development of economic and social life, and are instructive in the extent to which Weber’s analysis of real, historical monopolization of economic resources requires deviation from the impersonal market ideal type to an account of markets which takes seriously the personal aspects of economic relationships, even those formed on the basis of ‘rational closure on grounds of expediency’ (Weber 1978: 44). While the closure of access to guild membership

¹⁸. Weber’s treatment of the economic organization of labor in Chapter 2 of Economy & Society differentiates between types of economic activity along two dimensions: what determines the organization of economic functions, and who is able to appropriate the resulting advantages. In the main, therefore, it provides a description of alternative structures of economic power. These structures do not exclude the possibility that the relationships involved may ‘soften’ into ones with more personal meaning, as suggested by Weber in the quotation already referenced on durable relationships (Weber 1978: 41). (We thank the editor for drawing our attention to this point.)
after some initial period of formation is instrumentally required to ensure that the interest of the guild membership in securing monopolized advantages is retained, Weber notes that this is rarely the sole motivation for closure, but is combined with ideas of quality, prestige and honor (Weber 1978: 46). The guild, as a historical type of organized group based in economic interest, cannot be understood adequately using the ‘purely economically conditioned’ typification developed in the impersonal typification of the market, something Weber notes explicitly in his discussion of groups. As he writes, ‘voluntary organizations tend to transcend their rational primary purpose and to create relationships among the participants that may have quite different goals. As a rule, an overarching communal relationship attaches itself to the association’ (Weber 1978: 346).

While this, Weber notes, requires some personal contact between group members, these overarching communal relationships present an element in need of understanding within existing market systems. Although Weber himself recognized that it was necessary to focus on this personal element in order to understand historical markets, he nonetheless discarded and closed off consideration of this element when he treated the market as a space antiseptic to any relationship not based in immediate congruence of interest. Relationships both within and between groups are apt to be subject to transformation. When a group or individual has, in virtue of the circumstances of interest-situations involved, established a position of domination over others, such as in an economic relationship, Weber notes the possibility that the relationship becomes one characterized by domination and authority, where commands are not followed because of the deliberate pursuit of interest but because of a subjectively felt duty towards the issuer of commands (Weber 1978: 943-44).

Moreover, the pure orientation of individuals in the market to the commodity which features prominently in the fragment on the market also represents an element of the nature of market relationships that cannot be seen as adequate when considered in light of Weber’s own work. Even within the same fragmentary chapter, for instance, Weber points out that the orientation towards the commodity, the ‘rigorous conceptions’ (Weber 1978: 636) of ethical obligations regarding the inviolable nature of exchange commitments that constitutes ‘such absolute depersonalization’, (Weber 1978: 637) are themselves norms that can differ between individuals. The ability to rely upon the discipline of repeated dealings, assumed as one
element of the background to the market ethic, is a feature of one’s counterparty. Status groups or others outside the sphere of regular exposure to commerce, for instance, often view exchange in a different light, ‘as an activity in which the sole question is: who will cheat whom’ (Weber 1978: 638). Orientation purely towards the commodity then, takes place upon a backdrop whereby the personal qualities of the counterparty can be assumed.19

Elsewhere Weber uses examples that highlight even more clearly the importance of personal characteristics to the structure of expectations in exchange. Membership in a group with a social reputation can often serve as a qualification that gives one’s potential exchange partners confidence that honest dealing can be expected. And, as Weber notes in the course of his numerous examples, sometimes membership in the relevant group is the only qualification needed or accepted. As Weber describes, ‘A person who wants to open a bank joins the Baptists or Methodists, for everybody knows that baptism, respectively admission, is preceded by an examen rigorosum… if the result of the inquiry is positive, credit-worthiness is guaranteed, and in countries like the United States personal credit is almost unthinkable on any other basis’ (Weber 1978: 1206).20 Again, the impersonal market typification is not adequate to understanding the structure of exchanges conducted in a context resembling the situation described by Weber. Weber’s abandonment of the purely impersonal reaches a particular height when the defining features of a concrete historical type of economic organization, the ‘urban local market’ are ‘its exchange between agricultural and non-agricultural producers and local traders, its personal customer relationships, and its low-capital small shops’ (Weber 1978: 1220). Note that the purely impersonal type does not enter into his description of this organization.21

19. In addition there are instances where the fact that one is explicitly not oriented towards the other party as a commodity but as a person is of great sociological significance, such as Weber’s discussion of the sociological role of the attorney (1978: 875).

20. In these contexts, the assessment and establishment of credit-worthiness required more than impersonal connections. As a result, individuals required recourse to alternative means by which trust could be established. (We thank the editor for raising this point.)

21. Similarly, the impersonal type seems to be unable, conceptually, to include individuals who enter the market with particular orientations derived from other social relationships of the sort Weber himself employed in his work on the Protestant Ethic. Instead, these economically relevant features of religion must be reflections of the various ethics developed in opposition to the impersonal market.
Finally, Weber’s sophisticated account of political economy deals realistically with the relational nature of political exchange, such as his identification of the constant interest of organized groups of producers to secure legal protection for their monopolization of economic opportunities (Weber 1978: 638). The relative success of the monopolistic impulse against the market’s general push towards increasing formal freedom of market activity and the removal of status restrictions partially determine how political and economic groups interact in any given social setting. The formal and status-leveling characteristics of bureaucratic administration in Weber often align well with the expansionist/competitive impulses of the market, but for groups that have already established a monopoly or are engaged in an attempt to gain non-economic sanction such as legal or religious protection for such a restriction, personal relationships with individuals with authority can be key instruments. This is yet another avenue where, to understand market activity, personal relationships need to be taken into account. Discussing the attitudes of economic interests towards separation of powers, for instance, Weber notes,

Collegiality of legal bodies with rationally defined functions may be favorable to objectivity and the absence of personal influences in their administrative actions. Even if such collegiality has a negative influence because it functions imprecisely, the general effect may favor the rationality of economic activity. On the other hand, the big capitalistic interests of the present day, like those of the past, are apt, in political life—in parties and in all other connections that are important to them—to prefer monocracy. For monocracy is, from their point of view, more ‘discreet’. The monocratic chief is more open to personal influence and is more easily swayed, thus making it more readily possible to influence the administration of justice and other governmental activity in favor of such powerful interests (Weber 1978: 283-84).

The fragmentary presentation of the ethos of the market is a useful ideal type for understanding certain elements of the incentive structure created by the presence of economic opportunities, and for the tensions that result from the interaction of those structures and social organizations such as organized, rationalized religious ethical systems or groups with traditional privileges derived from membership in particular groups. But, as a basis upon which to examine historical market systems, Weber himself implicitly concedes the insufficiency of the purely impersonal type. To understand the subjective meanings that characterize real-world market relationships, the various ways interaction in the commercial sphere enables and
forms relationships based in personal relations is needed just as much as the understanding of how markets pressure for the abandonment of such personal relationships in order to engage in the deliberate pursuit of self-interest.

5. Like Weber, we Should Adopt an Ideal-Type that is Actually Useful for Understanding Commercial Societies

Ideal types are instrumentally constructed and so are justified as conceptual shortcuts only insofar as they give focus to the examination of a phenomena and aid in our understanding. Weber’s explicit presentation of the character of the market presents one such candidate ideal type, one that shares its defining feature, the contrast of the impersonal realm of the market and some alternative sphere of community or fraternity, with many other depictions of the nature of economic activity. This typification, while useful, is limited in its applicability. In purging market relationships of any content outside the deliberate pursuit of interests by haggling and exchange, Weber overlooked the elements of market activity which, in other discussions, he identified as giving rise to tendencies for economic interaction to produce personal/communal relationships. This limitation is revealed keenly by Weber’s own abandonment of the purely impersonal market type when confronting economic relationships and economically derived groups’ historical features, in favor of an ideal type where impersonalizing and personalizing features coexist in tension. The point here is that this alternate ideal type is not just a more concrete version of the impersonal market built from the more abstract type that Weber advances in the fragment. Instead, the argument is that Weber is not simply adding the possibility of personal relationships to the impersonal market ideal type but is utilizing an alternate typification when he discusses market activity. In fact, adding a personal realm to the impersonal market type is not really an option available to Weber since, recall, he has described the exchange relationship as ‘the most impersonal relationship of practical life’.

A more useful ideal type of the market is suggested by Weber’s efforts to understand market activity in commercial societies. In these accounts, the market can be seen as a sphere within which social action is given an orientation towards continual expansion of the members of the exchange community, towards the elimination of traditional limitations on exchanges, towards the production and exchange of commodities within an ordered market. Yet, at
the same time, the same sequence of rational exchange agreements that creates those orientations also give rise to durable relationships. Additionally, rational exchange agreements on this account generate situations where group interests call for attempts to create new restrictions on exchange to insulate against competition, including via the development of new types of personal status relationships, such as those between members of a guild or professional association, or that between an entrepreneur and the venture capitalist who has taken on the role of ‘angel’ investor. Recognition both of the ways in which market interactions give rise to these kinds of social action as alongside impersonal haggling over the terms of exchange gives us an ideal type more suited to understanding economic activity as it takes place.

References


Work and Personality in Flexible Capitalism

Vincenzo Mele

Abstract
The focus of this article is the relation between work and personality in flexible capitalism. The concept of work still represents one of the major factors determining modern individuals’ ability (or inability) to formulate personal, stable identities that enable them to become fully socialized. Both Georg Simmel and Max Weber among the classics of German sociology make reference to a common theoretical background that views the human being as a creature with originally rational potential, who is faced with the task of becoming a personality by means of consciously chosen life behaviour. Drawing from classic as well as contemporary sociological theory, the article explores the two spheres of identity and work in flexible capitalism. Despite the complexity of modern subjectivity and the great number of its affiliations, the sphere of work still remains the de facto decisive sphere for recognition, socialization, self-esteem, and self-definition. It remains the field in which the ‘decisive plays’ for definition of subjectivity take place—and the struggle for its possible emancipation.

Keywords: personality, Simmel, Weber, work, identity.

Work, Personality, Character
The focus of this article is the relation between work—in the sense of labour—and personality. Although somewhat neglected in the academic debate before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall (together with the idea of Socialism), the concept of work has gained new attention with the recent global financial crisis. Together with the consciousness of the limitations of ‘Postmodern turn’ (Susen 2015), it has raised a new awareness that ‘work’ still represents one of the major factors determining modern individuals’ ability (or inability)

to formulate personal, stable identities that enable them to become fully socialized, the bearers of both rights and duties and, moreover, recognized from the perspective of their personal abilities and dignity. Ten years before the financial crisis of 2008, U.S. sociologist Richard Sennett provided arguably the best known treatment of the relevant issue. In his now-classic book, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (Sennett 1998), he focuses on the ‘liaisons dangereuses’ between new work patterns and the consequent risks to the development of personal identity. He uses the term *character* in a highly pregnant sense, to include all the connotations that current usage would ascribe to ‘personality’ as well. There is, however, a distinction: whereas personality ‘concerns desires and sentiments which may fester within, witnessed by no one else’, the concept of character instead:

> focuses upon the long-term aspect of our emotional experience. Character is expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment, or through the pursuit of long-term goals, or by the practice of delayed gratification for the sake of a future end. Out of the confusion of sentiments in which we all dwell at any particular moment, we seek to save and sustain some; these sustainable sentiments will serve our characters. Character concerns the personal traits which we value in ourselves and for we seek to be valued by others (Sennett 1998: 10).

Character, therefore expresses permanent, or at least long-term, personality traits, without which it would be hard to imagine anyone immersed in a social fabric, who is recognized as such by himself and others. The concepts of character, person, personality, and personal identity, taken together with the more general terms individual and subjectivity, are not immediately superimposable, even if they are clearly interrelated and often used as synonyms in common parlance. As Adorno and Horkheimer noted in their *Lexicon zur Soziologie*, the concept of individual is one of the most ambiguous of those considered (Institut für Sozialforschung 1956: 40ff.). Indeed, while common sense dictates that the single individual is the fundamental biological entity that lies before the attention of the social observer, it is also a concept fraught with philosophical, ideological and cultural significance. After all, every society appears first and foremost

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2. Actually, Sennett has devoted more than one book to the subject of the formation of modern individual identity. *The Corrosion of Character* is merely a small pamphlet, a ‘long essay’ based on ‘heterogeneous, informal sources’, which should be viewed in light of his more important works, such as *The Fall of Public Man* (1974) and *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972).
as a society of individuals, in the sense each individual is a constitutive, elementary component of a society and hence it becomes difficult to view, vice versa, the individual as an ‘artifice’, a construct that is above all social and cultural. From the current perspective, it was probably Durkheim to first highlight the relation existing between social differentiation, or the division of labor, and progressive individualization. In the Conclusion to The Division of Labor in Society, Durkheim opines that ‘far from the progress of specialization whittling away the individual personality, this develops with the division of labor’ (Durkheim [1893] 2014: 314). In the modern context, human nature is able to develop in depth (unilaterally) rather than expanding in an omnicomprehensive, but superficial, way. The life of the modern individual would be ‘more specialized kind of life but one that is more intense’, above all thanks to the fact that, ‘we can thus recapture what we have lost through our association with others who posses what we lack and who make us complete beings’ (Durkheim 2014: 313). Thus, it would be pure delusion to believe that personality is more complete when the division of labor has not yet penetrated it. Life in societies where the division of labor has not yet developed allows for the individual that liberty ‘is only apparent; his personality is borrowed’ (Durkheim 2014: 314-15). Men’s activities, and therefore their personalities, ‘with greater specialization, the activity becomes richer and more intense’ (Durkheim 2014: 315).

To delve into the problematic connection between work and personality, however, requires further clarification of the modern concept of work. If we were not dealing with a radically new social phenomenon in the history of the west, the question we started off with would probably not even make any sense. Work, as we understand it in the modern sense, is a relatively recent ‘invention’:

For the essential characteristic of such work—which we ‘have’, ‘seek’ or ‘offer’—is that it is an activity in the public sphere, demanded, defined and recognized as useful by other people and, consequently, as an activity as they will pay for. It is by having paid work (more particularly, work for a wage) that we belong to the public sphere, acquire a social existence and a social identity (that is, a ‘profession’), and are part of a network of relations and exchanges in which we are measured against other people and are granted certain rights over them in exchange for the duties we have towards them. It is because work paid and determined socially is by far the most important factor of socialization—even for those who are seeking it, preparing for it or who lack it—that industrial society views itself as a ‘society of workers’ and distinguishes itself, on these grounds, from all earlier forms of society (Gorz 1989: 13-14).
Such a definition includes a series of important elements characterizing the modern concept of work, which can be summed up as follows: it is carried out in the public sphere; it is recognized as useful; it is remunerated (generally through a salary); it confers social identity, and is hence the most important factor in socialization in modern society. As Hannah Arendt warns in her *The Human Condition* ([1958] 2013), in antiquity the relation between work and the public sphere was almost completely inverted: the work necessary to satisfy basic needs was relegated to slaves and women, whom society excluded from its citizenry, that is to say, from sharing in public affairs. For citizens, ‘work’, or better ‘vita activa’, essentially consisted of participating in the affairs of the polis, that is, political life. Work was beneath the citizen, not because it was reserved for women and slaves; to contrary, it was relegated to women and slaves because to work was to be subservient to necessity, and such subservience would be accepted only by those who, like slaves, preferred their life to their freedom, thereby demonstrating their subservient nature. For this reason Plato classified farmers with slaves, and artisans, to the extent that they did not work for the city, in the public sphere, were not full citizens: ‘their chief interest being their craft and not the market place’ (Arendt 2013: 81). Liberty begins only outside the private economic sphere, the family; the sphere of liberty was the public domain of the polis. ‘The polis was distinguished from the household in that it knew only ‘equals’ whereas the household was the center of the strictest inequality’ (Arendt 2013: 81). The family had to take on ‘the necessities of life’, so that the polis could address the sphere of liberty, which is to say, disinterestedly striving for the public good and a ‘good life’. In this context, the modern idea of a ‘worker’ was inconceivable: destined to servitude and imprisonment in the domestic, ‘work’, far from conferring ‘social identity’, defined private existence and excluded from the sphere public those who had become slaves. According to André Gorz (1989: 14-15), since Plato, philosophy and philosophical thought in general have been unable to shake this assumption that liberty, and hence the ‘realm of the human’, is in strict opposition to the ‘realm of necessity’, and that work belongs to the latter: it thus has very little in common with the realm of formation of the spirit, and therefore of the person and liberty, as well. Man, in the sense of one who is able to act ethically and personally, emerges only when actions cease to be determined by bodily needs and dependence on the environment, and instead stem from self-determination alone. Karl Marx, the modern thinker who
can, with good reason, be considered he who has reflected most on the problems inherent in work and who has to some extent conferred philosophical dignity on it—in a certain sense ‘redeeming’ it—and favoring its reentry into the distant realm of the spirit, does not free himself from such conceptions: in fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases. The (wholly modern) problem of work’s contradictory relationship with the construction and maintenance of the personality arises the moment it leaves the ‘realm of necessity’ to enter ‘the realm of liberty’, which is the domain of human ends. It should not therefore come as a surprise that the concept of work is a central topic in the classics of sociology. Sociology, as the discipline of the modern was established essentially to address the problems of the dawning industrial society. Whether conceived of as the study of ‘social facts’ (Durkheim), or an attempt to build a theory of social action (Weber, Pareto), sociology mainly focuses its attention on the individual as a worker and producer.

