Weber Past and Present

Max Weber was, among quite a few other things, the historical sociologist par excellence. As such, he belongs to the "patron saints" of this journal, and a special issue devoted to his work is overdue. The present collection of papers deals with different aspects of his legacy and reflects diverse lines of interpretation, but their common ground is an awareness of new problems and perspectives thrown up by the edition of Weber's complete works (*Max-Weber-Gesamtausgabe*).That landmark achievement (together with new and more adequate English translations of some key texts) has changed received notions about Weber's life and work and enriched our knowledge of both aspects, but also to some extent reactivated old questions in a much-altered context. The unity of the work has always been hard to grasp (alternative keys to that question will be discussed in the present issue), and this has sometimes tempted Weber scholars to look for clues in his very distinctive biography. But the unity of life and work is a dubious assumption that can lead to disastrous results; and in any case, biographical themes will not enter into the discussion to be pursued here. There is, however, a question that borders on biographical matters and demands some attention before confronting the labyrinthine paths of the work. It has to do with the definition of Weber's intellectual and cultural identity, its reflection in his self-definitions, and its place in a broader historical context.

Weber's Multiple Identities

It has never been controversial that if it makes sense to speak of sociological classics, Weber should be counted among them; disagreements have arisen around the question of limits, complements and counterweights to that identity, and the *Gesamtausgabe* has clearly not brought them to an end. He obviously arrived at a position that led him to focus on conceptual foundations of sociology; but the text traditionally known as the first part of *Economy and Society*, now published in the *Gesamtausgabe* as *Sociology* (*incomplete*), is marked by a certain ambiguity. On one hand, Weber explicitly justified his elaboration of a conceptual scheme as a critical response to dominant but misguided ideas about the object and aims of sociology; but at the same time, he claimed to be spelling out the implicit meaning of an already practiced – but not clearly identified – empirical sociology. Given his preference for speaking about and in the name of *Kulturwissenschaften* in a broad sense (a term and a theme particularly prominent in early writings, but not abandoned in later phases), as well as Weber's difficult relationship to the German sociological association, it would seem reasonable to describe him as a reluctant, ambivalent and conditional sociologist. That raises the question of other labels used to describe his work; some of them deserve brief consideration.

Attempts to portray Weber as a philosopher have a history that cannot be recapitulated here; the following comments will be limited to the first and the most massive case. But to begin with, the *prima facie* case for this view should be noted. There are texts – mostly short – where Weber undeniably adopts an overarching perspective that is best described as philosophical. That applies to the essay on objectivity, even more so to the *Zwischenbetrachtung* and *Science as a Vocation*, somewhat less to *Politics as a Vocation.* In *Science as a Vocation*, he made the following crucial statement: "Let us stay it he disciplines closest to me, that is with sociology, history, political economy (*Nationalökonomie*) and political theory (*Staatslehre*) and the kind of cultural philosophy that makes their interpretation its task" [*MWG I/17: 95*]. This formulation seems unequivocal: Weber accepts the philosophy of culture as a legitimate pursuit, inseparable from the cultural sciences (invoked and defined in a very broad sense in the preceding paragraph) and admits to an interest in it. The association of culture and philosophy might help to explain why the concept of culture is not included in the discussion of sociological concepts traditionally known as the first section of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* [*now in MWG I/22: 1*].

But although these texts are among the most interesting parts of Weber's work, their intermittent resort to philosophical reflection cannot sustain claims relating to the work as a whole. If Weber is to be canonized as a philosopher, some supporting evidence of a lasting commitment is required. Karl Jaspers was the first to argue that case, in a funeral oration and then in later publications; moreover, Dieter Henrich [*1988*] has shown that claiming philosophical identity and importance on behalf of Weber was, for Jaspers, a roundabout way to define his own line of research in such terms. That point can be taken further. Jaspers's portrait of Weber was not simply a search for shared philosophical credentials; over and above that, it served to defend an exorbitant conception of the philosopher's role and status: "A *philosopher* is more than simply one who knows; what characterizes him is the *matter* that he comes to know and its origin. The time, its movement, its problematic are present in his personality … He is representative of what the times are; he represents it in the most substantial way, whereas others realize only parts, offshoots, emptyings, distortions of the forces of the times … The philosopher is the heart in the life of the times" [*Jaspers 1988: 36*; this is a passage from the 1920 funeral oration]. It is safe to say that no philosopher has ever lived up to this description; there have been thinkers with ambitions akin to Jaspers's model, but they are not necessarily inspiring examples (the most tragically absurd case is probably Martin Heidegger in 1933). Jaspers's own aspirations were not altogether alien to the superlatives designed for Weber; his 1932 publication on the "spiritual situation of the times" reflects that stance, but the timing of that book could not have been worse, and Jaspers's influence on opinion and debate in postwar Germany was nowhere near the stipulated level. As for Weber, and with all due acknowledgement of his exceptional stature, his work was too fragmentary and the overall perspective too one-sidedly articulated for the quoted definition of the philosopher to be applicable. More specifically, he was too committed to certain mirages of the epoch to be capable of the distance required by Jaspers's model. There are three such aspects of Weber's thought, none of them entirely without reservations or correctives but all strong enough to leave their mark on his thought. His vision of the cultured great power (*kultureller Machtstaat*) aligns him with the nationalizing of empires that was – in varying ways and degrees – a pronounced feature of the decades before 1914. The idea of the sovereignly autonomous individual,

