

Editorial

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The articles appearing in issues 11.1 and 11.2 are drawn from the colloquium 'Re-configuring Modernity', which was held in September 2010 at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge and was generously supported by the British Sociological Association. The idea of the colloquium was to discuss new shifts in thinking on modernity and to encourage new approaches to Weber research. Fifty years ago the focus of such a conference would have been on rationality, authority, bureaucracy, organization, and the ethical neutrality of science. Weber offered a way for sociologists, political scientists and organizational theorists to apply theories for the pragmatic improvement of institutions and social behaviour. Fifty years on this focus has not completely disappeared, yet older senses of Weber's universe have been returning: religion, civilizational conflict, power and rulership, irrationalism, ultimate callings, flux and contingency.

The phrase, reconfiguring modernity, points to the increasing strains in an OECD conception of globalization that was narrowly focused on the economic doctrines of rational and efficient markets and the unproven assertion that these would ascend hand in hand with rights-based democracies. As Weber observed of Russia in 1905, seeding capitalism there brought no automatic democratic dividend. It was 'absolutely ridiculous' to assume 'any elective affinity [of advanced capitalism] with "democracy" let alone with "liberty"' (cited below, p. 249). The realm of material interests aggrandizes economic power without respect to the niceties of political values. Neither can the fad for assuming that market prices absorb the requisite information from the societal spheres be squared with Weber's understanding of modern capitalism. Economic theory was just one leg of economic science that required the other two legs of economic history and economic institutions. There was, for him, a tension intrinsic to the formation of modern capitalism, where the formal operating rules are not attuned to delivering wealth and well-being in ways that are substantively rational. This was a design

flaw in modernity itself. Its dynamic was built on 'ratio', an intellectualism that supervened over substantive purposes and outcomes.

Late modernizers, whether in the late 19th or 20th centuries, have looked to where rationality structures are located in society: mass literacy, communication, science and research, effective economic policy, and a strong directing state. It is now perfectly feasible to adapt modern capitalism to different cultural traditions or to closely control it through authoritarian structures. This also counts as the 'reconfiguring of modernity'. This is the conclusion of Volker Schmidt in his analysis of the East Asian tiger economies, which on indices of human development are now to be counted among the leading Western economies. By such rankings East Asian countries join the West in contradistinction to other regions of the world that lag some way behind on these indices. Does this mean that Protestantism is not a pre-condition of modernization, since Asian religions in Weber's terms exhibited adaptation to the world (Confucianism) as well as rejection of the world (Buddhism)? This assumes too determinative a role to religion. The commonality is not Protestant belief but a complex of attributes: literacy, discipline, rational conduct. Late modernizers have inculcated those attitudes in education systems, family life, organization, state and bureaucracy.

Youcef Djedi in a deeply thoughtful survey of Islamic societies confronts the issue of whether Islam thinks of itself as belonging in modernity. Northern European cultural Protestantism was deeply engaged with this scholarly question. One long historical thread relates to the development of a form of caesaropapism under the caliphate, which laid out the institutional cards in a way antithetical to any emergence of modernity. Against this, it has been noted that Islam in its initial revelation was in itself a religion of reform. For Weber, that energy expanded outwards in jihadist conquest, in contrast to the brooding yet revolutionary inwardness of Puritanism. Both movements required a sense of reformatory zeal. Islam has had its 'protestant sects' such as Ibadism and will increasingly display such attitudes to the world. This suggests that in a globalizing world, destructive of all churches, a form of cultural 'protestant' mentality will become increasingly pervasive.

Isabelle Darmon offers a critical appraisal of Boltanski and Chiapello's *New Spirit of Capitalism*. The so-called 'new spirit' is the mentality of making an entrepreneur of oneself in the increasingly time- and career-fragmented world of work within the service sector.

This is, of course, ‘nouvel’ since nothing could be further away from the sober, systematic work disposition of Weber’s Protestants. However, Weber’s ‘ancien’ Protestant ethic was but one essay in a mass of economic writings, and Darmon focuses on his analysis of advanced capitalism of the early twentieth century. This dispensed with an attitude that looked beyond work itself to some higher divine purpose in favour of adapting workers, both in their physical and mental attributes, to the framework of an organised division of labour. The explanandum of Boltanski and Chiapello’s thesis is simply the continuation of the adaptive demands of advanced, and now, globalised capitalism and its forced division of labour.

In this sense we have become the victims of Weber’s prediction of the ‘last men’ who think they have discovered happiness in the guise of lifestyle choice and consumer satisfaction. Mirko Alagna brings a new slant to this topic, picking up Weber’s extensive use of the term ‘Sättigung’ and its range of meanings: sated, satiation, saturated. In the old peasant cycle of life, a person could die sated, and so, content with his life. The modern person remains dissatisfied, since no one experience closes a cycle of life and new tasks always beckon. In the late modern world, the sense of citizen activism is undermined by both consumerist saturation and a distended media sphere.

More accurately, Weber is issuing a warning, not a prediction. Alagna draws attention to Weber’s demand for a clarity of perception and vision that can override passive and adaptive subjectivity.