**Work and Character in Max Weber**

In order to trace the origins of this sense of character—its special link to western culture and its development in parallel to the modern concept of work—we must return to historical classics of sociological thought, in particular to the work the work of Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and Max Weber (1864–1920). Schluchter highlighted the parallelism between the Simmel’s interest in the concept of ‘lifestyle’ (*Der Stil des Lebens*), to which he devoted the final part of his major work, the *Philosophy of Money* (1900), and Weber’s research on ‘life conduct’ (*Lebensführung*) that arose in western rationalistic culture, and was developed mainly in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–1905). According to Schluchter both Simmel and Weber make reference to a common theoretical background that views man as an originally rational creature, who is faced with the task of becoming a personality by means of consciously chosen life behavior (Schluchter 1991: 83ff.). This implies a lasting transcending of ‘self’ from life and from natural experience through a responsible decision based on values and meanings. In this context, work, as that ‘fixed ideal line between the person and his life’ (Simmel 2004: 436), carries out a decisive role. As Müller states, work is not a central concept for Weber, but he did write extensively on the subject in his oeuvre, specially into four domains: the organization of work,
occupation and social stratification, work and political community, and finally, work, personality and life style (Müller 2006: 119; Müller and Sigmund 2014: 31ff.). Sennett himself suggests Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as a fundamental source to understand western character, when he states, ‘As an economic history, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is riddled with errors… As the critique of a certain character type, however, both its purpose and its execution are coherent’ (Sennett 1998: 105). Given the recent debate over the transition to post-modern society, which has cast light on the connection between Weber and Nietzsche, it is possible to discern in Weber’s work a reflection on the formation and maintenance of the self in an age of change and polytheism of values, as also many commentators (Goldman 1988; Farris 2013) persuasively argued. In the context of such a reading, the two key terms are *Beruf* (at once ‘profession’ and ‘vocation’) and *Persönlichkeit* (‘personality’ or ‘character’). It is precisely the twofold connotations of the term *Beruf*, comprising the ‘profession’, ‘occupation’, and ‘work’ performed in industrial society, as well as one’s ‘vocation’ or ‘calling’ that explains its inextricable link to the concept of ‘personality’. By virtue of its religious connotations, *Beruf* is well-suited to forming one of the basics of the sense of existence and individual identity. Ultimately, one of Weber’s main aims was to propose a conception of ‘vocation’ and ‘personality’ that would present his contemporaries with the only hope of living a life endowed with sense in an age pervaded by cultural disorientation and desperation. In this sense, the *Protestant Ethic* can be considered the basis for Weber’s subsequent search to find a vital, binding, and effective ideal of the person, in both public and private life. Weber’s conception of vocation and personality reached its acme (and its ethical-political consequences) in his political writings and famous lectures on *Science as a Vocation* (*Wissenschaft als Beruf* 1917) and *Politics as a Vocation* (*Politik als Beruf* 1919), in which he attempted to reformulate his notions of vocation and personality by presenting them as a remedy for Germany’s crisis in political and spiritual leadership. This is one of the reasons why Weber’s thoughts remain so topical with regard to the ongoing transformations in today’s workplace. His work can provide some insights into understanding the link between work and personality, and the *risks* to the development of individuality inherent in the rationalization process of modern culture. It should not be surprising that Weber’s concept of *Beruf* was not limited to the context of liberal middle-class professions. As pointed out by English historian
Edward Thompson (1978: 121), in the 19th century even the most disadvantaged workers (poorly employed, unemployed, or continuously switching jobs from one day to the next) strove to define themselves as weavers, blacksmiths or farmers, using terms such as ‘career’, ‘profession’, and ‘job’ in a broader sense than would be accepted today. Here, our interests lie not so much in the validity of Weber’s thesis on the ‘elective affinity’ (Wahlverwandtschaft) between the ‘spirit of Christian asceticism’ and modern Beruf, but more in the description of character and personality that emerges therefrom. Even the harshest repudiation of Weber’s thesis on the role of ascetic Protestantism as the crucial factor in the spirit of capitalism cannot undermine the validity of the formulated hypothesis with respect to the need for a new character that the rise of capitalism brought about—a new form of personality that within its interior bears the elements of innovation, of rational methodical action, and of a new self. The type of modern personality ideally suited to capitalism and, more generally, to the spirit of modern rationalization (of which capitalism is the economic realization) is found in the great entrepreneur, in the modern scientist, and in the politician. Such a character portrayal holds true even if we ascribe its development to other historical and cultural sources. Entrepreneur, politician, and scientist represent the three ‘ideal types’ of Beruf in the spheres of economics, the sciences, and politics, respectively, even though such spheres may at first sight appear distinct and governed by different ‘gods’ within the framework of the modern processes of rationalization and differentiation. For Weber, the ‘professional’ (Berufsmensch) is a new man, formed and educated by Protestant asceticism, which drives him toward rational, systematic behavior and control of his professional life. This represents an overturning of the ‘natural’ order, by which the aim of work and duty is to satisfy needs. In the perspective of an individual’s leading a ‘good life’, that is, one based on the harmonious development of a comprehensive personality, such a drive may even seem ‘irrational’. Such is the ‘spirit of modern capitalism’, which indeed finds its most suitable expression in modern capitalist enterprise. From the perspective of the relation between work and personality, such a ‘life conduct’ (Lebensführung) requires giving up one’s ‘natural self’, and defining oneself, rather than through a channeling of the desire to accumulate boundless wealth, by domination of the desire itself. Prime examples of this can be found in Weber’s depictions of the first great entrepreneurs. They represent models for the new character types and personalities, made necessary by the
birth of modern capitalism, which would take on a significant *ethical* quality even for the present day and age. The consequences of this professional spirit, however, were evident not only in its effects on entrepreneurs and businessmen, but also on workers. Weber maintained that considering work as a profession became as characteristic for the modern worker as the corresponding concept of profit for the entrepreneur. Only work performed as if it were an absolute autonomous goal—a profession—produces that which is required, and such a mentality is not a nature-given thing.

As much as Weber’s conception of *Beruf* can be considered ‘idealistic’, or even literary, it is impossible to deny its descriptive power with respect to the working conditions and work ethic prevailing during the times of Henry Ford, that is to say, in a productive system based on long-term planning, certain markets and predictable demand. In Weber’s sense, *Beruf* reveals the importance of work intended as ‘narrative’ and the character development made possible by organized, long-term efforts. In the ‘disenchanted’ modern world (*entzaubert*), traditional religious narrative—original sin, redemption and salvation—gets replaced by profane narrative, that of ‘career’, whose end is to deliver subjectivity from absurdity and fragmentation. The concept central to Weber’s conception of *Beruf* is *sense*: faced with the lack of historical philosophies and the polytheism of values, which fragment individual life—in the sense that there are no given ‘absolute’ values binding on an individual and all of one’s spheres of action, but only ‘local’ values—work constitutes the unifying narrative for the personality. Weber was well aware of the fact that the spirit of modern professionalism had religious and ethical origins, but mature industrial society appeared entirely devoid of such ethics. The Puritans were motivated by the glory of God to live a professional life at the service of higher ends; nowadays when it is not necessarily felt subjectively as simple economic pressure, the individual today generally ceases to reflect on it. In the United States, where it has been given most freedom, acquisitiveness, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends today to be associated with purely competitive passions, which often give it the character of a sporting contest (Weber 1958: 171).

The capitalist lifestyle and modern personality stem from inspirations and influences of an ethical-religious nature, but such influence

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3. According to Goldman these ‘are the true objects of Weber’s interest in this work and actually have great prominence in his explanation’ (1988: 48).
is soon spent to give rise to a self-perpetuating mechanism. Weber, in his later writings, expresses his desire for a return to the ethical values of *Beruf* as work-vocation, viewed as a ‘demon who holds the fibers of our very life’ (Weber 1946: 156), a sort of eminent code in everyone’s life, an ‘individual law’ that each gives himself and must follow, not because it is sanctioned by external authority, but as a law that springs from the particularity and individuality of each life. Modern professions take on the paradoxical role of ‘necessary pretense’, in the sense that, despite the awareness of their inadequacy as governing values for one’s entire existence, they must, lacking any other equally valid values, be accepted. The fulfillment of the ‘daily duties’ we have chosen, a sense of *Sachlichkeit*, that is impassioned devotion to a ‘cause’ (*Sache*) and the objective logic governing it, are the virtues that Weber attributes to the entrepreneur, politician, and scientist, though they hold for every working activity, even the humblest. Perhaps, the solution to the modern identity crisis lies in the inner strength that allows us to model ourselves, in that strength of character that makes it possible for us to adhere to the ‘spiritual discipline’ of our profession.

**Work and Individualization in Simmel**

An attentive scholar, Émile Durkheim already realized that the problem Simmel had at heart, in both his *Social Differentiation* (1890) and subsequently in *Philosophy of Money* (1900), was ‘the process of individualization’, observing that ‘he does not speak specifically of division of labor’ (Durkheim 2014: 45). Simmel’s approach starts with different theoretical premises from Durkheim’s, to lead to a view of the relation between work and the individualization process that is rather more problematic and a great deal less linear than the French sociologist’s. While the latter holds that it is the impersonal mechanism of the division of labor that dictates the pace of the evolution of the individual, Simmel instead views the Spencerian principle of ‘energy saving’ (*Kraftersparnis*) as the basis for the process of differentiation: ‘a being is more perfect if and when it attains the same goals with a smaller quantum of energy […]. The evolutionary advantage of differentiation can be interpreted as energy savings in nearly every sense indicated here’ (Simmel 1989: 258-59). Money is the most representative symbol of this process: it represents ‘pure energy’ (*reine Kraft*, Simmel 1923: 3). At the same time it is also a symbol of *energy savings*, as it enables reducing resistance and conserving one’s
forces. In fact, performing all economic transactions through money represents a saving of energy over exchanges carried out in traditional ways. Division of labor is merely a special case of the general evolutionary trend toward energy saving; it has been attained by virtue of the process of differentiation in all circles of social and individual life. Social formations in which work is most highly differentiated are more energy efficient, and this is the reason that the division of labor and a monetary economy advance hand in hand: it is in fact far more efficient and more convenient for members of society to specialize in a single activity and use money to acquire necessary products than to individually produce all products one needs. In his article significantly entitled 'Metaphysics of idleness', Simmel stresses that the principle of activity, and therefore of work, is not at the origin of social (and cosmic universal) evolution, but precisely its opposite, idleness, defined in German as Kraftersparnis, that is ‘energy saving’ (Simmel 1900: 337-39). The same fundamental law of evolution through differentiation must be also applied to the concept of the ‘individual’ and to its corollary of individual personality. The world vision introduced by Darwin and taken up by Spencer by locating the evolution of all living creatures at the intersection of an interchangeable series of factors—such as chance, heredity, environmental influences—leads us to the ‘need to renounce the unitary substance of the psyche’, and to the fact that ‘beneath its contents there is no real unity to be discovered’ (Simmel 1989: 128). In such a view, that which we call ‘individual’, and believe to be distinguished by a characteristic identity and personality, would be no more than an unstable mixture, a series of heterogeneous representations, a subjective synthesis that is needed in order for us to carry on in social life, but that, upon realistic examination, turns out to be unfounded. We must therefore ‘get to the bottom and see how much the multiplicity that man as an individual already reveals in himself and for himself’ and accept as ‘inaccurate and subjective our recomposing a set of elementary movements and single representations in the history of an “individual”’ (Simmel 1989: 128-29). Although Simmel renounces any substantial metaphysical concept of subjectivity, this does not take away from the fact that he does not—like Durkheim, in this case—see how the modern individual is the very fruit of the process of differentiation and division of labor. The division of labor increases the individual sense of particularity and indispensability, linked as it is to the specificity of one’s performance. The specificity of Simmel’s analysis in comparison to Durkheim’s is however
aimed at highlighting how social differentiation acts to multiply the circles that a single individual can enter to become part of and hence belong to. By virtue of this intuition, Simmel formulates a true sociological concept of individuality, which he developed mainly in the chapter on the ‘intersection of social circles’ in Social Differentiation (1890), reproduced in his ‘grand’ work Sociology (1908). In its original state, every social formation is organized in a relatively narrow circle that is strictly closed to other nearby circles, but with great internal cohesion that allows individuals only a very limited range of action both in developing their particular qualities and in moving about freely and responsibly. Beginning with this stage, social evolution advances simultaneously in two different, yet complementary directions. As a social group grows—in number, in space, in its importance and life content—its inner cohesion immediately loosens, its original boundaries are obscured by relationships and connections with other groups. At the same time, the individual gains freedom of movement that goes well beyond the constraints first set by strict belonging to the group, and hence develops a specificity and a peculiarity that are made possible and necessary by the social division of labor within the extended social group. Urban life represents a particularly apt example of this pattern of development of individuality. Life in a small city, in antiquity as well as the Middle Ages, imposed on individuals such limits to their movement and relationship with the outside that modern man would feel suffocated. Vice versa, the metropolis by virtue of its enormous size and population, offers an incomparably superior space for development of the personality. It is in these social spaces that we may properly speak of individuality: ‘the determinateness of personality is greater when the circles that determine it are found flanking each other, rather than being concentric’ (Simmel 1989: 239). Indeed, the metropolis allows for the possibility that the circles to which an individual belongs are partially or wholly independent, with the further possibility of competition or contrasts between them, thereby furnishing the utmost space for realization of personal peculiarities.

Simmel places the metropolis—as an eminently modern social formation—at the acme of the process of ‘differentiation’. The metropolis is therefore viewed as the social space where the division of labor reaches unheard of levels of refinement and specialism, so much so as to represent a threat to the integrity of the individual ‘personality’. The main threat comes precisely from that differentiation and division of labor that it had in some way produced. The division of labor
is in fact the major cause of that overwhelming development of the object culture, which makes individuals feel themselves reduced to a quantité négligeable. In particular, the monetary economy—both the prerequisite and consequence of the differentiation and division of labor—from the point of view of the individual personality actually facilitates ‘the absence of character’, in the sense described in the foregoing, that is, as that set of qualities that in a certain sense ‘colors’ our personalities in a unique and peculiar way. Faced with such threat, historically, two main strategies for constructing subjectivity emerged in the west, and that represented different ways for the individual to resist ‘being leveled down and worn out by a social-technological mechanism’ (Simmel 1997: 175). Simmel identified two forms of individualism, by which term he included not only two different political doctrines, but also two strategies for the construction and maintenance of the personality. The two forms of individualism can be defined as the individualism of independence (or individualism of equality) and individualism as the development of originality and personal peculiarity (or the individualism of difference). The concept of the individualism of equality begins with the premise that all individuals are by nature equal and have the same right to liberty. This harks back to the tradition of natural law theory and its triumph over the political inequalities imposed by nature. The individualism of difference, instead, has its roots in Romanticism and Goethe’s thought. It maintains the value of the uniqueness of the single individual and his right to distinguish himself and not be confused with all others. While the individualism of equality was founded on ‘the universal man’ present in every single individual, the individualism of difference is based on the concept of the ‘qualitative irreplaceability of the individual’. The originality and importance of Simmel’s conception lies precisely in his having analyzed this duality inherent in the creation of the personality in the modern age, characterized by the problematic coexistence between the impulse toward personal autonomy and the desire for individual authenticity. As we have seen in the foregoing, the objective possibility to attain individualism of equality or independence lies in the existence within the social body of a sufficiently large number of eccentric ‘social circles’ to whose intersection individuals belong and within whose interior they find communities enabling them to satisfy their inclinations and aspirations, with all the advantages of belonging to a group. The very concept of ‘public spirit’ and ‘public opinion’, fundamental for the realization of a fully liberal and democratic society, can be measured based on the number
and configuration of the social circles at an individual’s disposal (Simmel 1995: 126). The impulse toward autonomy has produced some of modernity’s fundamental conceptual abstractions, which formed the bases for the emergence of strategies for individual emancipation, such as for instance, reflections on the concept of citizen. This eminently abstract and philosophical creation would never have been possible without postulation of a universal substratum, common to all individuals, above and beyond any concrete differences in status, birth, aptitude, ability, and so forth. Without this concept, all the roles of modern society—city, worker, professional etc.—would be unthinkable, as by their very essence they are characterized by the possibility of being taken on by any individual whatsoever, regardless of specific historical characteristics of class, status, race, color, and so on. As Simmel would subsequently state in his ‘große Soziologie’ (1908), from this point of view, society in general, and modern society in particular can be represented as ‘an arrangement of contents and accomplishments—all related to one another in space, time, concepts, and values—and next to which one can in this respect disregard the personality, the I-form, that carries its dynamics’ (Simmel 2009: 49). In other words, we are dealing with the concept of the modern social role, which is inconceivable without the premise of individualism of equality. However—and this is a decisive consideration for the relation between work and character—for Simmel individuals are never expressed wholly through the different social roles they are carrying out at any given time, but instead always through something more than the sum of such roles, in the sense that their lives spring from an independent seat that cannot be reduced to the position they occupy in various social circles. This is a fundamental sociological consequence of the individualism of difference, which in 1908 Simmel formulated with ‘the seemingly trivial statement that every member of a group is not only a part of society but also something else besides’ (Simmel 2009: 45). For Simmel this constitutes an a priori condition for the existence of empirical society ‘to the extent that the part of the individual not facing society or not absorbed in it not simply disconnected from its socially significant part, i.e. entirely external to society’ (Simmel 2009: 49). When speaking of society and the socialization of individuals, it is therefore necessary to consider that insertion into a society regards beings that can never be completely embraced by it. This is an implicit criticism of any form of sociologism that attempts to regard the individual solely and exhaustively in terms of the socialized being. According to Simmel, there is
an irreducible *dissonance* between individual and role, the result of the *tragedy of modern culture*: in consequence, the ‘marriage’ between the individual and society is destined to remain an unhappy one. In a highly specialized society personality can no longer correspond entirely with ‘work’. The concerns Simmel expresses over how individuals can manage to preserve the *independence* and the *peculiarity* of their individual beings are felt even more acutely nowadays, as they are faced with the vast transformations towards *flexibility* of the organization of production and the problematic relation between work (and therefore social *role*, which falls within the sphere of the individualism of *equality*, that is, that which universally and quantitatively unites all individuals) and the development of individual personality (the need to distinguish oneself and give oneself a unique identity).