combining a firm value-orientation with an ethic of responsibility, implies an aristocratic twist to individualism and reflects – as Wolfgang Mommsen has convincingly argued – a diffuse but undeniable influence of Nietzsche. The most emphatic expression of this view, bordering on a modern myth [*Mommsen 1983*], is the conception of *Führertum* as an indispensable "caesaristic" ingredient of modern politics [*MWS I/15: 233*]. That does not make Weber responsible for later excesses in this vein, but it does reflect a lack of insight into historical possibilities. Finally, the perspective of a future serfdom (which justifies *ex negativo* the aristocratic-individualist mode of resistance), brought about by the irreversible fusion of capitalism and bureaucracy, was based on underestimation of the adaptive capacities inherent in both sides of the bipolar constellation. A more balanced version of Weber according to Jaspers can be found in later texts, where Weber as philosopher is portrayed alongside his record as a politician and a researcher.

The most ambitious attempt to interpret Weber as a philosopher was made by Pierre Bouretz [*1996*]; it should also be noted that Paul Ricoeur wrote an introduction to that work, very interesting in its own right and not quite in line with Bouretz's own approach. Bouretz's reconstruction of Weber's philosophy is very detailed, and here I can only note the most salient points. The title, invoking "promises of the world", already suggests a key theme: the author engages critically with Weber's concept of *Entzauberung* and advocates a search for counterweights to the trend thus described (Bouretz's extensive work on – and apparent affinity with – messianism in twentieth-century thought should be seen as a background to this effort). But Bouretz's focus differs from usual approaches to this topic. The term *Entzauberung* is commonly taken to denote the joint effect of two processes: a long-term one, centred on the history of religion, identified in the 1920 version of the *Protestant Ethic* and traced back to Greek and Jewish origins, and a distinctively modern one equated with the growth of scientific knowledge.[1] Bouretz is primarily interested in a third factor: the situation of multiple and in principle unresolvable conflicts that emerge when the internal logics of different value spheres clash with each other and traditional ways of harmonizing or hierarchizing them lose strength. This is, for Bouretz, a key characteristic of the European crisis that preceded World War I, and Weber's fleeting reference

[1] There is no adequate English translation of *Entzauberung*. "Disenchantment", proposed by Parsons, is misleading because it has other more familiar meaning, and because it misses the metaphorical charge of the German word: magic as a symbol of meaning. "Demagification", occasionally used, is a rather clumsy expression and tends to suggest a literal reading of the metaphor. Bouretz's extension of the term makes the metaphorical aspect even more salient; Weber's reference to conflicting modern values (and more tentatively to rival national cultures) as *entzaubert* versions of "old gods" is more massively metaphorical than the use of the same term to describe the cultural impact of religious and scientific development. There is no genealogical connection between the polytheistic imagination and the modern divergence of values; the meaning that has vanished is the idea of an overarching framework of meaning, capable of muting or transcending the conflicts of values. It may be added that this accentuation of the metaphorical element suggests a brief consideration of possible links to recent and ongoing attempts to theorize the roe and the history of metaphorical discourse. Hans Blumenberg's unfinished project of metaphorology is the most prominent project of this kind. His distinction between fundamental and residual metaphors (*Grundbestände* and *Restbestände*) is central to the whole argument; the former term refers to metaphors that go beyond the limits of conceptualization and remain essential to cognitive or interpretive efforts, the latter to cases where metaphorical discourse can in principle be translated into more precise concepts but is retained for reasons of convenience. It seems difficult to fit the notion of *Entzauberung* into this scheme. It is certainly not a remnant, and it seems clear that Weber intended to give it a more precise meaning (it represents one of the unfinished lines of exploration in his later work). Should we perhaps consider a category of synthesizing metaphors, invoked in order to impose some kind of unity on an inquiry with multiple starting-points and an uncertain outcome?