This is the point at which Weber’s diagnosis of modernity becomes most expansive. Secularization comprises one thread, which as Andrea Erizi argues, is not as such a Weberian word, suggesting that the concept of ‘subrogation’ more accurately reflects his viewpoint. This contribution underscores the wealth of resources at hand in Weber’s writings for an understanding of what Hans Blumenberg called the modern age’s ‘functional reoccupation’ of ancient theological and religious contents and cognitive legacies.

Andreas Anter considers the role of thematic of nature in Weber’s thought, as highlighted recently by Joachim Radkau. The key problem here is that the term ‘nature’ itself carries ambivalences, both in Weber’s own usage and in that of Weber scholars. It can denote the natural environment, human nature, or attitudes to the world. Weber criticizes the increasing mechanization of modern life without countenancing any return to some more primordial state called ‘nature’. Weber’s conundrum is how human beings in a disenchanted age can be led to accept and require order as ‘second nature’.

Disenchantment ('Entzauberung'), as José González García illustrates, is a ubiquitous motif in later nineteenth-century German literary writing. *Stricto sensu*, disenchantment for Weber meant the disappearance of magic from the world and from some religious traditions. However, as González García points out, it did not have to mean the collapse of any feeling for enchantment in existence tout court, at least not in any aesthetic sense. Even for Weber, modernity leaves room for both liberty and the charm of the poetic word and of music.

During the period of bringing the conference papers to press, the Arab Spring occurred. One of the recurring political concepts in the news commentary was 'legitimacy'. The Mubarak regime, the Libyan regime, the Assad and other regimes were spoken of as 'losing legitimacy'. This sense of legitimacy is close to Weber's usage of the term to denote the belief by the ruled in the authority of the ruler and his rulership. It is in the nature of power or '*Herrschaft*' to seek legitimacy, since the pure exercise of power and violence through a state apparatus while feasible is not a long-run prospect. The charisma of street protest has shown the limitations of state violence. But in the re-constitution of these countries, especially one like Egypt with a mass urban population, will legitimacy in this minimal Weberian sense continue to be the main *desideratum*? Frank Furedi, in his analysis of Weber's political sociology, notes that Weber shies away from an interest in, or acceptance of, the force of public opinion as a possibly deeper fundament of legitimacy. And behind that, one can add, Weber's scepticism to quasi-natural law legitimations of authority.

This is a debate that has rumbled on in Weber studies, as Furedi notes, since Wolfgang J. Mommsen engaged with Jürgen Habermas's legitimization crisis thesis in the 1970s. Michael Sommer, a classical historian, brings an entirely new comparative aspect to the question. In classical studies there is a dilemma about how to frame Augustus' assertion of a de facto monarchical and uncontested power as '*princeps*' (in 27 BC). Julius Caesar had been murdered by his fellow senators for declaring himself dictator for life and thereby upturning the legitimization claims of the Roman Republic. The classical historian Theodor Mommsen, with his reverence for law, saw Augustus as proceeding through constitutional mechanisms. Others have pointed to the undeniable reality of dynastic rule. Legitimacy, as Sommer points out, is an ideal-typical construction. Augustus modulated his rule through tradition, that is his heritage of family and as Julius Caesar's

heir, through charisma – his awe-inspiring wars and leadership, and through legal senatorial rule – the creation of the principate.

Ideal types are cognitive instruments, not judgements on legitimization claims. Kari Palonen observes that Weber's conceptual terminology for power and the state was neutral, studiously avoiding any commitment to the many normative conceptions of the state discourse of his day. The state is a complex of chances that obedience can be obtained from subjects. States can be both sovereign in their claims but also fragile and temporal entities in which competing regimes lay claim to that title.

Laura Ford in her article on the legitimacy of legal orders, in respect to copyright as the constitution of a claim to intellectual property, shows that the ideal type works an orientating device. What happens in (past) empirical reality is complex and involves more conceptual furniture than 'simple' ideal types. A property 'right' is a claim to property and has to be realized through appropriation. Copyright, in today's sense as an enforceable claim to intellectual knowledge, originated from the medieval London Stationers Company. As a guild this company monopolised the process of making books and selling them, but did not 'own' copyright of the text. The basis of Anglo-American copyright law was only established through legal judgements (in 1769 and 1774). The empirical analysis of this process involves the (social) structural understanding of guilds and their organization, the material powers over which they disposed, and their engagement at a symbolic level in the legal order, which for Ford has to be thought of semantically. There is nothing ordained about this process, as if an 'Ordnung' simply determined the result from above. The realization of claims through semantic orders is an untapped Weberian resource of the utmost importance to our time where the processes of appropriation are being re-formulated with massive consequences.

In sum, the papers brought together in these two issues demonstrate the continuing currency of a Weberian approach through a range of different fields. There is much to learn from studying Weber in a historical perspective, within the context of turn-of-the-century social, political and economic thought, as some articles admirably show. But equally, in the wake of recent developments in international politics, science and finance, we require a more probing understanding of themes such as power, irrationalism and the logic of modern capitalism. A refocusing of the study of modernity, in the manner of the articles presented here, indicates new directions for research.