Therefore, the problem the contrast and the reconciliation between quantitative and qualitative individualism is a fundamental, highly topical element in Simmel’s thought in a context — such as contemporary culture and economy — that can be defined as undergoing the ‘metropolization of society’ (Jonas 1995), that is to say, extension of the peculiar cultural characteristics of the great city to the entire social body. Obviously, Simmel never proposed any specific, unequivocal solution to these problems. Faced with the looming *tragedy* for individuals — caught between necessarily being like everyone else (occupying a defined *role* in society) and, at the same time, being above all and incomparably oneself — Simmel never found any arrangement, either ideological or utopian, for a future socialist order in society. Nor did he view the seemingly irreversible individualism of his time with particular optimism or equanimity. One important aspect for countering or attenuating this conflict actually belongs to the sphere of aesthetics, in particular, individuals’ ability to adopt a specific *lifestyle*, distinct from all others.

**Individualization in second modernity**

We must now confront the situation of uncertainty and insecurity now prevalent in Europe, the United States, and throughout the global economy that is generally referred to as ‘work flexibility’. According to some authors, this is accompanied by a more generalized change in the *regime of accumulation* of the capitalist economy (Harvey 1989).

4. U.S. sociologist David Harvey examined the link between what he defined as the ‘regime of flexible accumulation’ and post-modern cultural change. Harvey’s
German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992), in his theorization of the ‘risk society’ emphasized the risks to individual life conduct and histories posed by the so-called ‘second modernity’. What does he mean by this? Beck ascribes the threat to individuals’ ability to determine their personal life histories to the phenomenon of individualization, ‘the historical process contrary to socialization (Vergesellschaftung)’ (Beck 1992: 115). While individuals have been progressively liberated from the social constraints of industrial society (class, rank, nuclear family, roles linked to the status of male and female gender), there has been an emergence of ‘individualized forms and conditions of existence that force men, in the interests of material survival, to make themselves the center of their own plans and life conduct’ (Beck 1992: 113). ‘In this case, individualization means variation and differentiation of lifestyles and ways of life, in contrast to the thought underlying traditional categories of the society of large groups: classes, rank and social stratification’ (Beck 1992: 113). Marking the ‘second modernity’, therefore, is a true de-standardization of lifestyles that also became more diversified, particularly in consequence of changing work patterns. In the industrial era, salaried work, together with the family, represented the ‘axis of life conduct’, the coordinated system within which the individual’s existence unfolded. Today, with transformation of the ‘post-Ford’ industrial system and the end of the ‘mass society’, this system has been radically called into question. More and more, individuals are left alone before society, deprived of the necessary tools to orient themselves, which once derived from patterns, habits, and behavioral models handed down from one generation to the next. Moreover, jobs themselves have become more and more individualized, far from the recognizable work typifying industrial society (factory, office worker, industrialist, etc.). Such a situation is highly ambivalent: on the one hand, it potentially offers great freedom to individuals, while on the other, it binds their lives to extremely variable, changing social factors, such as the vicissitudes of the labor market, training opportunities, and institutional frameworks. It is precisely for such reasons that it is worth reflecting further on the relations between work and modern identity and economic analysis is based mainly on the work of the ‘regulation school’ of economy, notably that of M. Aglietta.

5. A great body of work exists on the concept of risk from the point of view of the social sciences, so great, in fact, that ‘risk study’ almost qualifies as a discipline in itself. See, for example, the work of the sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1991), and the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1992).
how the risk that uncertainty in the former affects formation of the latter. Work and identity are two terms generally encountered separately in today’s philosophical and social science debates. Although many social analysts from varying perspectives, and with varying degrees of insight, have tackled the subject of contemporary individuals’ difficulties in maintaining coherence and stability over time, rarely do they associate the problem with the subject of work and work’s changing face in modern social processes. A good example in this regard is the classification made by Jürgen Habermas in his Theory of the Communicative Action (1984–87), which defines work as an ‘instrumental action’, a merely functional, reproductive activity, and hence completely irrelevant (or nearly so) to the makeup and expression of individual personality. Personal realization actually comes about in the Lebenswelt (a term taken from phenomenology), that is to say, the cultural and symbolic world of daily life. Habermas nevertheless recognizes that a relation does exist between these two spheres and must be studied. Even if ‘work’ does not necessarily coincide with ‘interaction’, a relationship exists between the two on which ‘the process of formation of the spirit as well as the species substantially depends’ (Habermas 1969: 47). It is interesting, therefore, to analyze the interrelations between work and modern personality, to try to understand what problems and risks to contemporary subjective identity may stem from its becoming more flexible.

For Weber, work, in the sense of a methodical, rational ‘life conduct’ inspired by the ‘demon’ of inner vocation, represents the final attempt to save the self from modernity’s inherent drive towards dissolution of the individual. However, the circumstances in the current era, which some observers define as post-modern, appear different. In a 1983 essay, German sociologist Claus Offe, reflecting on ‘work as the key sociological category’, maintained that, given the heterogeneity of what we mean by work in today’s service-oriented society, it is impossible to identify a single type of rationality for all work

6. Habermas makes a clear distinction between instrumental action and communicative action, stressing how instrumental actions are based on empirical knowledge, are organized according to technical rules and have specific work tasks to fulfill: They are rational insofar as they achieve ends, defined under given conditions, through the use of means suitable to such ends. On the other hand, communicative actions consist of symbolically mediated interactions among individuals, that is, through language, and organized on the basis of rules that define mutual expectations of behavior. For a criticism of the concept of work as an ‘instrumental actions’, see Honneth (1980).
activities. However, Offe’s dismissal of the work-orientated society, soon echoed by others such as Gorz (1989) and Rifkin (1995), appears a bit hasty. Although industrial work is no longer central or so visible in western societies, the ‘spirit of capitalism’ tends to extend to all spheres of life without an ethic or social class to drive its development. In this regard, Beck speaks of capitalism as a ‘second modernity’ and ‘classless capitalism’ (Beck 1992: 34). Zygmunt Bauman described the ongoing transformations toward a postmodern culture with an eloquent metaphor: the modern individual would be transformed ‘from pilgrim to tourist’. While ‘the modern ‘problem of identity’ consisted in building and maintaining a solid, stable identity, the post-modern ‘problem of identity’ is above all how to avoid any and all kinds of fixation and how to leave open possibilities’ (1995: 27). The metaphor of the pilgrim makes explicit reference to Weber’s Protestant Ethic. Bauman defines the Protestant as the characteristic figure of modern man, a product of industrial society. In fact, Protestants became pilgrims of the interior world, taking on intra-worldly life as their task and professional duty as the instrument with which to attain salvation. In his view, the ‘disenchanted’ world of science and technology became a desert without rich, meaningful places or seductive temptations. Impersonality, frigidity and emptiness rose to the status of virtues in an attempt to ward off the world’s temptations and make the external world meaningless and devoid of any value. Nevertheless, maintains Bauman, today’s world is inhospitable for the pilgrim. Not only have lifelong jobs disappeared, but present-day professions and jobs, which characteristically appear out of nowhere and fade into nothingness, can hardly be construed in terms of Weber’s ‘vocations’. Work and identity are thus clearly divorced. The ‘pilgrimage’ of the temporary or intermittent worker is no longer a heroic or holy choice, but little by little, transformed into aimless wandering without the ultimate goal that gives meaning to the pilgrimage. In fact, it is distance that enables plans to exist, for space–time coordinates are the vectors of life sense and identity. Distance measured in terms of time allows building and giving meaning to identity; it gives shape to the deferred gratification that marks the beginnings of personal development and the formation of identity. However, the act of deferring gratification (despite the momentary frustration) provides the stimulus for constructing identity only if there is faith in the linearity and cumulativeness of time and trust that the future will repay savings with interest. Without such trust, economic activity and a market could not even be imagined. The life
histories of the new ‘flexible’ workers are different from those of past generations that unfolded in the cumulative ‘linear time’ of a career or, in any event, within a relatively predictable framework, enabling them to measure an increase in savings and overall improvement in lifestyle. It was not only enrichment of their material lifestyle, but also human and psychological experience, as life unfolded as a linear narrative. What instead characterizes ‘flexible’ contemporary life histories is the fragmentation and the unpredictability of work patterns, which threaten the possibility of creating a narrative to define it. The consequence of such impossibility is difficulty in attaining some form of ‘mastery’ (or of governance, as Foucault might have put it) over the course of one’s own life, even in purely symbolic terms. This process of conferring sense to one’s life actually helps the individual come to terms with the errors of the past, while it stimulates acting in the present and looking toward the future. And, above all, it helps the individual to bear the eventuality –ever more frequent in the world of flexible work—of failure. ‘But there is little room for understanding a breakdown of a career, if you believe that all life history is just an assemblage of fragments. Nor is there any room for assaying the gravity and pain of failure, if failure is just another incident’ (Sennett 1998: 133). The ability (and possibility) to gather the events of one’s own life (at work and elsewhere) together in a plot or storyline has a restorative and healing capacity on the self, especially when the events are source of stress and fragmentation. The taboo towards, and obsession with, failure in contemporary ‘flexible’ capitalism actually stems from the fragmentation and discontinuity of current work patterns. If an individual has enough proof of concrete results, of a life course endowed with some continuity, then that person runs less risks than when, by virtue of discontinuity in the work sphere, one cannot manage to hold one’s own life together or even give it a sense: ‘Failure can come about… when the journey… reveals itself to be endless and pointless’ (Sennett 1998: 133). This is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to appease feelings of failure with money. Money, by its very nature a universal means (Simmel), cannot provide sense. Thus, when the failure consists of losing the purpose around which one’s very existence was centered, money can be no more than a mere palliative. Some distinctions given in contemporary philosophical writings enable a more precise definition of what is meant by ‘strength of character’, which in contemporary circumstances is fading. Emmanuel Levinas (1981) distinguishes between maintien de soi, the maintenance of oneself, and constance à soi, loyalty to oneself.
The former preserves identity over time, while the second is the basis for virtues, such as honesty with oneself, even with regard to one’s own defects. Self-loyalty also has a social dimension and implies responsibility towards other people. The ‘corrosion of character’ (Sennett) characteristic of contemporary flexible capitalism consists precisely in the collapse of the conditions facilitating this second characteristic of the self. Overall, the socioeconomic system breeds indifference in a multitude of ways: indifference towards human effort (given the financial market mechanism of ‘winner takes all’, with a minimal relationship between risks taken and remuneration); indifference as a state of systemic lack of trust in others; and lastly, the indifference of companies towards their employees, who can be summarily dismissed. The consequence is that no one is indispensable, and precisely for this reason, nobody feels responsible. If no one is relying on me, I am not answerable to others for my actions. To be reliable, we must feel that someone else needs us, and in order to feel this, that someone else must feel some sort of need. The question ‘who needs me?’ is a character question on which contemporary capitalism raises serious doubts about the answer (Sennett 1998: 147).

From a different theoretical approach, Axel Honneth (1996) stresses that, without some form of recognition from society, individuals risk being abandoned to the solipsistic cult of individual interiority. Honneth (inspired by a school of thought tracing its origins to Hegel and Mead) holds that formation of personal identity is determined by the ‘other’s glance’, in the sense that the grounds for our individual realization are based on the recognition (or the ‘scorn’) that others demonstrate with regard to our personality. The realization and evolution of personal identity does not happen in the air-tight vacuum of freedom from all social bonds, but rather within the context of meaningful communicative social relations, which—as Habermas neglected (cf. Honneth 1980) — develop largely in the sphere of work. Taking Honneth’s struggle for recognition as point of departure, contemporary social theorists describe critically the logic of contemporary forms of work and their consequences for the process of individualization (Petersen and Willig 2004). Theorists like Jean-Pierre Le Goff, Christophe Dejours and Emmanuel Renault—even if from different perspectives—agree that the growth of autonomy, flexibility and mobility has destabilized individual and collective identity formation and has led to an increase in social pathological illnesses such as stress and depression. By juxtaposing these analyses with Honneth’s theory on recognition, we can conclude that the contemporary logic
of work is unable to provide individuals adequate forms of recognition and (self)respect.

Conclusions

Faced with nihilism and fragmentation, Weber expressed the hope that professions could once again be guided by rules of ‘ethical conduct’ binding on both the individual and the collectivity. This is not an attempt to reaffirm or vindicate the ethical value attributed by Weber to work, but to stress that work is not merely the role that individuals are called on to play in society. It represents something more than the simple autonomous actions of the individual:

This something more that distinguishes true from autonomous conduct is its being somehow connected to the center of the social actor’s personality and expressing at least some of its aspects. True conduct brings the unique personal identity of the actor into play, rather than the culturally or socially shared identity (Ferrara 1999: 72).

For most flexible workers, profession and work have no constructive value, as they do not allow for the possibility of formulating a work ‘narrative’ that involves projection towards the future and responsibility towards others. Without any ‘distance’ in time, it is impossible to speak of projection, meaning or, hence, identity. The short-termism prevailing in the majority of labour market sectors seems to preclude this out of hand. Is it legitimate to consider that work today—given its plurality and fragmentation—no longer has anything to do with ‘character’ or ego consciousness? As Simmel had shown us, it is after all the objective dynamics of a society characterized by extensive division of labor and profound separation between the social spheres—family, politics, work, leisure time—to ensure that individuals are born as separate realities, as entities that do not coincide with any of the social circles to which they belong. It is this belonging to many circles that provides the impetus to develop forms of highly ‘individualized identity’, in the sense that only a highly individualistic personality with a strong spirit of autonomy is able to withstand all the attractions exerted by the single social circles. However, despite the complexity of modern subjectivity and the great number of its affiliations, the sphere of work still remains the de facto decisive sphere for recognition, socialization, self-esteem, and self-definition. It remains the field in which the ‘decisive plays’ for definition of subjectivity take place—the struggle for its possible emancipation. Modern subjectivity has probably always surpassed
work, as well as the pre-established roles in society. It is likewise probable that a ‘society of chosen time and multiactivity’ (Gorz 1999: 107) can—or rather, according to Gorz, must—be based on a repudiation of work and the pre-established roles of society. However, by separating the two spheres (identity and work) of current social conditions, we risk not only ignoring a fundamental aspect of the modern personality (albeit not the only one), but also not understanding the roots of that character corrosion denounced by Sennett.

The risks consequent to life histories formed under the conditions of flexible work are those feared by Christopher Lasch (1985) when he speaks of the ‘minimal self’ prey to the immediate gratifications of consumerism, malleable and permeated with the impersonal organs of mass society. The inability to defer gratification to a future time leads to a tendency to expend the personality in immediate satisfaction (hyperconsumerism, drugs, etc.). Furthermore, the inability to gather up life events into a coherent plot leads to a lack of ‘experience’, in the sense of wisdom, and therefore ultimately, to an essentially endless adolescence, never achieving autonomy and consequently needing recourse to aid from external authorities (experts, psychotherapists, etc.). Individuals’ fragility and difficulty experienced in coherently assembling life experience makes them susceptible to the seductions of the unchanging (and unchangeable) ‘integral’ identities, typical of fundamentalist doctrines. Perhaps countering such trends requires introducing a concept of ‘sustainable personality’ (analogous to the concept of ‘sustainable development’), which modern capitalism should foster as a precondition for fundamental human rights. Such a construct should, moreover, be founded upon the right to a minimum level of coherence in life experience, to the deferment of gratification and to the establishment of reciprocal relations.

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Max Weber and the Idea of Progress

John Torpey

Abstract
This paper examines Max Weber’s understanding of progress and his evaluation of how much of it there has been in human history. Weber largely dismissed the idea of progress, arguing that modern Kulturmenschen die ‘tired of life’—beset by meaninglessness—rather than, like the peasant, ‘satiated with life’—that is, filled with the meaningfulness of a life lived with and for others. Weber’s perspective, which imputes a sort of generic meaninglessness to modern life, is argued to be too pessimistic; improvements in health, life expectancy, and wellbeing suggest that many people might well feel that there has been considerable progress, even if Weber thinks that their lives lack meaning for them. A fairer accounting of developments in the past century suggest that there is plenty of meaning to go around, and that especially those who contributed to the improvements in modern life are likely to have had fulfilling, meaningful lives in the course of making those contributions.

Keywords: Weber, progress, Condorcet, meaninglessness, rationalization.