to national antagonisms helps to put the war into the picture. Bouretz also includes the separate and self-contained logics of the capitalist economy and the bureaucratic state, occasionally described by Weber as "machines", among the driving forces of *Entzauberung*; and he aligns Weber's sociology of law with his theory of the state: legal development culminates in the "restriction of political experience to the participation in a system of formal rules that organize an institution of rationalized rule" [*Bouretz 1996: 300*].

Bouretz argues that Weber's confrontation with the crisis of European modernity, summed up in the particular perspective on *Entzauberung* outlined above, can be seen as a further extension of the intellectual trajectory analyzed by Karl Löwith as a rupture leading from Hegel to Nietzsche (Ricoeur appears to agree with this view) and refers to it as "the Weberian moment", in a transparent allusion to Pocock's "Machiavellian moment", already imitated by a few other authors. There is no doubt about Weber's particularly sharp and keenly conscious opposition to Hegel; several statements indicate that he saw this contrast as a defining feature of his project. The emphasis on irreducible pluralism, impossible reconciliation and disparate rationalities does reinforce this point. But both Bouretz and Ricoeur think that it can be taken one step further back: for them, the Weberian vision of a modernity at multiple odds with itself is a definitive break with the Enlightenment's belief in all-round and unified progress.

Bouretz's repeatedly stated intention is to move beyond the Weberian moment, with all due respect for its significance, and thereby to "awaken from the twentieth century". The limits that have to be overcome for this to be possible are more clearly defined in *Science as a Vocation* than in *Politics as a Vocation*. They have to do with two presuppositions: the individualistic conception of commitment to a vocation and its intrinsic value(s), and the radical *Entzauberung* culminating in the belief that everything can be mastered through calculation. In other words: the absence of community and the imaginary closure of the world horizon. Bouretz's proposal to open up new perspectives on both sides is clearly formulated in general terms, but possible results of the "awakening" are only vaguely described. The wide range of authors invoked – from Tocqueville to Habermas, and from Arendt to Levinas – does not make for precision. As an overall indication, we can say that the title of the book ("Promises of the World") expresses hopes for new ways of relating to others and to a shared world. Existential community and contextual creativity are keywords for the future beyond twentieth-century crises and disasters. A background assumption, vaguely stated, is the belief – accompanied by a reference to Levinas – in a primordial ethic inherent in the human condition, a kind of recognition prior to struggle; that claim may also be understood as a counterpoint to Weber's emphasis on struggle as a fundamental feature of social life. The book ends with another suggestion in a Levinasian spirit: the possibility of rejecting the connotations of certainty linked to Weber's concept of *Entzauberung* and regarding the process in question as a wager on atheism, open to critical reflection on the outcome.

It remains to add a few words about Ricoeur's preface to Bouretz. He raises a general hermeneutical issue that has critical implications for Weber's work as well as for Bouretz's reading of it. It is the question whether they do justice to the "problem of equivocity in the interpretation of large-scale cultural phenomena" [*Bouretz 1996: 11*]. Ricoeur is, in other words, reminding readers of a problematic that plays a key role in his own work: the conflict of interpretations. This applies to a whole range of themes in Weber's historical

sociology; Ricoeur asks whether theodicy was the only major problem faced by Jewish prophecy, whether the quest for guarantees against damnation was the only relevant religious motivation of Puritanism, and whether ascetic Protestantism was the only generator of economic rationality. All these examples merit a long discussion, but here it may be noted in passing that an alternative approach to the first one can be found in Jan Assmann's analysis of monotheistic political theology as a negation of sacred kingship. As for the last one, Weber did not claim that the Protestant Ethic was the only source of the modern capitalist spirit, but he did not elaborate on other factors; the most suggestive line of argument on that matter is the one proposed by Christoph Deutschmann [*2001*]. It focuses on the quai-religious orientation inherent in capitalist accumulation as such, the sacralization of wealth and the promise of its unlimited growth.

Further discussion of Ricoeur's questions is beyond the scope of this introductory text. We should now turn to another definition (open to variations) of Weber's place in intellectual history and modern thought. It focuses on political aspects of his work and of the outlook or mindset behind it. We can distinguish four main versions of this approach. There have been attempts to locate Weber's key themes and concerns within a much older tradition of political philosophy; a more nuanced version stresses the influence of political views or ideological alignments on his sociological conceptions and historical interpretations. Scholars more attentive to the concrete historical background have raised the issue of Weber's involvement in (and opinions on) German politics during the Wilhelmine period and its early aftermath; the question of connections between his political lifeworld and his scholarly work is not to be dismissed out of hand. Finally, there have been readers and interpreters of Weber who envisioned him as a groundbreaking (though not infallible) analyst of modern politics, not to the exclusion of other identities and not necessarily as the dominant one, but at least to a degree that merited special attention.

Weber's affinities with the tradition of political thought – from Plato and Thucydides to Rousseau and Tocqueville – are most emphatically foregrounded in Wilhelm Hennis's writings [especially *Hennis 1987*]; as he sees it, the main thematic connection is an abiding interest in the formative effect of social regimes – especially their political frameworks – on the constitution and self-understanding of humanity (*Menschentum*). Hennis does not deny that Weber takes this line of interpretation far beyond the traditional limits of political philosophy, but regards the continuity of an inherited problematic as more important than the often-overestimated identification with the new discipline of sociology. This is not the place to survey Hennis's extensive comments on Weber (often insightful, occasionally facetious), but one fundamental problem with his approach should be mentioned. Scholars who emphasize Weber's conversion to sociology have objected to Hennis's use of the term *Menschentum* in the singular, but that is hardly a reason for dispute; such formulations also occur in Weber's work. The real problem is elsewhere. Weber's most revealing statement about anthropological foundations of his research interests (defined, be it noted, with reference to a plurality of cultural sciences) centres on the ability of *Kulturmenschen* to lend meaning to the world and adopt a stance towards it [*MWG I/7: 188–189*]. The point is, in other words, not just *Menschentum*, understood in a more or less variable sense; the matter at issue is the variously articulated human condition in the world (that is, of course, a theme later most explicitly tackled by thinkers in the phenomenological tradition). This claim implies a cultural perspective, but not a culturalist one in any reductionistic sense;

more specifically, it does not suggest a one-sidedly culturalist view of politics. Rather, the indicated task is a comparative study of interactive relations – including tensions and divergences – between culture and politics. It is obviously true that political philosophy has often had something to say on that subject; but then it does not support the case for a primacy of the political.

As for the idea of a political intention or attitude behind Weber's strategy of concept formation [*Palonen 2016*], it is hard to see how that could apply to more than a part of his work. The fundamental concepts of world acceptance and world rejection do not reflect a political rationale. It is true that when it comes to the conceptualization of power, the decision to focus on *Herrschaft* (and set aside the multiple less concentrated and polarized forms of power) testifies to a political concern; but the next move – the typology of legitimacy – brings cultural frameworks back in, albeit with a restrictive twist. That problem will be discussed elsewhere in this issue. Finally, the most elusive and controversial part of the typology, the concept of charisma, is clearly designed to deal with both cultural and political transformations, as well as their absorption into more durable patterns of social life. The upshot of these considerations is that cultural and political perspectives intertwined in Weber's work, with some changes on both sides and without any kind of any definitive balance between them being reached. Weber was interested in the cultural significance (*Kulturbedeutung*) of social and historical phenomena, across the board and for interpretive as well as explanatory purposes; the most important shift within this context was the turn to a comparative analysis of different cultural worlds. Both before and after that extension, the cultural focus allowed Weber to maintain a unifying reference for his interdisciplinary scholarship. On the other hand, nobody doubts that he was an intensely political person, keenly aware of political implications in all fields of inquiry and interested in political history as well as the political problems and conflicts of his times. In this regard, it is more difficult to identify a decisive shift; but in a late text, written in 1918, he does describe his political journey as a change from conservative to democratic positions [*MWS I/15: 421–596*]. That seems to have happened more slowly and had a more limited effect on the theoretical level than the abovementioned broadening of the cultural focus. Attempts to conceptualize democracy as a distinctive theme for political sociology were late and inconclusive.