What did Weber think of ‘progress’? Did he even think such a thing exists? Often, if one wishes to know the meaning of such a socio-logical concept, one can simply search out the relevant passage in Weber’s writings and get an ideal-typical definition of the phenomenon. For example, Weber’s characterization of a ‘state’ as an entity with a ‘monopoly on the legitimate use of violence within a given territory’, extrapolated from Marx’s notion of the bourgeoisie’s monopolization of the ‘means of production’, is widely accepted as the definition of a state today. Similarly, Weber shows, a ‘bureaucracy’ is an organization that ‘owns’ the means of administration, precluding opportunities for profit from the official’s routine conduct of her duties. To be sure, notwithstanding his extensive writings on the subject, Weber avoided defining ‘religion’, presumably as a result of the well-known slipperiness of the phenomenon. The situation with ‘progress’ is different. ‘Progress’ is obviously a more freighted term than any of these others, more normative in nature, and hence not the sort of concept Weber was inclined to endow

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with a meaning that is consistent and comparable across contexts. It therefore forced him out of his customary stance of ‘objectivity’ into a more judgmental position. The question of the meaning of progress thus provides a valuable window into Weber’s view of the modern world. Given his immense and well-deserved importance in shaping our understanding of that world, I ask in what follows: what did Weber think about ‘progress’?

In truth, Weber does not have that much to say about it specifically, but what he does say is pretty damning. The one place that Weber speaks directly of ‘progress’ is in the renowned lecture on ‘Science as a Vocation’ (Weber 1946a). Here he is at his most philosophical, precisely because he is not recounting an historical social process or elucidating a scientific concept but trying to assess the place of science in contemporary human life. This he did at the behest of a student group in Munich—a group that could be expected to have a serious interest in the nature and meaning of Wissenschaft (the ‘science’ in the title of the lecture, more accurately translated into English as ‘scholarship’), since it was the career to which they were consecrating themselves. In making sense of the notion of progress, Weber distinguishes first of all between science and art. Science, he asserts, is ‘chained to the course of progress’ (Weber 1946a: 137) in a way that art is not. A work of art in any style or period may attain ‘fulfillment’ (Erfüllung) (Weber 1946a: 138) and hence never be superseded; it simply joins the ranks of the works of art recognized as having supreme artistic significance (Michelangelo’s Pietà, the Taj Mahal, the paintings of Van Gogh, etc.). Although it may be true, as with the Mona Lisa, that there may be contingent reasons for the fame of certain artworks, truly sublime works of art seem likely to be recognized as aesthetically surpassing for centuries to come, Weber believed.

Scholarship, by contrast, is virtually defined in Weber’s mind by the process whereby a scientific contribution, however compelling today, is fated to be superseded and made obsolete tomorrow. And indeed this process of being superseded is the point of the whole exercise. This is partially because, according to Weber, all scientific contributions today are unavoidably specialized. They are destined to be outdated and made obsolete, whether sooner or later. Once one recognizes this fact about scholarship, Weber argues, one must inquire into the ‘meaning of science’: ‘For, after all, it is not self-evident that something subordinate to such a law is sensible and meaningful in itself. Why does one engage in doing something that in reality never comes, and never can come, to an end?’ (Weber 1946a: 138).
Here Weber begins to explore the conditions of scientific endeavor and, more generally, the conditions of modern life itself. He argues that, under modern conditions, science is meaningless in the same way that death has become meaningless (other than for those who die on the field of battle, who know very well why they are dying and often believe that service to their countries lends meaning to their demise). Weber explicated the situation as follows. He avers that ‘Abraham, or some peasant of the past, died “old and satiated with life”’ because he had seen the full round of life—childhood, adolescence, adulthood, raising a family, meeting the demands of a peasant existence. ‘[H]is life, in terms of its meaning and on the eve of his days, had given to him what life had to offer’. In contrast,

civilized man, placed in the midst of the continuous enrichment of culture by ideas, knowledge, and problems, may become ‘tired of life’ [lebensmüde] but not ‘satiated with life’ [lebensgesättigt]. He catches only the most minute part of what the life of the spirit brings forth ever anew… and therefore death for him is a meaningless occurrence. And because death is meaningless, civilized life as such is meaningless; by its very ‘progressiveness’ [Fortschrittlichkeit] it gives death the imprint of meaninglessness (Weber 1946a: 140).

This account of the meaninglessness of death for the modern person is part of Weber’s larger story about rationalization as the metanarrative of the modern world. Rationalization is a process whereby more and more of life becomes ‘impersonal’ and emptied of meaning: that is, it loses its human-ness. Rationalization is a process afoot in so many aspects of modern life—bureaucratization, the advance of a ‘rational’ capitalist economy based on calculations of the cost of formally free labor, technical advances, etc.—that it is simply inescapable. The fate of moderns is ‘the disenchantment of the world’, a phrase Weber borrowed from the dramatist Friedrich Schiller that is more literally (if less elegantly) translated as the ‘de-magicalization of the world’. From this perspective, modern life is no great advance over the past; despite all the improvements in scientific methodology and in the efficiency of production and administration, it’s not at all clear that we are ‘moving forward’. To the contrary, our advances in technical means seem only to be emptying life of its meaning. Accordingly, ‘progress’ is very difficult to identify in the modern world, as far as Weber is concerned: ‘Has “progress” as such a recognizable meaning that goes beyond the technical, so that to serve it is a meaningful vocation?’ (Weber 1946: 140).
At this point, Weber goes on to explore how, despite its intrinsic meaninglessness, scholarship might be useful to humanity. He argues that it can help us understand the world and the likely consequences of different courses of action. Concepts, invented by Plato, allow us to organize the chaos of reality, while the rational experiment, consolidated as a research tool in the Renaissance, permits us to ‘reliably control […] experience’ (Weber 1946: 141) for investigative purposes. Science can bring us ‘clarity’ about the consequences of various courses of action. And, Weber argues, a teacher can make an inestimable ‘moral achievement’ if she were to succeed in teaching her students ‘inconvenient facts’—that is, ‘inconvenient facts for their party opinions’ (Weber 1946: 147). (This would seem especially true in our so-called ‘post-truth’ era, when political operatives are using social media to stoke outrage in order to maximize the mobilization of their bases.)

But despite the valuable advances in the methodology of empirical research and its resulting precision, Weber thinks these developments insufficient to view science as a ‘meaningful vocation’. He quotes Tolstoy, ‘Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to… the only question [that is] important for us: “What shall we do and how shall we live?”’ (Weber 1946: 143). Weber addresses this incomparable problem with an exploration of the ways in which one has to decide, on the basis of one’s deepest moral and intellectual commitments, which ‘gods’ one wishes to serve. For by serving one god, one unavoidably offends the others. Moreover, these choices cannot really be justified intellectually or morally; this is what is sometimes known as Weber’s ‘decisionism’, his claim that these most profound individual choices fundamentally lack any rational basis.1

Needless to say, this pessimistic stance is a far cry from the paean to progress penned by Enlightenment thinkers such as Condorcet. In his 1793 Sketch of the Progress of the Human Spirit, the Frenchman regarded mankind as ‘close upon one of the great revolutions of the human race’ (Condorcet 2012: 8). Indeed, Condorcet saw no limit to the perfectibility of man other than ‘the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us’ (Condorcet 2012: 2). Like Weber, Condorcet broke the idea of progress into several types, especially scientific

1. Fritz Ringer (2004: 241) argues that Weber’s emphasis on the ‘clarity’ that scholarship can provide is a decisive counterargument to the notion that Weber adhered to any Schmittian ‘decisionism’.

progress, artistic progress, and moral progress. It was about the latter that he was most engaged and passionate, however. Condorcet abhorred inequality and believed it could be progressively diminished by way of what he called the ‘social art’. According to two recent editors of Condorcet’s writings, ‘He advocated equal rights for women, civil marriage and divorce, special homes and hospitals for unmarried mothers, birth control, free secular education for all (male and female) and schemes that anticipated social security (with publicly funded provision for old age, widows’ pensions and child support) and a permanent League of Nations’ (Lukes and Urbinati 2012: xxiii). And all of this depended on the advance of knowledge, which, ‘so far from corrupting man, has always improved him when it could not totally correct or reform him’ (Condorcet 2012: 16). In the aftermath of postmodernism’s deep skepticism about—if not hostility toward the belief in—the link between knowledge and progress, Condorcet’s optimism may appear to us hopelessly naïve. But even Weber had come to doubt that knowledge brought progress; instead, it seemed mainly to denude the world of its human meaning.

What happened during the century between Condorcet and Weber? Perhaps one might simply say that ‘Nietzsche happened’. Weber’s countryman, after Marx one of the most important influences on his thinking, looked out upon modern life and saw ignobility, mediocrity, and fecklessness aplenty. The reason? European civilization had abandoned the heroic ideals and attitudes of the ancient Greeks and Romans, for whom the powerful were associated with and defined what was good, whereas the weak were regarded as evil and bad. For this fall from nobility, Nietzsche famously blamed Christianity and its ‘slave revolt in morals’ (Nietzsche 1956: 148). By counseling that the lowly turn the other cheek and instill guilt into the powerful for their high positions, Christianity raised the meek to the same level as the greatest—above them, in fact. The Christian endorsement of the dignity of all people, especially the ‘least’ of them, overthrew a way of looking at the world that equated power and goodness and replaced it with the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount (‘the meek shall inherit the earth’). According to Nietzsche, it thus undermined the search for glory and greatness that makes human life truly worth living—a life that is ‘beyond good and evil’.

To be sure, Weber was unconvinced about Nietzsche’s stress on ‘ressentiment’ as a driving force in religious development (Weber 1946: 270-71). Nonetheless, Weber writes, ‘since Nietzsche, we realize that something can be beautiful, not only in spite of the aspect in
which it is not good, but rather in that very aspect’ (Weber 1946a: 148). The classical unity of ‘the good, the true, and the beautiful’, around which Kant organized his three critiques (of pure reason, practical reason, and aesthetic judgment), had been shattered. Moreover, even Alexis de Tocqueville, another important influence on Weber and widely (if not altogether accurately) thought of as a great enthusiast of modern democracy, agreed that aristocratic societies engendered cultural brilliance, whereas democracy spawned mediocrity (Tocqueville 2000: 234-35; on Tocqueville’s influence on Weber, see Hecht 1998). Still, although Weber found Nietzsche’s understanding of the ‘slave revolt in morals’ convincing historically, he did not accept Nietzsche’s view that this undermined human striving. It is historically correct, Weber argued, to say that peasants were originally not religiously ‘qualified’; the image of the peasant as the picture of piety is ‘a thoroughly modern phenomenon’ (Weber 1963: 83). Meanwhile, Nietzsche’s ‘devastating criticism of those “last men” who “invented happiness”’ rendered irrelevant ‘the naïve optimism in which science… has been celebrated as the way to happiness’ (Weber 1946a: 143). Yet Weber clearly thought that Christianity and Buddhism, at least, had promoted a profoundly egalitarian outlook sharply at odds with Nietzsche’s elitism.

Weber’s whole orientation to historical phenomena also bespeaks a skepticism about ‘progress’ as well. Other than the overarching trend toward rationalization, at least in the West, there are in his view developments—conjunctures that impart crucial momentum to social phenomena in certain trajectories—and there are carriers of ideas in various historical periods (on Weber’s ‘developmental history’, see Schluchter 1981). But other than the starkly one-way street of rationalization, there is little sense that Weber regards history as having a direction or, certainly, any meaning. To take one important example of this attitude, while Condorcet, Marx, and myriad others regarded the French Revolution as a decisive watershed in human history foretelling powerful strides toward progress, Weber has next to nothing to say about it. He observes in General Economic History that ‘the revolution put an end to the feudal system at one blow in the night of August 4, 1789’ and that ‘the state confiscated the enormous estates of the émigrés and of the church’, but that is about it. Indeed, in Weber’s mind, the results of the French Revolution seem only to have confirmed processes already long since underway: ‘since equality of inheritance and distribution of holdings had arisen long before the abolition of feudal burdens, the final result
was that France, in contrast with England, became a land of small and medium sized farms’ (Weber 1995: 98-99).

Although I know of no textual evidence to support this claim, Weber’s assessment of the French Revolution may have been influenced by Tocqueville’s dour evaluation of the episode. Although Tocqueville focuses more on its consequences for the character of the state than on those for the economy, he regarded the revolution as a depressingly state-strengthening development that merely brought to fruition trends already afoot under Louis XIV in the seventeenth century (Tocqueville 1998; see also Skocpol 1979). Weber did note the pervasive importance in post-1789 Europe of ‘that child of the revolution, the Civil Code’, but he addresses this only in a brief passage of *Economy and Society* on ‘Revolutionary Law’ (Weber 1978: 865). In short, Weber seems to have regarded the French Revolution as having done little more than to have consolidated certain earlier developments in French history and to have launched a particularly influential form of modern rational law. Otherwise, it was an event like many others—say, the emancipation of the serfs in Russia or the development of ‘kadi-justice’ in Islamic law—but hardly comparable with the profound and enduring impact of the centuries-long elaboration of the ‘world religions’, and certainly not ‘progress’ in the sense that legions of observers on the political left subsequently saw in it. To put it mildly, that is a pretty underwhelming conclusion about a series of events that some say dominated two centuries of the modern understanding of revolution and progress (see Arendt 1963; Furet 1981).

Meanwhile, Weber’s view of democracy is at least as ambivalent as Tocqueville’s, but without any of the latter’s conviction that an unstoppable and Providential ‘great democratic revolution’ was the chief tendency of modern times. Tocqueville thought that the archetypal form of oppression in the modern world would be ‘the schoolmaster’ (Tocqueville 2000: 662), a form of domination that would tell everyone what not to do and thus stifle freedom and initiative. He also worried about the ‘tyranny of the majority’, a force that would overwhelm opposition, rob dissenters of their freedom of thought, and banish free-thinkers to the margins of public space. Weber’s concerns were different. In his view, ‘democracy’ has its laudable features, but it typically masks the continued rule of elites. Superficial appearances may suggest the rule of the plebs in the modern world. But the reality is different, Weber believed. The notion that the people rule in a putatively democratic order is far too simplistic.
an understanding of the situation, even if there are moments when it has a certain truth. Weber’s position on the matter was perhaps best expressed by the title character in Giuseppe Tommaso di Lampedusa’s elegant and unforgettable novel, The Leopard: ‘In order for everything to remain the same, everything has to change.’

But even worse is the fact that democracy, in Weber’s view, has a perverse, dialectical entanglement with bureaucracy. That is, democracy both promotes and is promoted by bureaucracy, because democracy demands that everyone be treated the same. In theory, this is what bureaucracy promises to do as well; it is supposed to deal with individual claims ‘sine ira et studio’—without hatred or passion, and hence without love or concern. Bureaucracy thus promotes a ‘levelling of the governed’ before the bureaucratic machine, their reduction to manipulable bits of data and identifiers lacking social differentiation. Yet despite their unavoidable entanglement, these two forms of organization are specifically at odds with one another: democracy is ‘flat’, presupposing the equality of all, whereas bureaucracy is precisely a hierarchical arrangement in which those below are expected to obey without question the orders received from superiors. Democracy as such, without these antithetical admixtures, is simply inconceivable in the modern world: ‘democracy inevitably comes into conflict with the bureaucratic tendencies which, by its fight against notable rule, democracy has produced’ (Weber 1946b: 226). The idea of a progressive march toward democracy and equality is therefore an illusion or, at best, a temporary phenomenon that occurs rarely, fleetingly, and altogether reversibly. Tocqueville’s analysis of the dangers of democratic despotism offered a prescient premonition of the stifling ideological strictures that would later be imposed in ‘Soviet-type societies’. But Tocqueville’s image of a steady march toward equality and democracy—with the concerned caveat of a possible return of ‘permanent inequality’ in the form a ‘manufacturing aristocracy’ (Tocqueville 2000: 532)—at present seems badly in need of re-thinking even (or especially) in the democratic world (see Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

That said, Weber’s fears about the oppressive character of bureaucracy were overblown. The question is whether or not bureaucracies in democratic societies are ‘monocratic’ in the way that he feared, towering over the individual and bending him or her to its requirements (see Mann 1985: 57-58). It is often the case, of course, that people are compelled to do what bureaucracies such as tax authorities tell them to do. But in democratic societies, bureaucracies are subject to rules
intended to keep them from becoming a law unto themselves. Officials can be held accountable to democratically elected representatives. At the same time, however, the permanent officialdom—with its routines, non-partisan professional predispositions, and *esprit de corps*, which are utterly alien to the entrepreneur’s mindset—may be among the most important forces sustaining democracy. Bureaucracy may well be organized along different lines than ‘democracy’, and Weber certainly believes that it is the most efficient way to handle large administrative tasks. But by its very stodginess and inflexibility, bureaucracy may also play a role in maintaining democratic rule when that rule is challenged by a capricious plebiscitarian ruler, as in the United States today. The bureaucratic ‘deep state’ may be the strongest bastion of democracy against a would-be autocrat raining blows upon a law-based political order and seeking to take it down.

Finally, in order to make sense of Weber’s views about the idea of progress, we need to examine his ‘theory of the stages and directions of religious world-rejections’. Weber’s understanding of human life is that it is intrinsically bound up with the idea of ‘brotherliness’ [Brüderlichkeit]—a term that might, in fact, be translated or interpreted as ‘fraternity’ and hence even as ‘solidarity’. Weber notes that people have always appreciated that ‘your want of today may be mine of tomorrow’. He takes this attitude as a crucial feature of human sensibility, an orientation that we cannot live without. Weber argues that religions are rooted in this human need for ‘brotherliness’, and he understands religions in relation to an ‘ethic of brotherliness’: ‘the religiosity of the congregation transferred this ancient economic ethic to the relations among brethren of the faith’ (Weber 1946c: 329). Yet the ethic of brotherliness was inevitably at odds with the other realities of human life: ‘the religion of brotherliness has always clashed with the orders and values of this world, and the more consistently its demands have been carried through, the sharper the clash has been’ (Weber 1946c: 330). The burden of the essay known as ‘Intermediate Reflection’ (and in Gerth and Mills’ translation as ‘Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions’) is to address the conflict between the demands of the ethic of brotherliness and the different ‘value spheres’—the economic, the political, the aesthetic, the erotic, and the intellectual. All of these come into conflict with the requirements of brotherliness in one way or the other, for each of the value spheres makes its own claims on
the individual and is more or less antagonistic to the demand for brotherliness.

Religions have also advanced the claim that the world is ‘meaningful’. Typically, according to Weber, they do so in the form of a theodicy—an attempt to account for why, if the world and God are good, there is so much suffering. Salvation religions have thus sought to offer redemption from the various scourges identified by different religions as plaguing human beings. Here the tension between religion and reason comes to the fore: ‘Religious interpretations of the world and ethics of religion created by intellectuals and meant to be rational have been strongly exposed to the imperative of consistency.’ As a result, in an increasingly ‘disenchanted’ world, religion is more and more shunted into the realm of the irrational: ‘Every increase in rationalism in empirical science increasingly pushes religion from the rational into the irrational realm; but only today does religion become the irrational or anti-rational supra-human power’ (Weber 1946c: 351). It should be noted that this is very different from saying that religion will decline as a matter of practice, a claim often attributed to Weber that he nowhere makes. Instead, Weber is arguing that religious interpretations of the world seem increasingly unconvincing in the face of the growing prestige of scientific explanations of the world. Charles Taylor (2007) advances a similar argument, insisting that the ‘subtraction story’—whereby religious faith declines because science is more convincing—is incorrect, but agreeing that religion seems less and less plausible to those in the more developed parts of the world (see Norris and Inglehart 2004) and is no longer necessarily the ‘default setting’ for modern people.

Yet the conflict between science and religion—which Weber regards as ‘unbridgeable’ (Weber 1946a: 154)—generates another paradox or, if one wishes, dialectic. The claim of science to be the only rational way of making sense of the world leads, as with so many phenomena in the modern world, down the road to ‘meaninglessness’. The rationalized, disenchanted world, Weber thought, generates (non-religious) irrational responses because people, ‘especially…the younger generation’, find it hard ‘to measure up to workaday existence… and to countenance the stern seriousness of our fateful times’ (Weber 1946a: 149). In Weber’s own time, it was the philosophical and popular obsession with a Romantic form of ‘experience’ (Erlebnis); in our own day, one might see death-defying ‘extreme sports’ and the vogue of ‘mindfulness’ as forms of flight from the rationalization of the world. At the same time, Weber’s
criticism sounds a bit like the older generation scolding the younger for its lack of mettle. As far as Weber is concerned, ‘the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations’ (Weber 1946a: 155).

Weber’s analysis of the relationship between the ethic of brotherliness and the different value spheres yields the depressing conclusion that the tensions between them are simply insurmountable in the modern world. The various efforts to gain ‘salvation in the face of these tensions succumb in the end to the world dominion of unbrotherliness’. Under these inauspicious conditions, ‘an imitation of the life of Buddha, Jesus, or Francis [of Assisi] seems condemned to failure for purely external reasons’ (Weber 1946b: 351). The cultivation of ‘acosmic brotherliness’—the objectless love of all mankind, or what Robert Bellah has termed ‘world-denying love’ (Bellah 1999: 277-304)—is simply eliminated in the loveless world of unbrotherliness.

While agreeing that there is much to worry about in the modern world and in the clash between the ethic of brotherliness and the different ‘value-spheres’, Bellah took issue with important elements of Weber’s dismal diagnosis of the times. It is true that the world of capitalism is at its root antithetical to brotherliness; it is a world of dog-eat-dog and of antagonistic relationships in the marketplace, not a world of altruism and turning the other cheek. And the bureaucratic state, with all its hierarchy and impersonality, is similarly at odds with the dictates of brotherliness. But, Bellah notes, there have been certain developments that Weber did not live to see—associated with the figures of Gandhi and Martin Luther King—that sought, not without some success, to advance the ethic of brotherliness in political and (less so) economic life. Moreover, one might argue that postwar European social democracy created a form of society that sought to realize the ethic of brotherliness, if perhaps under impersonal bureaucratic terms. Bellah argues, however, that much of that effort has been in retreat—if not under assault—since the 1980s (Bellah 1999: 350). The oceans of ink spilled on the post-1973 triumph of ‘neoliberalism’ (for just one recent example, see Kuttner 2018) attests to this conclusion.

Nonetheless, Weber himself argued that the ethic of brotherliness was still possible in intimate relationships and personal behavior. Marriage goes beyond the merely erotic to a ‘mutual granting of oneself to another and the becoming indebted to each other’ (Weber
1946c: 350). Moreover, ‘every act of genuine brotherliness… contributes something imperishable to a super-personal realm’ (Weber 1946a: 155). So there are rays of hope. On the whole, however, modern culture—whatever its scientific and cultural achievements, and they are considerable—is such that brotherliness on a universal scale is impossible. There may have been progress in the technical realm, but this cannot be said to constitute ‘progress’ in any human sense.

Yet Weber’s view of modernity is too pessimistic. The terms of the comparison between the peasant and the modern Kulturmensch should make us aware of the problem with his position. Weber portrays the peasant of yore in starkly Romantic terms as someone having ‘stood in the organic cycle of life’ and for whom, at the end of his days, nothing urgently needed to be done and ‘there remained no puzzles he might wish to solve’ (Weber 1946a: 140). But need we accept this highly stylized picture as true? Might the peasant have wondered why half of his children died before reaching the age of 5? Or why he often lacked enough to eat, despite his best efforts to keep the family fed? Or why famine came at its whim and took many of those around him, especially when public policy might often address the problem? The peasant is characterized as an exceptionally taciturn fellow for someone who lived a life of privation and precarity, often on the edge of starvation, and inclined at times toward bread riots intended to call attention to his plight (see Fogel 2012: 66).

It is also extremely uncharacteristic of Weber to draw such a sharp line between two periods, the agricultural and the ‘modern’. Have we really stepped over a line from an epoch of meaning, in which ‘life had given to [the peasant] what life had to offer’, into an epoch marked by a pervasive ‘meaninglessness’? To be sure, many people spend their working lives performing tasks that have little meaning for them other than making it possible to pay the bills. But as compared to an agricultural way of life, as a result of reductions in the amount of time necessary to acquire life’s necessities, those people are also likely to have considerably more leisure to pursue activities that are meaningful to them (Fogel 2004: 69-71).

Moreover, even if Bellah were correct to point to areas of and efforts toward improvement in human social life of which Weber might have approved, Weber’s (and for that matter, Bellah’s) view of science and progress is simply too bleak. Before getting into the more philosophical aspects of his inquiry about the place of science in human life, Weber noted that many scientific endeavors cannot justify themselves; they simply don’t ask the question whether
medicine, art, jurisprudence, and the historical and social sciences are worth doing. They essentially proceed on the assumption that they are worthwhile—to someone. Weber begins this line of thinking by using the example of medicine: ‘Whether life is worth while living and when—this question is not asked by medicine’ (Weber 1946a: 144). This conundrum seems to loom even larger now than it did 100 years ago: given the extraordinary increases in life expectancy in the intervening century since Weber wrote, as well as the unprecedented growth in the sheer size of the human population (see Livi-Bacci 2017), who can say whether life is ‘worth living’? Why should one seek to live longer and longer? Many are skeptical, asking themselves, reasonably enough, what point there might be in the potentially limitless extension of human life.

About these questions it seems impossible that one could find convincing answers without some encompassing purpose; as Nietzsche put it, ‘Man would sooner have the void for his purpose than be void of purpose’ (Nietzsche 1956: 299). Having a purpose is surely crucial to any answer to the question whether life is worth living. Unexamined lives may be tolerable, pace Socrates, but they are likely to lack purpose, and purpose seems to be the thing that gets us out of bed in the morning. However, we also need to be able to get out of bed in the morning without grinding, insufferable pain. Whereas the first revolution in life expectancy led to the virtual elimination of infant and child mortality in at least the wealthier parts of the world, the second involves the lengthening of life on the back end (see Riley 2001). But everyone knows that old age is likely to come with aches and pains; accordingly, a good deal of attention is now being given to ‘healthy aging’ and to reducing the number of years lived with disability (World Health Organization 2015).

And here we may have a reply to Weber’s point that medicine does not ask whether life is worth living. ‘Medicine’ might not ask that question, but people who practice medicine and medical research presumably often do. Those who have contributed to the many medical and public health advances that have resulted in the lengthening of life and the improvement of health might be presumed to have thought that what they were doing was ‘meaningful’, even if only to them personally, and that that’s what drove them to make their contributions. Far from Weber’s image of science as a meaningless, impersonal realm, Shapin argues that ‘the related resources of personal virtue, familiarity, and charisma’ are central to contemporary technoscience and, moreover, are generally ‘neglected
aspects of late modernity’ (2008: 5; his italics). The efforts of scientists such as these have virtually eliminated child mortality in the wealthier countries of the world and are increasingly doing so in the poorer ones as well. Researchers are intent upon identifying the causes of, and hence reducing, communicable diseases, some of which (such as smallpox and polio) have been eradicated and hence largely forgotten by people in the wealthy parts of the world. Science does, indeed, seem ‘chained to the course of progress’, but it is not obvious that this must necessarily lead to the meaninglessness that Weber imagined. Indeed, one might think rather that the opposite is the case; the proven prospects for improvement might well generate a sense of meaning and hence of devotion to the task.

The fact is that, Weber’s cultural pessimism notwithstanding, advances in human well-being are all around us. Extreme poverty and illiteracy, scourges of human life for most of its history, have been extensively eliminated, and may well be within our lifetimes. In 2017, a smaller share of the world’s population was hungry, impoverished, or illiterate than ever before (Kristof 2018). GDP per capita has risen around the globe in the past generation, largely as a result of developments in India and China, which comprise nearly 40% of world population. Accordingly, inequalities are increasingly to be found within countries rather than between them, as had been the case for much of the period since the Industrial Revolution (Milanovic 2016), and the poorer parts of the world are increasingly closing the gap with the rich (Radelet 2015). Moreover, world population has grown dramatically since Weber wrote ‘Science as a Vocation’; it has roughly quadrupled, from 1.8 billion in 1918 (when the worldwide flu epidemic killed perhaps 3-5% of the people on the planet) (Scheidel 2017: 441) to some 7.3 billion. The number of hours of work and the amount of working time necessary to acquire the necessities of life have declined dramatically over the intervening century (Fogel 2004: 69-71), while the idea of retirement—often lasting many years now—replaced an older fear that people would spend their last years without work and hence without money (see Costa 1998). Homicide rates have plummeted in the world’s wealthier countries for generations, and in the United States, ‘2014 was not only the safest year of the past five decades, it was one of the safest years in U.S. history’ (Sharkey 2018: 6). Since World War II, interstate warfare has diminished markedly in frequency and in deadliness; indeed, in 2014, researchers recorded only one interstate conflict, that between India and Pakistan, with fewer than 50 fatalities in the
course of the year (Petterson and Wallensteen 2015: 537). Wars have become almost exclusively internal and the rate of battle deaths and ‘one-sided’ deaths (as in genocides) have declined significantly (see Roser 2018). Women have many more rights and opportunities—most obviously, the right to vote almost everywhere—than they did in Weber’s time, no doubt in part a product of the shift from heavy manufacturing to office work that more readily permits the inclusion of women. These are some of the major bright spots that have been brought about by the industrial revolution, the rise of modern science, and their respective application to human problems (see Deaton 2013). Progress and meaning may not be the same thing, of course, but one imagines that these developments provide much more auspicious conditions for human flourishing than the ‘biological old regime’ described by Fernand Braudel (1992: 91), when conditions of hunger, famine, pestilence, and short life expectancies plagued agricultural populations.

What remains to be fixed? The most obvious ‘externality’ or negative side-effect of the improvements outlined above concern the environment; insofar as the transformation wrought by industrialization and post-industrial society has depended on the burning of fossil fuels and the use of complex chemical compounds such as those in plastics, the environment has suffered. Yet there have been improvements here as well, which bode well for a successful response to the increasingly urgent problem of global warming. Next is the problem of inequality. The French economist Thomas Piketty unexpectedly became an overnight sensation with the publication of his dense academic tome, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014). There he paints a picture of a return to the world before 1918, when returns to capital were greater than those to labor, and hence a world of sharp inequalities rooted in the ownership or non-ownership of capital assets. Meanwhile, in a development peculiar to the United States, a major crisis in overuse of opioid drugs has led to a decline in life expectancy for middle-aged whites, especially among the less educated. Husband-and-wife economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton found that mortality rates of white middle-aged men and women in the United States have risen in the years since 1998, especially among the less educated. Case and Deaton suggest that these findings may reflect the long stagnation in the economic prospects of these populations and rising concern among them about economic insecurity since the 1970s. This development represents a reversal of the previous across-the-board upward trend and is reminiscent
of the decline of life expectancy in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Both are related to the decline of conditions of economic security that had existed before the trends developed (Case and Deaton 2015). The opioid crisis in the United States also points to the possible purposelessness of a life without meaningful work. The universal basic income proposed by some may help resolve the challenge of surviving economically without an adequately paying job, but it may not successfully address the question whether people have purpose in their lives. With a modicum of economic security, however, even the non-rich may acquire the opportunity to experience ‘real freedom’ (see van Parijs and Vanderborgh 2017) to explore their true interests.

Hence, while it is hardly the case that we have solved all human problems, it is clear that we have had significant progress in a number of areas as compared to our forebears of, say, a century ago. Still, warfare plagues (mostly) the poorer parts of the world, which also suffer from hunger, illiteracy, and preventable communicable diseases, while lack of work, lack of (economic or physical) security, lack of adequate income, and, perhaps, lack of purpose plague especially the disadvantaged portions of the wealthier populations of the world. Science—that is, scholarship in the broadest sense—has done much to ameliorate these scourges since Weber found meaninglessness in that endeavor. It is of course difficult to label this ‘progress’ in any undifferentiated sense, given that progress in the sense of increases in health, wealth, and life expectancy may not be the same as meaning. But we need not necessarily take Weber at his pessimistic word. Just as Bellah suggested that the push for racial equality and European social democracy represented progress of a kind that Weber would have recognized, Weber would presumably have acknowledged improvements in life and the quality of life as progress as well. Against the background of these improvements, Weber’s tragic view of the modern world as a descent into meaninglessness seems too harsh. We should keep that in mind when we read him on these matters.

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Weber’s Critical Evaluation of Tarde: An Assessment

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Abstract
This article presents and discusses Weber’s critical evaluation of Tarde’s notion of imitation. While Weber does not object to the potential sociological relevance of this notion, he finds it ill-defined and difficult to investigate. He does not concur, moreover, with Tarde’s fundamental thesis that all social action rests on imitation. A textual examination of Tarde’s writings indicate that—aside from the notion of imitation, on which Tarde has laid exclusive focus - there are several points of agreement between Weber and Tarde. However, Tarde has preferred merely to mention these points, rather than investigating them, as Weber has done in his sociological writings. This may open the way to further investigation of common ground and differences between the two authors.

Keywords: Tarde, Imitation, Norms.

Introductory Observations
Max Weber’s brief critical comment on Gabriel Tarde’s key concept of imitation, as formulated in the first chapter of Economy and Society (Weber 1972: 11-12; 1978: 23), has so far raised limited scholarly attention. Therefore, the appropriateness of Weber’s criticism of Tarde has been so far inadequately considered. This is deplorable, for this comment provides the only text in which Weber mentions Tarde, and constitutes therefore the only information source on Weber’s assessment of Tarde’s oeuvre. Imitation as a sociological category was related by Tarde, and by subsequent sociologists such as Everett M. Rogers, to the diffusion of innovation. While this specific field of studies has survived to this day, other aspects of Tarde’s writings have fallen into oblivion. Tarde himself has often been not even mentioned in works dealing with Sociological Theory.

1 See however Gane 2012: 61-65.
2 See however Martindale 1960; Timasheff and Theodorson 1976.
The analysis of this criticism may moreover pave the way to a comparison of their respective definitions of sociology’s specific subject matter, and more in general, of their sociological epistemologies. We shall first present in some detail Weber’s critical observations and then comment on them by considering Tarde’s own writings that bear on the notion of imitation. These writings will provide the textual basis for evaluating the correctness of Weber’s assessment.

Weber’s critical observations on Tarde

Weber’s mentions Tarde briefly in his discussion of the notion of social action, on which he builds his own definition of sociology (Weber 1978: 23-24). Weber considers Tarde’s emphasis on the sociological relevance of imitation justified. Tarde himself, however, is taken to task for having failed to distinguish between two distinct sorts of imitation (Nachahmung); namely, one which is merely an unreflected reaction to other people’s conduct, and another which presupposes by contrast a meaningful and deliberate orientation of one’s conduct on the conduct of other people. Weber adds that this is not a clear-cut distinction; for the distinction is empirically quite difficult to ascertain in many cases, whether because this orientation on others’ conduct cannot be clearly established or because the subjects are not aware, not to mention fully aware, of the meaning of their own conduct. Conscious reference to this meaning is accordingly a pre-condition to imitation as a sociologically relevant category (Weber 1973: 454-60).