As already noted, the question of Weber's political identity or orientation can also be posed in terms of his place in the modern constellation of political ideologies. More specifically, it is Weber's undoubted but not easily defined relationship to liberalism that has been brought up for this kind of debate. He has often been described as a liberal, even as a classic of that tradition, but on the basis of closer reading, some scholars have suggested significant qualifications of that view, or even rejected it. Wilhelm Hennis [*1987: 195–236*] has argued at length that Weber does not fit standard definitions of liberal thinking; the convincing part of that claim rests on Weber's critique of illusions frequently shared by nineteenth-century liberals (and not unknown to reappear in later times), relating particularly to belief in the guaranteed progress or permanence of modern freedoms. However, objections are bound to arise when we consider Weber's commitment to value pluralism and individual autonomy, clearly indicative of a basic affinity with liberalism, though not of predetermined agreement with its dominant versions. Hennis suggests – in passing – a comparison with Roger Boesche's argument about "the strange liberalism of Alexis de

Tocqueville" (referring to an article with that title; the book with the same title [*Boesche 1987*] had not been published when Hennis's essay was written). It is tempting to generalize this suggestion and identify a category of thinkers who have criticized liberal illusions, notably those linked to the belief in progress and the doctrine of an invisible hand harmonizing private interests, while at the same time developing original and insightful interpretations of fundamental liberal themes. Whether we call them estranged, disillusioned or critical liberals is a secondary issue. Weber and Tocqueville are not the only candidates for inclusion; Raymond Aron is an obvious further choice.

Expanding this argument, we might ask whether a similar type of thinkers can be found within – or in the margin of – other political traditions. In the case of the socialist tradition, that seems to be a late development; the present writer admits a preference for Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort. As for the conservative one, the matter seems more complicated, but a list of possible candidates might begin with Jacob Burckhardt.

If Weber can be read as a critic of widely accepted liberal illusions, we must also confront the question whether his alternative views were marked by or could be conducive to illusions of another kind. Wolfgang Mommsen has argued that Weber's individualism has strong aristocratic connotations, due to Nietzsche's influence, and that its most explicit normative formulations border on myth, notwithstanding Weber's sharp criticism of attempts to revive myth in a modern context [*Mommsen 1983*]. The question of Nietzsche's influence is one of the most controversial issues in Weber studies, and cannot be discussed at length here; suffice it to say that those who have argued that it was significantly stronger than direct references would suggest seem to have a stronger case than their opponents (advocates of the first position include scholars otherwise as different as Hennis and Mommsen). In any case, one relative weighting seems uncontested: the more Nietzsche, the less Rickert, and vice versa. But the specific question of an aristocratic stance allows for a brief answer, based on the concept of freedom. Although this was not one of the concepts which Weber singled out for clarification, there is no doubt about his very strong commitment to its normative claim. If we look for a definition (which Weber did not provide), Christian Marty's suggestion is a persuasive choice: "Freiheit, das ist derjenige Typus der Lebensführung, bei welchem man bewusst genau das tut, was man in einem letzten Sinne für wertvoll hält." Freiheit "vollzieht sich … dort, wo der Mensch … das Leben hellsichtig nach eigenem Prinzip führt" [*Marty 2020: 70*]. There are at least two remarks to be made on this statement. In the first place, it clearly transcends the distinction between negative and positive freedom; the acting individual is supposed to be free from external constraints, at least to such an extent that he/she can lend meaning and consistency to her/his own life, and at the same time free to follow value commitments that can be made understandable to others. On the other hand, the move towards a complex idea of freedom does not involve any consideration of social freedom, and it is not made with a view to reconciling freedom and equality. The additional value-ideas invoked by Weber's conception of freedom (as interpreted by Marty) are human dignity and responsibility; and to the extent that their chances of effective impact depend on abilities and conditions, there is an implicit link to the aristocratic stance mentioned above.

The question of Weber's political orientations and their influence on his work cannot be discussed without some reference to his involvement in the political life and demise of Wilhelmine Germany. This is not to suggest that the exceptionally complex and ambitious