Any conventional conduct, such as the one that presupposes the expressed or tacit consent of all participants (Einverständnishandeln), is potentially ambiguous, Weber argues. Fashion is a case in point. Conformity to fashion may originate either from tradition-sanctioned, unreflected and passive imitation of others’ conduct, which have been the object of observation. Alternatively, it may originate from experience-based expectations that others will behave likewise, as well as from conscious abiding with conventional norms and values that prescribe a given conduct and lifestyle as mandatory. As Weber glosses, ‘every status society lives by conventions, which regulate the style of life’ (Weber 1978: 307). Conventions hold even in the absence of a formal coercive apparatus, and may follow from persuasion, calculation, habit, conformity to status conventions, or still other motives. However, Weber maintains that all forms of conduct resting exclusively on the conduct of others
would be labile in the particular case of conformity to fashion, and also in general, when it is not upheld by norms (Weber 1973: 457; 1978: 29). Consent-based actions are found, in addition to status societies, also in markets (Weber 1973: 635-40). In this case, too, activities with which they abide ‘are not simply about imitation, and … imitation is not simply about the blind following of others’ (Gane 2013: 63). Participants share the expectation that others will find the contract clauses binding, and will accordingly respect their provisos.

Weber’s sociological statements concerning imitation, when compared to Tarde’s, may be thus summarized as follows:

a. Imitation is a particular social action which deserves sociological investigation (Weber and Tarde).
b. Tarde has neglected to clarify the distinction between passive following other people’s conduct, on the one hand, and deliberate orientation to its meaning, on the other (Weber’s first difference from Tarde).
c. In the latter case, which may be empirically difficult to distinguish from the former, conformity to others’ conduct can originate from a variety of motives, passive imitation being but only one of them (Weber’s second difference from Tarde).
d. Conformity to others’ conduct is unstable when social norms do not support it (Weber’s third difference from Tarde).

These statements reflect, however, only Weber’s critical interpretation of Tarde. For his part, Tarde did not include Weber among the authors with whom he was apparently familiar, even though he could have commented on those epistemological writings by Weber that came out before Tarde’s death in 1904. Weber’s interpretation should be accordingly verified against Tarde’s own writings that concern imitation in order to check its textual accuracy.

Tarde on Imitation

Weber has apparently only read Tarde’s The Laws of Imitation, possibly still his best known work. Tarde moves from his conception of society as ‘everyone’s reciprocal possession, in extremely varied forms’ (Tarde 1893: 52). His main thesis is consistent with this conception, and is stated with clarity: ‘All that is social, rather than regarding life or the physical environment is caused by imitation.

3 We shall refer here to the second edition of this work (Tarde 1895).
This holds for all social phenomena, insofar as both their similarities and their differences are concerned’ (Tarde 1895a: 63; see also 84, 96, 248). In several other works by this author this notion is also discussed and put into use (see for instance Tarde 1895b: 63, 127, 147, 272; 1899: 30, 247), in line with the interpretive thesis that the concept of imitation plays ‘a key explanatory role in Tarde’s thinking from the first work onwards’ (Renneville 2018: 111). Tarde has applied the notion of imitation to different areas of sociological inquiry, such as sociability, politics, and social stratification.

Thus, in *La Logique Sociale* imitation is said to be relevant in ‘contracts, services, or constraints’ (1895b: 63). Elsewhere, Tarde has stated that imitation expands because it perpetuates new ideas, discoveries, and innovations on the part of single individuals, which would have had an ephemeral existence otherwise (Tarde 1898: 127).

As Tarde also observes, however, imitation is sociologically relevant only if it is accompanied by some sort of innovation, whether artistic or historical. Innovation, however, precludes imitation once a person is inserted into social life (cf. Tarde 1895b: 520; 1898: 59). Imitation should not be therefore equated to parrot-like and meaningless following someone else’s thought or conducts (cf. Tarde 1895a: 201). This would correspond to the first phase of the imitation process only. In the second phase, however, the individual ‘becomes creative and goes beyond the established rules’ (Leroux 2018: 120). In this latter case, imitation intends to respond to some problems of the times in which it takes place, oftentimes ‘a pseudo-logical response to questions that are themselves insoluble’ (Tarde 1895a: 58-59, 255). Imitation is reciprocally related to the ‘instinct of sympathy and sociability’ (Tarde 1901: 132), and to the ‘similarity of the states of mind’ (Tarde 1899: 197). It originates from the advancement of collaborative tendencies and from the social facts which conform to them, and which Tarde calls ‘social logic’ (Tarde 1895b: 176).

Imitation rests on, and corresponds to, social memory, and therefore on usages, which are essential to all actions that occur in social life logic’ (Tarde 1895b: 213-14). The advancement of innovation has gone hand-in-hand and has been reciprocally related with the progress of inventions. In particular, industrial inventions have given a strong impulse to perform reciprocal imitations on the part of different peoples (Tarde 1895a: 119, 326). Tarde distinguishes between two sorts of imitation, one based on custom and other on fashion, the former being in contrast to the latter whenever customs and
traditions are incompatible and at loggerheads with each other. This assertion by Tarde is linked to his conception of politics, power, and authority. Imitation plays a lesser role in politics where customs and traditions are strong; whilst parties, which are currents of imitation, rise and consolidate in the second case (cf. Tarde 1899: 143-44). The related notions of politics, power, and authority are formulated in the same text. Power is defined as ‘the privilege to obtain obedience’, and it has taken on ‘an ever-more impersonal and objective character’ (Tarde 1899: 15).

Power has steadily increased its extension, as gauged by the number of people who are subject to it and the territory it controls. It has also ever increased its celerity and reliability (Tarde 1899: 209-210). Changes in political power depend on new beliefs, whether based on convictions or norms (cf. Borlandi 2018: 92), and desires; for ‘the capital of individuals consists exclusively beliefs and wishes’, as Tarde has written (Cited by Lubek 2008: 11). By contrast, collective or spiritual capital, as evidenced by ‘progress in production and trade’, is driven by ‘inventions and their propagation by imitation’ (Valade 2018: 83). As for politics, Tarde has conceived of it as ‘the domination of other peoples or fractions of the same people, or the deliverance from the servitude, which other peoples or other fractions of the same one have imposed’ (Tarde 1899: 54, 181). While political organizations are possibly dispensable in small societies, they are necessary in large societies, as these societies require mutual collaboration and assistance (Tarde 1899: 13).

Authority, too, originates in most cases from imitation: ‘In three quarters of the time one obeys someone else because the latter receives allegiance from others’. Authority may rest either on the ‘public spirit’, that is in modern times on public opinion; or on official and formal criteria, such as the authority exerted by Heads of State (Tarde 1901: 97; see also 49, 94). The former type of authority spreads much more gradually than the latter (Tarde 1899: 15-16). Both types of authority have their origin in the people’s belief in the legitimacy of command, and ultimately, in the rulers’ desires (Tarde 1899: 163-67, 262); for—as it has been stated with reference to Tarde’s notions of power and legitimacy - ‘in the long run, no power can dispense with some kind of recognition’ (Borlandi 2018: 90). Among the causes of imitation, Tarde has also laid stress on the ‘immense social importance of conversation’ (Tarde 1901: 89), as stated in his L’opinion et la foule (1901). For conversation is an important source of
public opinion. It is therefore also a source of change in social relations and, ultimately, in social norms (cf. Toews 2018: 152).

His attention is, however, focused on power and legitimacy as most relevant sources of imitation. Those who are ruled grant legitimacy to the rulers whom they believe are more able to guard their most coveted goods (Tarde 1899: 35-36). Discredit, on the other hand, may befall power holders when its secret ways are divulged, even though loss of prestige tends to make power more effective in accomplishing its ends (Tarde 1899: 53). The legitimacy of power confers, even to those who have been defeated, ‘an invisible, extraordinary force’ (Tarde 1899: 163). Alternatively, imitation involves the attempt to reach success by following the path of others who for whatever reason have been successful, and have for this very reason become authoritative. As a case in point, the lower classes imitate those who are more privileged, thereby participating in their power and eventually gaining admittance into their circles. In fact, Tarde argues, the influence of imitation is hindered by the divide connoting different layers of the population, different parties, or different religions (Tarde 1895a: 331; 1899: 185, 214, 255).

For social divides prevent feelings of sympathy, which are ‘the profound source of imitation, and of social life as whole’ (Tarde 1899: 248-49). As Tarde has written elsewhere, imitation ‘everywhere has mostly spread downwards’, socially speaking. The ‘continuous currents of imitation’ have broken social and geographical barriers, contributing to ‘the systematic consolidation of societies’ (Tarde 1895b: 147; 1901: 94). The progress of social life is promoted when ‘new appetites and curiosities’ come about, or when ‘some widely shared desires and ideas gain strength’ (Tarde 1895b: 447).

The uniformity of ideas, tastes, and usages, which ‘external imitation has created’, has made possible the ‘multiplication of external relations between classes and between peoples’ (Tarde 1895a: 294). This uniformity, in turn, has resulted from such venues of conversation as ‘coffee houses, salons, and stores, all places where people talk’, which are ‘the veritable factories of power’ (Tarde 1901: 96-97; cf. also 61, 83). Imitation, therefore, promotes social relations, whose nature is manifold (cf. Tarde 1895a: 317). At the same time, the progress of social life, notably in the urban centers, has made the subjection to the influence of imitation more individual and rational; for with the advancement of civilization individuals are more able to choose according to their own natures and ends (cf. Tarde 1893: 63;
In this sense, as Tarde has stated in a passage reminiscent of Symbolic Interactionism, the individual I shapes and becomes conscious of itself ‘by means of multiple actions establishing contacts with strangers’ (Tarde 1901: 113).

How and to what extent is Weber’s critique compatible with Tarde’s notion of imitation?

Granted that imitation is a social action which deserves investigation, according to both authors, Tarde has paid it much greater attention than Weber, for Tarde - rather than Weber- has considered it of the greatest sociological import. Merely stating that these two authors have agreed on the relevance of imitation may obfuscate this point. The other points, which have been made by way of recapitulation of Weber’s differences from Tarde, will be considered separately. As for Weber’s objection that Tarde has failed to distinguish between passive and deliberate imitation, there are in fact passages in which this distinction is made, whether explicitly or by implication. This will be shown with reference to the above-made statements which regard Tarde’s notion of imitation.

Tarde relates this notion, as it will be recalled, with innovation, sympathy and sociability. He accordingly rejects the equation of imitation with parrot-like conduct. Still, Tarde has frequently repeated the assertion that imitation holds for all social phenomena. Thus, for example, ‘irrespective of whether the question bears on contracts, services, or constraints, it always concerns facts of imitation’ (Tarde 1895b: 63); or, as Tarde has stated elsewhere, ‘imitation, which socializes the individual, everywhere perpetuates the good ideas and, by doing so, it makes them closer to each other, and fecundates them’ (Tarde 1898: 127). In still another work by Tarde the following statement is found: ‘Everywhere, imitation is especially propagated from above to below’ (Tarde 1901: 94). These and other similar assertions, however, are not per se conducive to any clearly made distinction between passive imitation on the one hand, and intentional and deliberate imitation on the other.

That the distinction is de facto present in many Tarde’s writings is no objection to the inherent defectiveness of this definition. This conclusion holds even when Tarde appears to concur with Weber’s epistemological stance and in particular with the relevance of Verstellen, as in this passage. It refers to a hypothetical listener (auditeur). The passage should be cited in its entirety:
If this listener had limited himself to repeat the sound in question, like a parrot, without attaching the intended meaning, one cannot see how this superficial and mechanical could have led him to grasp the meaning which a foreigner would have given to it, and have led the latter to operate the transition from sound to word. It is therefore necessary to concede that the meaning has been conveyed with the sound, it has reflected the sound. Certainly, admitting this postulate should not cost the hypnotic tours de force, the miracles of suggestion, which have been lately so vulgarized (Tarde 1895a: 201).

One may conclude from these passages, when jointly considered, that imitation is for Tarde a deliberate and meaningful action. Tarde, however, has preferred to underline the very fact of imitation, and impute it great sociological relevance. The motives of conformity to others’ conduct vary greatly, according to Tarde, even apart from the particular case of a deliberate and meaningful action. One motive is the habit of reciprocal imitation, as is the case when the imitators share only some traits, but disregard others in their attempts to imitate themselves reciprocally (Tarde 1895a: 227). Tarde has preferred to mention these motives, rather than investigating them (Tarde 1895a: 301, 326). Other motives are as follows: the need to be directed (Tarde 1895a: 259); the imitative influence exerted by the official Authority (Tarde 1899: 16); the desire to imitate what is current in other status groups and provinces (Tarde 1895b: 147); the imitation of morality and justice in a milieu that is immoral and unjust.

This imitation flows from the feelings of sympathy and sociability which originate from such a moral condition (Tarde 1899: 248-49; see also 30), and therefore goes a long way, according to Tarde, toward explaining a very large number of conducts. Motives should be distinguished from the causes of imitation, and therefore of the propagation of sentiments, ideas, modes of action. Tarde is apparently interested in investigating the motives of imitation, rather than its causes. Moreover, and more relevant here, he would have agreed with Weber’s assertion that conformity to others’ conduct is unstable without the support of social norms. In fact, if sympathy and sociability is a component of moral invention, and sympathy is ‘the deep source of imitation’, as Tarde has written (Tarde 1899: 248-49), then morality and social norms provide stability to imitation and, by implication, to conformity. Tarde does not apparently dwell on this point, however, and prefers to show that, in a great variety and number of cases, ‘the social being, insofar as social, is essentially imitator’ (Tarde 1895a: 28).
Conclusion

Tarde has thus made some statements that accord with Weber’s formulations, while relevant to his own sociological theory. These statements, as mentioned, are as follows: (a) passive (‘parrot-like’) imitation should be distinguished from intentional and deliberate imitation; (b) conformity to others’ conduct originates from a variety of motives, imitation being the most important from a sociological viewpoint; (c) conformity to social norms stabilizes imitation. Important differences between Tarde and Weber qualify these points of agreement, however. The first and foremost difference is Weber’s disagreement with Tarde’s foundational thesis that all that is social is caused by imitation. While Tarde points to a variety of other possible motives that may underlie imitation, his consistent emphasis on imitation as the prime cause of social action indicates that Weber’s observation is not off the mark.

Weber, moreover, would presumably raise no objection to Tarde’s previously mentioned conception of power as the privilege to obtain obedience; nor, for that matter, to his thesis that power has taken on an ever-more impersonal and objective character. In fact, both statements remind one of Weber’s own definition and conception of power, authority, and legitimacy. However, he would object that these statements give no adequate information on the sources of legitimate power. Mentioning sympathy, custom, and tradition would hardly constitute a sociological analysis of legitimate, insofar as these sources of legitimacy when subject to an in-depth analysis are of a social-psychological nature power. If it is granted, in keeping with both authors, that norms provide stability to social conformity, Weber would not concur with Tarde’s thesis that imitation is the one and only, or even the most important, source of social norms and, therefore, of conformity; for imitation provides labile foundation to norms. All in all, then, Weber would have found numerous points of agreement with Tarde concerning the latter’s notion of imitation and some related statements. Weber would have rejected, however, many—perhaps most—ferences Tarde has drawn from his basic notion of imitation.

References


Kari Palonen’s *A Political Style of Theorizing* collects in one place the many articles and essays he has published over the last 20 years, all devoted to aspects of Weber’s style of theorizing. Forging his own style of interpretation out of Weber’s style, Palonen provides a running commentary that pulls all aspects of Weber’s corpus back to a distinctive interpretation of Weber’s theory of politics, an interpretation that he himself claims ‘applies the principle of one-sided accentuation to Weber’s own work’ (2, 167). This interpretation has many moving parts, but at its core are three key arguments: first, a recurrent emphasis on the role of ‘Chancen’ (chance or chances) as central to Weber’s concepts of power and politics over and against a determinate notion of purposive reason; second, a fierce defense of Weber’s account of parliamentary politics and the professional politician against its critics; and lastly, the attempt to draw an analogy between the for-and-against nature of parliamentary debate and Weber’s revision of ‘objectivity’ in the social sciences as requiring a self-renewing process of competing interpretations and explanations.

In contrast to most interpreters of Weber, Palonen puts special emphasis on the word ‘Chancen’ in all of its potential meanings—chance, probability, possibility, opportunity, contingency, likelihood—in Weber’s work. This allows him to emphasize that Weber’s concepts of, say, professional politicians, parties, or states could always have developed differently and that their conceptualization assumes ‘a radical contingency’ (5, 123) that renders their existence always only as a realized possibility. Although he does not quote this passage, one might understand Palonen’s approach to Weber under the stricture from *Economy and Society* that the ‘additional achievement of explanation by interpretive understanding, as distinguished [by understanding] through external observation, is of course attained only at the price of the more hypothetical and fragmentary character of its interpretively achieved results.'
[my emphasis].

Weber’s concepts of politics, power, domination/rule, nation, party, or state are always tentative and partial; therefore when we explain why they have come about and what the consequences might be of acting under them, we should always be aware of the hypothetical nature of our explanation. Things could be otherwise. It is this aspect of Weber’s account of explanatory-understanding that informs Palonen’s emphasis on ‘chance’, opportunity, and probability, and possibility in his interpretations of the core concepts of Weber’s political theorizing. Or as he puts it, they are ‘a phenomenon of the possible’ because ‘they appeal to the human agents’ everyday understanding’ (132).

Palonen derives his claim that Weber is less about predictable action based on purposive rationality (Zweckrationalität) and more about chances to act from Weber’s famous definitions of power (Macht) and ‘Herrschaft’ (rule or domination). He supports this approach by reference to the student notes of Weber’s very last lectures in 1920 on Staatsssoziologie, in which the ‘Herrschaft’ exercised by a state—whatever its form—rests on the probability (Chance) of having its rule or commands accepted (’Wann besteht der Staat: wenn er die Chance hat, daß man ihm gehorch!’) (125-26). Thus in Weber’s well-known definition of power as ‘the probability [jede Chancen] that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability [diese Chance] rests’, Palonen chooses to focus on the ‘Chancen’, the possibility or, under certain circumstances the probability, of imposing one’s will over resistance rather than on the actual act of imposing one’s will, the resistance to it, or the resources necessary to carry out this imposition. Likewise in Weber’s equally well-known definition of ‘Herrschaft’ (rule or domination), ‘the probability [Chance] that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a group of persons [Gehorsam zu finden]’, Palonen again focuses on the chance of imposing one’s will without resistance, though here, depending on circumstance, it is probable rather than contingent. The implication that ‘Herrschaft’ involves a nexus between purposive reason

and domination creating predictable command and obedience without resistance plays less of a role in Palonen’s self-described ‘one-sided’ reading. This focus on ‘Chancen’ takes the hard edge off Weber’s account of politics as the struggle for power, domination, conflict, and selection, even though Palonen acknowledges the centrality of this vocabulary in Weber. For Palonen ‘politics’ in Weber becomes a contingent struggle for ‘power shares’ and their distribution (33) rather than a determinate exercise of will over adversaries or rule in which subjects obey the commands of an apparatus or a person because they believe them to be valid.

This definition of politics as a contingent chance to acquire or shift shares of power or struggle for ‘Herrschaft’ has the greatest interpretative payoff in the chapters where Palonen lays out Weber’s justification for the necessity of professional politics and politicians in modern parliamentary democracies. In the chapter titled ‘Max Weber’s Three Types of Professional Politicians’, Palonen reconstructs a three-part typology of the professional politician: the party functionary, the popularly elected president, and, for Palonen’s purposes the most significant figure, the professional politician as parliamentarian. In laying out the complementarity and conflicts among these three types, Palonen provides a distinctive slant on the rather standard understanding that, for Weber, the professional politician under modern conditions of mass democracy provided a necessary counterweight to the reduction of all politics to administrative rule. Employing his notion of Weberian politics as rotating around ‘the chance’ or ‘chances’ to struggle for power shares, he views each of these figures as offering ‘specific chances’ to form a counterweight to ‘Beamtenherrschaft’, the rule or domination of bureaucratic officials over all politics (55).

The party functionary arose for Weber from the necessity for parties to become machines in order to deliver votes under the pressure of mass suffrage. On Palonen’s reading, parties provide a weak counter to the administrative desire to close down opportunities for political action, since the political machine produces hierarchical order on the side of political competition. A stronger counter-weight to the bureaucracy is to be found in the ideal type of the plebiscitary president and political leader. Against Mommsen, Palonen argues that the plebiscitary leader is not an authoritarian element within mass democracy, but rather emerges out of the process by which popular acclamation turns into a regular ‘election procedure’ regulated by mass suffrage. Yet Palonen is aware that Weber was himself
ambiguous on this front, given that Weber portrayed the direct election for the president as a form of ‘Caesarist acclamation’ and admitted that ‘the borderline between acclamation and election can be crossed in both directions’ (59). Palonen solves this ambiguity by claiming that Weber always adhered to the British model in which even a plebiscitary leader would be subject to parliamentary scrutiny—the famous argument in favor of the Reich president was, he argues, purely aimed at offsetting the newly constituted German parliament based on what he saw as clientelist parties (61) and not meant as a general political proposal.

This submission of the plebiscitary leader to parliament opens out to the last type of professional politician in Weber, the ‘professional parliamentarian’ whose work in parliament offers the most direct counter to bureaucratic officialdom for Palonen. Again, in dispute with Mommsen’s claim that parliament for Weber is merely an instrument for the selection of plebiscitary leadership, Palonen makes the case that the parliamentary deputy shares in a variety of functions all of which counter the rule of state bureaucracy. They include selecting the prime minister and toppling governments, weeding out demagogues through demanding committee work, selecting responsible political leaders through the committee system, and above all holding hearings that can penetrate the claim of bureaucracy to monopolize specialized knowledge, knowledge of administrative office procedure, and secrecy (62-65). Contra Mommsen, Palonen claims that parliaments with professional politicians absorb the plebiscitary elements of politics into their own functioning (63). As Palonen points out in true Weberian fashion, each of these types of professional politician constitute in their mutual interdependence the sphere of politicking in modern mass politics. But he also insightfully points out that any single one of these figures would not have sufficient room to maneuver to counter the bureaucratic threat. On Palonen’s Weberian inspired reconstruction, it is the contingent coming together of these three types that provides a constant counter-weight to the fact that all modern states rule through bureaucracy. This is a reconstruction of the Weberian political style of thinking at its best.

Palonen’s account of Weber’s dispute with Sombart over the status of professional politics, ‘Weber and Sombart as Politicians’, is one of the most interpretively illuminating chapters in the book. First off, it provides a significant slice of the fin de siècle context for Weber’s own reconstruction of the modern Berufspolitiker, the
professional politician with a calling for politics as a way of life. The Sombart-Weber debate emerged at a historical inflection point when a whole host of political thinkers was trying to figure out whether the rise of the professional politician and modern electioneering was part of a decline optic from a world of notables and active citizens or a new set of chances or opportunities for political action. More significantly, the chapter demonstrates the underlying strategy Weber used in defending modern politics as a ‘business’ (ein Betrieb) from the critics who found it wanting because it had become a ‘business’ with its own professional organization and norms. The very deficiencies that Sombart found in professional politics became for Weber the necessary conditions for defending politics as such under modern democratic conditions. What is striking in Palonen’s account of this debate is the way that Sombart and Weber agreed on the sociological facts of the professionalization of modern politics—its emergence as a business with its own strata of professionals, driven by the demands of mass politics, requiring constant agitation and mobilization of mass opinion, and responding to the complexity of the modern administrative state with democratically elected parliaments. They also agreed that a return to a politics of notables was impossible. But what Sombart saw as a reason to retreat from politics and cultivate one’s own life calling, Weber saw as the opportunity to produce new conditions for political action and actors—in particular, democratic suffrage in conjunction with competing parties and parliaments opened up new opportunities to bring the monopoly of specialized knowledge by officials under political control (50). While not explicitly argued, Palonen’s account in this chapter gives us good grounds to infer that Weber’s concept of the Berufspolitiker, the vocational politician who lives from the profession of politics and for the higher ethical demands of the political way of life, is forged out of this debate.

In subsequent chapters Palonen deploys both Weber’s argument against Sombart and his typology of professional politics to defend Weber’s reading of the English Parliament as the model for modern professional politics, both in Weber’s own context and for the present. In these chapters, Palonen seeks to shift the emphasis away from the idealized vocational or ‘leading politician’ in Politics as a Vocation, giving direction to the nation against a policy of bureaucratic ossification, and instead turns our attention to the processes of parliamentary politics itself. Relying primarily on ‘Wahlrecht in Deutschland’ and ‘Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland’,
Palonen embraces Weber’s view of parliament based on a certain stylized English model, though he interprets this model as containing a continuity between a speaking parliament and a working parliament (192). On Palonen’s reading, Weber embraced a notion of a parliament that overcomes the dilemma referenced in *Economy and Society*, wherein the politician in the modern state finds her/himself as a dilettante over and against the administrator whose specialized and hidden knowledge of policy and command allows a shift in political decision-making to the state bureaucracy.

Palonen points to two ways that parliaments in mass democracies overcome the bureaucrat’s monopoly of specialized knowledge: First, they are able to engage in pro and contra debates within specific ground rules of civility as ideally exemplified in the British parliament, though Palonen admits he is reading this process into Weber’s theory of parliaments based on a Quentin Skinner inspired historical contextual construction of the British rhetorical tradition (66, 175-80). This art of debating from different points of view, he claims, allows parliament to exercise a form of substantive scrutiny that a rule driven bureaucracy is unable to provide, analogous to the perspectival conflict of ideal types in Weber’s ‘Objectivity’ essay (153-68). In Palonen’s interpretation, Weber complemented this debating version of parliament with a view of deputies as members of specialized committees who scrutinize government officials and bureaucratic administrators for hidden information and files. Once we read him in this way, Weber sees parliament as providing multiple ‘chances’ (in the sense of opportunities for political action and intervention rather than probabilities for imposing one’s will) for deputies to offer arguments in back-and-forth debates and participate in committees that scrutinize the administrator’s monopoly of technical, secret, and office knowledge. Here we see a subtle shift in the interpretation of the professional politician as portrayed in *Politik als Beruf*. Under Palonen’s expansive concept of ‘Chancen’, the extremely rare qualities of the vocational politician—who combines long-range partisan commitments with responsibility and judgment and whose vocation inspires charismatic submission of party and masses—are now explicitly ascribed to the whole body of professional politicians in a properly organized parliament (191). The potential but unique ideal of the vocational politician in Weber is now shifted to the modern parliament, which under Palonen’s ‘one-sided’ construction becomes a possible ideal within the business of professional politics in mass democracy. Thus his claim that
‘Weber’s defense of parliament and parliamentarians as professional politicians concerns the ideal type more than the actual practice of German MPs’ (68) could apply as much to Palonen in relation to the contemporary political practice of parliaments.

With his various deployments of the ‘Chancen’ concept in Weber across the many aspects of the latter’s account of politics, Palonen has given us a fresh way to recover the role of self-understanding and the contingent appearances of Weber’s political types and typologies. Moreover, he gives us a way to understand Weber’s particular defense of parliamentary politics within mass democracy as an activity with many loci for free action. At times, however, Palonen is so intent on defending Weber’s own defense of the professionalization of politics, professional politicians, and modern parliaments within mass democracies that he overstates his case both with regard to critics of Weberian politics and with regard to the deterministic logics that Weber himself deploys in judging the outcomes of political action. That is, he emphasizes the ‘chance concept’ of political struggle and rule with such dogged one-sidedness that Weber’s own invocation of determinism in the logic of domination and power against political opportunity and chance seems to disappear from the picture. Here I will focus on two examples of these tendencies, both of which directly engage debates in contemporary political theory and political sociology.

In his provocative essay on ‘Imagining Max Weber’s Response to Hannah Arendt’ Palonen reconstructs what Weber might have said in response to Arendt’s argument in On Revolution — most specifically, that it is in modern revolutions that we discover both the recovery of equal political liberty enjoyed in public and the problem of sustaining this political liberty in some form of constitution. In the former case Arendt suggested we could see this originary concept of political liberty enjoyed by ordinary people in the popular societies, workers councils, and Thomas Jefferson’s proposal for a ward system of republican institutions. Palonen claims that an answer to Arendt must follow a Weberian approach, and this requires in opposition to the actual outcome of history that we imagine ‘an unrealized comparative alternative to it’ (103). Within this frame, Palonen proceeds to measure her argument for ‘constituting’ public freedom through direct participation in a variety of public fora according to what he takes to be her lack of appreciation of the contingency and efficacy of parliamentary elections. He argues that ‘she tends to underestimate the chances of the political decision involved in the
electoral choice leading to the changing of majorities, governments, and policies’ (108). In response to Arendt’s criticism that representative institutions under constitutional regimes only generate negative protections but fail to ‘enable the citizen to become a “participant” in public affairs’ (113), Palonen frames her argument within his reading of Weber’s account of modern politics: ‘in Weberian terms we could… insist on the politically crucial distinction between the voters and the parliamentarians when dealing with subject matter of deliberation and decisions’ (113). It is in the adversarial procedures of debates in parliaments in which opposing perspectives are offered pro and contra ‘that the superiority of parliamentary regimes exists’ (116). But merely asserting this stylized (and idealized) Weberian alternative is not in and of itself an argument in its favor. After all, Arendt’s own view of public debate among citizens also emphasizes the variety of perspectives on public matters it elicits. Finally, to Arendt’s argument that revolutions have spontaneously rediscovered institutions of public engagement on public questions and recovered the notion of power (Macht) as collective initiation over and against rule as forms of command, Palonen answers rather oddly that she is operating with an outdated distinction (109) and that her definition of power does not offer an adequate counter to the Herrschaft exercised by bureaucracy (110-11). But Palonen here slights Weber’s own concern—referenced in earlier chapters—that parliaments could simply become arenas for negotiation, bargaining, and ‘horse trading’ at the cost of addressing fundamental public problems. Indeed, the Berufspolitiker in Weber’s Politik als Beruf, who arises from but transcends parliaments and parties and sets goals for the nation as a whole, is as much an imagined ‘unrealized alternative’ to day-to-day parliamentary politics run by professional politicians as is Arendt’s republicanism of wards for citizen participation in a large state. By focusing only on the room for political action on

5. David Beetham, Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 233-34. At present, Palonen’s Weberian ideal of parliament faces a more recent political-sociological development that diminishes the ‘chances’ for political initiative. Specifically, party operatives and parliamentary politicians worry far less than in the past about responding to voters, since if they lose an election, they simply move laterally into transnational organizations, lobbying, or finance. They thereby enter a realm of governing elites detached from the world in which parties were tied to their voters and fiercely tried to mobilize them and fight on their behalf in parliaments. See Peter Mair, Ruling The Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy (London: Verso, 2013).
the part of voters and professional politicians, the imagined argument around Weber’s possible response to Arendt is not fully joined.

Palonen concludes his attack on Hannah Arendt by claiming her criticism of ‘professional politicians’ is merely a symptom of a typical academic ‘deformation professionelle’—a distaste for practical politics (117). This particular reproach is the basis for his more general criticism of the critics of Weberian politics for not accepting the fact that parliamentary politics and party competition enable ‘chances’ for discussion and political freedom. Here his emphasis on ‘Chance’ as opportunity, unpredictability, possibility, and probability leads him at times to argue at cross purposes. On the one hand, he is right that viewed through the emphasis on ‘Chance aspects’, Gehorsam and Herrschaft can have degrees of existence (130). And indeed Weber frequently uses his concept of ‘Herrschaft’ more as the opportunity or possibility to rule. But at other times the contingent element in Herrschaft almost disappears into a recurrent and predictable relationship of command and obedience in which ‘domination’ is the right translation of the word. Under these circumstances even political rule becomes a form of determinate political domination within the state. Palonen can claim that parliamentarism and competitive party politics allow for opportunities to contest shares of power and programs over and against the ‘Herrschaft’ of bureaucracy that threatens to turn every part of life into predictable behavior based on impersonal rules. But here we have both uses in the same argument. The one use defends parliamentarism and professional politics under mass suffrage as embodying a version of freedom as chances to gain shares of power in politics. The other use points to its inevitable disappearance. The problem here is that Weber’s use of ‘Chancen’ can point in the direction of contingent ‘possibilities’ or ‘opportunities’ for action, or, as in his definition of legitimate domination (legitime Herrschaft), as the inexorable necessity that a command will be accepted as valid without resistance. In drawing political conclusions from his interpretive-explanations, Weber relies on both kinds of meanings of ‘Chancen’—the meanings that point to open possibilities and the meanings that point to strongly determinate outcomes. For example, in Politik als Beruf he opens the account of how modern politics becomes a both a Beruf and a Betrieb by pointing to the variety of developments of parties and parliaments in Germany, the United States, and Britain. Whether we end up with a model based on parties with a leading politician as in Britain, or a disempowered parliament dominated by state administration as in Germany,
or a party machine driven process of party competition with popular election of the President as in the USA, is a matter of historical chance, and the opportunities for occasional and professional politicians are different in all of these political systems. But toward the end of the same work Weber employs his typology of legitimate ‘Herrschaft’ to predict with complete certainty that all revolutions will end up in the ‘spiritual proletarianisation [of the following] in order to achieve “discipline”’. Weber rhetorically plays both registers, contingency and possibility and quasi deterministic outcomes, depending on the political judgments he is seeking to draw and the positions he is seeking to discredit. Curiously, Palonen often follows a similar polemical strategy when arguing with opponents of parliamentary politics, as in his dispute with Arendt, though he claims to be merely invoking the contingent aspects of Weberian politics.

This is not to say that Palonen’s ‘one-sided’ approach of focusing on ‘chance’ does not yield great interpretive insight across breadth of Weber’s political thinking. It most certainly does. It is merely to say, that given the sprawling nature of Weber’s work, we all face the danger that our ‘one–sided’ interpretations of his many concepts, categories, and developmental tendencies, may turn out to be too one-sided.

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In the autumn of 1894 Max Weber moved from Berlin to Freiburg, following his appointment as a Professor of ‘Economics and Financial Science’ in the state of Baden. The title was no mere formality: during the winter semester of 1894–95 he lectured four times a week on ‘general and theoretical economics’, and four times a week on ‘financial science’, what we would today call ‘public economics’. He

7. Ibid., p. 365.
only began reading and preparing for these lectures in late July 1894; the manuscript upon which these lectures is based has all the signs of work under pressure, prepared from lecture to lecture, without time for even a properly organised expository framework. The state of Baden required those civil servants working in financial administration to have taken university courses in mathematics, agriculture, manufacturing, economics, and public finance, in addition to the core law subjects, and the university was obliged to run a public finance course every semester. However, while Weber had 24 students in the autumn of 1894, only one of them was on the public administration pathway; the remainder were law students. Other members of the faculty also taught the course; Weber only did so once more before he left for Heidelberg in 1897, and he never taught the subject again. By contrast, before he broke off his last complete course in theoretical economics in the early summer of 1898 he had taught this course five times. From this comparison, and the sometimes scrappy nature of his lecture notes on public finance, we could easily presume that he ended up teaching this subject simply because it went with the appointment. Why, however, was he able he teach the subject at all, let alone four times a week for weeks on end?

Weber had lived in his parents’ Berlin house since 1886, working as an unpaid court clerk, preparing a doctoral dissertation supervised by Levin Goldschmidt, Professor of Commercial Law, and then in 1890 passing the second state law examination which formally qualified him for legal practice. But he then embarked on a second dissertation that would qualify him to teach law, eventually publishing this as a book on Roman agrarian history in October 1891, and gaining the right to teach in February 1892. From the spring of 1892 he lectured in the Law Faculty, substituting for his former supervisor, but was not even made an adjunct professor of German and Commercial Law in the University of Berlin until November 1893. During the summer semester of 1894 he taught four courses: law of the sea, agrarian law, commercial law, and insurance law, all specialised and substantive subjects. Then in the autumn, in Freiburg, he switched to two completely different substantive subjects.

If we look beyond Weber’s lecturing, this lurch in mid-1894 appears less abrupt. From early 1892 he had been involved in a detailed study of contemporary agrarian relations in Eastern Germany on behalf of the Verein für Socialpolitik, presenting his findings at a meeting in Berlin in March 1893 that demonstrated both his mastery of material and his analytical skill. The following month his Freiburg
appointment was confirmed. Around this time he became involved in contemporary debate over the appropriate regulatory regime for German stock and commodity trading. During the summer of 1894 he completed a popular guide to stock and commodity exchanges, and by December 1896 he was appointed as a financial expert to a government committee alongside the elite of the business community and East Elbian landowners. During the winter semester of 1895–96 at Freiburg he lectured twice a week on ‘Money, Banking and Exchanges’, becoming the first professor to lecture on stock and commodity exchanges in a German university.

Even so, these matters are still a long way from the basic material of public finance—as taught by Weber, starting with the ‘Concepts and Tasks of Financial Science’, a name taken from eighteenth-century France and initially concerned with state incomes, melding into a treatment of the “gesammte Staatswirtschaft” before today becoming ‘öffen[liche] Wirtschaft’ (91). As Weber rolls out his definitions of state, economy and the stages of their development we can already see here, sketched out, the lineaments of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, chapter 2. ‘Book I: Historical Development of the Public Economy’, opens out ‘general developmental stages’, from natural to money economy, from *Hauswirtschaft* to *Volkswirtschaft* (94), considering state administration and the army in, respectively, agrarian states, city states and national states (95-101). On this basis he constructs a history of state finance from the Roman and Frankish empires onward, where the emergence of the feudal state temporarily ended the centralised forms of public finance outlined up to this point (118). His historical account of England, France, and Germany is brought up to the later eighteenth century, in line with the usual practice of contemporary economic history.

He then turns briefly to the history of writings about public finance (Wagner, Cohn, Roscher, von Stein, Eheberg, Geffcken and Ricca-Salerno) remarking that ‘There is no systematic and complete study’ (147), before launching into his own review of French, German and English arguments about taxation, including a swift trot through Adam Smith’s position in *Wealth of Nations* (152-53), noting his four rules of taxation: equity, certainty, ease of payment, low costs of collection. The third ‘Book’ deals with the financial needs of the state (‘Characteristic of the state is that it levies taxes’ (158), reviewing the financial organisation of France, Britain, and the German states, then turning to sectors under state control that produce revenue, such as forests, mines and ironworks, and the public enterprises such as
the postal services, railways, and the lottery. Then Weber turns to
the fees and duties raised by public offices, before running through
the wide variety of taxes and duties in much the longest part of the
book, finishing with a short discussion of public credit. One impor-
tant feature of this collection, as was also the case with the edition
of his writings on stock and commodity exchanges (MWG I/5), is
a forty-page glossary of technical terms that elucidates particular
levies and impositions, and translates Latin, French, and English ter-
minology into German (also making it possible to do the reverse).

It remains something of a mystery how these and four other sub-
stantial sets of Weber’s lecture notes from the 1890s should have
survived, when virtually all of his notes, drafts, and typescripts for
everything else seem to have been discarded by Max once he had fin-
ish ed work on them. While his widow Marianne certainly gave away
masses of material in the 1920s—the entire manuscript for Wirtschaft
and Gesellschaft, for example, none of which has been traced—she
was aware of these lecture notes, and they have survived. In the early
1980s the editors of the Gesamtausgabe were very diffident about this
material. The catalogue for the edition published in 1981 anticipated
only two volumes: the Wirtschaftsgeschichte and one further volume
of lectures notes by Weber and his students. Now there are five sub-
stantial volumes of lectures notes from the period up to 1899, the
Wirtschaftsgeschichte that had already been published in 1923, and
the shorter volume of Weber’s last, unfinished lecture course on
Staatssoziology. Neither Weber’s own lecture notes, nor any by stu-
dents, have been traced from the Vienna (1918) and Munich (1919)
courses that formed the basis for Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, chapter
1—an anomaly that emphasises how fortunate we are to have mate-
rials for all his other university courses. Besides impressing upon us
very forcefully the sheer range and depth of Weber’s knowledge,
and his stupendous intellectual energy, these lecture notes present
us with more or less the only perspective we now have on his work-
ing methods: the way in which he gave shape to new subjects, how
he borrowed from his contemporaries, but then forcefully revised
what he borrowed. The fact that he only ever gave the lecture course
on Finanzwissenschaft twice means that the corpus that we are left
with is close to its original form—whereas the material from the par-
allel course on economics now exists only in the revised form it was
in several years later. The latter only dimly represents where he was
with the subject in 1894, when as he half-jokingly said, he heard his
first course of lectures on political economy, delivered by himself.

He had of course attended Knies’s course twice in the early 1880s in Heidelberg; but we also have two sets of student notes for that course, and they show that the political economy to which Weber had been exposed as a student was very different from the political economy that he presented just over a decade later.

Keith Tribe
Independent Scholar


During the 1980s Wolfgang Schluchter organized a series of conferences on the completed and projected parts of Max Weber’s *The Economic Ethics of World Religions* with distinguished scholars and experts from the most diverse fields. He edited the results, together with pioneering introductions, in six volumes: Confucianism and Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism, Ancient Judaism, Islam, Ancient Christianity, and Occidental Christianity. Since these volumes were written in German and new research results in specialized fields have since become available, Thomas Ertman has resolved to take a new look at the completed parts of Weber’s work. He asks whether Weber can help us understand our changing situation in today’s world, where religion is resurgent as a political force and the attractiveness of Western values has been questioned, despite the unfinished state of his oeuvre and the uncertainty as to whether the outdated character of his sources invalidates his conclusions.

While some of the contributors seem to be unaware of the context in which Weber’s essays must be situated, Wolfgang Schluchter and Hartmann Tyrell provide detailed outlines of Weber’s intellectual project and methodology in their opening chapters. Schluchter emphasizes the comparative dimension: Weber was interested in the Occident, and so he asked why it was only in the Occident that modern capitalism and a peculiar Occidental rationalism developed. He studied India and China to better characterize the Occident, its defining features, and the conditions for their emergence. In Asia he wanted to emphasize only that which stood in contrast to Occidental cultural phenomena; he did not intend to provide a history of Asian cultures. But one must also consider the developmental historical perspective in Weber’s analysis of two kinds of causal
relationships: the influence of ideas on economic, political, and legal institutions and, on the other hand, the influence of these institutions on ideas. Weber’s Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religions, of which The Economic Ethics of World Religions is the largest part, is a torso, writes Tyrell, though it is characterized by a strong inner coherence. Weber’s essays are not monographs, as the separate English translations and their misleading titles suggest, and they should not be assessed in isolation but rather in relation to Weber’s overriding question concerning the origin of modern Western rationalization. Normative ethnocentrism or Eurocentrism was certainly foreign to Weber, since he did not consider the Western world superior to other civilizations. On the other hand, he did have a heuristic ethnocentric perspective because he looked upon world history from a European standpoint in order to understand the distinctiveness of the West’s development.

The contributors who address Weber’s essay on China tend to treat this work in isolation from the rest of his oeuvre. In his chapter, Timothy Brook questions Weber’s belief that prophecies did not arise in China. As counter examples, Brook mentions imperial astronomers, charismatic cult leaders in the villages, and kin elders. What he does not mention, however, is that Weber regarded (ethical) prophets as a challenge to traditionalism; they broke the power of magic and thus advanced the process of rationalization. The discussion of prophecy is soon left aside when Brook chastises Weber for deeming China a failure and Europe a success (90), and for treating Europe as the norm and China as the deviation (91). Perhaps a closer reading of Weber’s Protestant Ethic might have led Brook to consider the famous passage that describes modern Western man as a specialist without spirit, a sensualist without heart, a nullity who imagines that he has attained a level of civilization never before achieved. In fact, Weber viewed Western civilization as diseased (especially in his political writings), a dead-end street or iron cage which does not have anything to offer to other civilizations. Brook also criticizes the conspicuous absence of Buddhism in Weber’s essay, since its treatment might have demonstrated the existence of tension between the world and other-worldly salvation (101), i.e., as experienced by millenarian movements or secret societies. Still, one might add, such tension would have been mitigated for Weber by magic and the absence of an all-powerful god who could claim exclusivity of creed and truth.

The chapters by R. Bin Wong and Dingxin Zhao focus on the political and institutional aspects of Weber’s essay. Wong reevaluates
and partially supports Weber’s ideas about the Chinese patrimonial bureaucracy (though he argues that Chinese bureaucracy was closer to the modern variant than Weber cares to admit), and he suggests that kinship and native place may have served as a substitute for legal adjudication and legal institutions like contract law. Zhao criticizes Weber’s critics who see only the trees—his controversial claims about the absence of powerful prophecy, politically autonomous cities, and a rationally specialized bureaucracy in China—and not the forest in his oeuvre (146). Even if one accepts their criticisms, Zhao argues, the differences between Europe and China tended to be far more significant than the variations within China. For example, while there may have been a medieval urban revolution during the late Tang and Song dynasties, the transformed Chinese cities after this urban revolution were still fundamentally different from autonomous European cities. Zhao also addresses the argument that the Yangzi Delta and England had reached an economically and technologically similar level of development during the eighteenth century. Zhao points out that two different functions may have the same value at one point (\(2^x\) and \(x^2\) will be equal when \(x\) equals 2), while their trajectories will be different for all other values. Modern capitalism in Weber’s sense is neither conceptualized nor referred to in this argument.

The section on India turns mainly on the concept of caste as the key institution. David Lorenzen seems ambivalent about the dominance of the concept. He writes that most scholars still view caste as the dominant institution of Indian society (180), but later almost reverses himself by suggesting that most scholars no longer accept Weber’s insistence on the overwhelmingly dominant role of caste (196). Lorenzen also questions Weber’s ideas about the almost inevitable transformation of Hindu sects into Hindu castes and about the orgiastic origins of cults dedicated to Siva and Krishna (189), which later are called sects (saguni sects) (193). What remains? Besides remaining a document about the history of European orientalism, Weber’s essay still is of value, according to Lorenzen, because of its methodological approach: his value-neutrality and search for affinities between religious beliefs and the political and economic institutions of society.

The chapter by Philip Stern turns on the Brahmanical and then British inspired concept of caste. It implied an apolitical ethos which corrupted a natural progress of state formation by charismatic leaders and the kind of patrimonial state of early modern Europe (but what
about Ashoka’s or the Gupta empire?). Nor did Indian cities develop political life as they had no citizens, i.e., no individual subjects, but only castes and sibs. The Brahmans retained the right to determine legitimacy but did not control (political) violence. Although Weber talked about the dharma of the political warrior caste, Stern believes that there were no Indian politics (221) and sees in Weber’s text a contribution to a comparative sociology of the modern state.

In his chapter on the religions of India, Martin Fuchs starts out by enumerating and outlining three elements of Weber’s agenda. First, Weber asked why the spirit of capitalism did not develop on its own in Asia. Then he broadened his scope and included the other side of the causal relationship in the development of economic ethics—the role of economic and social institutions—with the goal of undertaking wholesale civilizational comparisons. Finally, Weber elaborated a theory of value spheres, each with its own *Eigengesetzlichkeit* or inner logic, through which he acknowledged the cultural diversity of rationalizations in all areas of life. Fuchs calls attention to the tensions between Weber’s third, more pluralistic agenda, and his ‘methodological collectivism’, which takes life forms encountered in the whole subcontinent as an ensemble (*Kulturkreis*) rather than as an arena in which varied social, political, and religious strands of rationalization meet. Fuchs notes the diversity of understandings of karma in India—it can, for instance, be transferred or corrected (merit transfer in the Buddhist context between bhikkhus and lay people)—and suggests that Weber overstated the significance of the specific concept of karma-samsara. According to Fuchs, Weber also failed to reflect on the role of new carriers of new religious movements (e.g. the bhakti movement). His elitist focus on civilizationalist carriers foreclosed the acknowledgement of other carrier groups (apart from Brahmans) who represent the majority of Indians. Fuchs probably would not accept the defense that Weber’s construction of Hinduism was an ideal type, rationally constructed from a particular vantage point and naturally leaving out much of the much more complicated reality, and formed for the purpose of better understanding the Occident rather than India. In our time, when the political and economic dominance of the Occident seems like just one particular episode of world history, Fuchs believes that we need a more relational/reciprocal approach to comparison.

Most authors of the section on *Ancient Israel* are surprisingly critical of Weber and perhaps less forgiving of his errors in this particular work, for while he could not read Chinese or any Indian language,
he did in fact know Hebrew. William Dever begins by stating bluntly (269) that Weber’s paradigm (what does he mean by ‘Weber’s paradigm’?) and all other histories of ancient Israel are largely obsolete (269) due to the results of recent archaeological findings, the ‘facts on the ground’. Dever argues that the Hebrew Bible is not an adequate source for comprehending the reality of life in ancient Israel: it is out of touch and lacks sympathy with the masses of ordinary folk; it is a ‘minority report’. Prior to the Exile there were small villages of egalitarian and communitarian character, and here, in the ‘little tradition’ of the anonymous folk, there existed a mother goddess, and the religion was neither monotheistic nor centered in Jerusalem; it was, moreover, largely magical and not rationalistic. Ziony Zevit, whose introductory comments on the position of Ancient Judaism in the context of Weber’s Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion are confusing if not misleading, believes that Weber’s essay is largely irrelevant to biblical scholarship today (289), since it is methodologically unclear (applying sometimes Wellhausen’s and sometimes Gunkel’s method of dating), poorly written, and fails to consider the contributions of archaeology (continued belief in magic). But, concludes Zevit politely, Weber’s legacy lies in his philosophical, historical sociology.

It is a relief and a joy at the end to read Eckhard Otto’s contribution. He makes it clear that it would be a misinterpretation to read Ancient Judaism as if Weber had intended to contribute to Old Testament scholarship. Weber did not intend to write a history of ancient Judaism but rather to explain the impact of ancient Judaism on modern Occidental rationalism, including the market economy, the legal system, democracy, etc. According to Weber, the parts of the Old Testament that turned out to be relevant for the emergence of Occidental rationalism by virtue of their Christian reception were the Prophets and Deuteronomy, for they promoted an internalized ethic of conscience through their religiously motivated prophecies, its rationalization and systematization, thus overcoming traditional forms of magical ethics. According to Weber, the world-historical interest in Judaism rests upon this fact (316). Otto adds here that in his opinion the Christian reception of Old Testament ethical motifs involved not only formal but also substantial rationality, e.g. the European legal system, including constitutional and international law. Otto believes that Ancient Judaism continues to contribute to the reception history of the Hebrew Bible and still exerts a profound impact on German Old Testament scholarship through its
methodology. It is true, he writes, that some assumptions have lost their persuasive power, such as the notion of early Yahwistic monotheism, the early (premonarchic) dating of the Covenant, the Levites’ position in pre-Exilic Israel and a post-Exilic pariah-community, in part the result of the archaeological insight that Jewish religion through the seventh century BCE was polytheistic and rooted in the religious traditions of the Near East. But the realization that the Old Testament was probably created between the seventh and the third centuries and cannot be used as a source for historical facts does not affect the appropriateness of Weber’s approach, which assumes that the Old Testament is an ideology (not simply a minority report) and focuses on the definition of Israel’s identity in relation to the hegemonic powers of the day (329).

Weber’s essays are not often understood in the context of the questions he tried to answer, but in the context of today’s questions and problems. Weber’s fate—and the fate of all scholars—is to have their work revised by those who follow them. It is therefore understandable, though perhaps premature, when the contributors write that ‘we need to honor Max Weber for his pioneering efforts and then move on’ (281), or that ‘we should produce a kind of social theory that can honor the aspirations of grand theorists’ (134). More interesting is Schluchter and Lorenzen’s suggestion that we should direct our attention less towards Weber’s dated or incorrect findings and more toward his method of practicing interpretive (verstehende) sociology (60) and seek the connection between religion and other spheres of cultural life (196); or Fuchs’s effort to use a more neglected part of Weber’s agenda for his analysis of what then becomes an arena of different rationalizations, not a civilizational whole; or, finally, Otto’s analysis of Ancient Israel, where Weber’s central thesis is shown to still inspire in spite of major new findings in archaeology.

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Notes for Contributors

Max Weber Studies is an international journal which is published twice a year. It concerns itself with the interpretation, reception and application of Max Weber's writings and ideas and celebrates his polysemic legacy. The journal publishes new academic work on Max Weber and includes among its aims:

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