intellectual project pursued for some three decades – with a short interval around the turn of the century – is reducible to a historical context. Wolfgang Mommsen, who wrote the most seminal account of Weber's political views and interventions, did not fail to note that "fundamental philosophical views and ultimate value-related convictions" [*Mommsen 1974: XVIII*] were also involved in an essential way. Another factor of distanciation was Weber's very critical attitude towards different sections of the political spectrum. His original (though never unqualified) admiration for Bismarck gave way to a sharply critical judgment, based on the view that German political culture had regressed under his regime and that he had manouvered himself into a position where he faced the alternative of a coup leading to outright authoritarian rule or capitulation to parties whom he had previously worked to render unfit for government. Both options being impracticable, the outcome was Bismarck's demise and a transition to the confused mixture of erratic monarchic actions, lobbyism and court intrigue characteristic of the Wilhelmine period. Weber was an increasingly vocal critic of these practices, especially during World War I. He took a notoriously dim view of the German bourgeoisie (in the broad sense of *Bürgertum*) as a political force and saw its weaknesses as in large measure due to an inferior version of Protestantism; but he also lambasted the political immaturity and subaltern culture of the self-proclaimed herald of an alternative to bourgeois society, the Social Democratic party. Documented sympathies for the "revisionist" current within the party did not translate into clear-cut partisanship. As for Weber's general attitude to socialism as a tradition and a movement, interpretations have varied and there is still room for debate. Otto Hintze, who can hardly be dismissed as an uninformed witness, wrote a review of Marianne Weber's biography where he described Weber as a "radical democrat of strongly socialist colour" [*Hintze 1982: 151*]. That is, however, not a view supported by present scholarship (most certainly not by Mommsen's account). The most that can be said is that Weber saw socialism as an integral part of the modern world, a response to some of its central problems, but also as an ambiguous force in that it could both favour bureaucratization and mobilize resistance against it.

It remains to consider a specific issue that inevitably comes up in the debate on Max Weber and German politics. It concerns the role of the nation in Weber's vision of history and society, as well as the relative weight of nationalism in his political thought. There can be no doubt about his commitment to national greatness and honour; those who nevertheless balk at describing him as a nationalist are usually assuming that nationalism is, as such and *ipso facto*, a reprehensible attitude or mindset. The present writer does not share that view and consequently has no problem with calling Max Weber a German nationalist. That said, the next step must be to clarify what kind of nationalist he was, and on what understanding of the nation this version of a very common but multiform outlook was based.

Wolfgang Mommsen [*1974: 52*] suggested that for Weber, the idea of the nation-state had roughly the same kind of meaning as Jahve for the ancient Jews. This is probably the most glaring overstatement in an otherwise well-balanced book. Weber thought that the German nation needed political re-education; there is no record of Jewish prophets wanting to re-educate Jahve. But there is no doubt that the trinity of nation, state and culture was a very strong and stable principle of orientation in Weber's intellectual biography; there is a late and forceful reminder in *Science as a Vocation*, where he compares the difference between French and German culture to the conflict of fundamental values,

which he had identified as a defining feature of the modern condition. It would be hard to find a more radical endorsement of national differences and antagonisms; to use Weber's term, this was obviously a major case of *Wertbeziehung*. But he was also well aware of its problematic aspects. Neither the separate components of the trinity nor the relations between them are given constants; they have a history, and that also implies possibilities of relapse and dissonance. For one thing, Weber explicitly doubts that the military prowess of the German state after 1870 was beneficial to German culture [*MWS I/22-1: 77*, unnumbered n.]. This is surely one of the traces pointing to a reading of Nietzsche. More generally speaking, the conditions for *Wertbeziehung* translating into critical inquiry and a quest for objective knowledge seem to be present; the actual results are not quite up to that expectation.

As Stefan Breuer [*2022: 121 n. 6*] argues against Wolfgang Schluchter, Weber's references to the nation (in the strong sense including its claims to statehood and its cultural identity) are too weighty for them to be set aside when his way of theorizing society is reconstructed. On the level of conceptual foundation, this claim is conclusive. It is nevertheless striking that the central and emphatic idea of the nation is never backed up by a historical analysis in detailed terms. The only text that seems to set out towards that goal [*MWS I/22-1: 65–77*] is short, unfocused and ends with an incomplete sentence; no title proposed by Weber is recorded (the title used in the *Gesamtausgabe*. "The prestige of power and national feeling", was chosen by the editors). Much of the text looks like a digression from the intended topic; there is a discussion of connections between statehood and expansion and of the changing role of economic factors in imperialist policies, interesting in its own right but not very relevant to the twin problematics of nation formation and national identity. The most noteworthy statements on the latter subjects confirm that they have to do with intertwinings of culture and power, but the emphasis is somewhat one-sided. Weber's main point seems to be that national belonging involves a claim to some kind of prestige; that prestige is most commonly and directly rooted in the power wielded by the collectivity in question; cultural elites or "intellectuals" (as Weber calls them, with quotation marks included) tend to transfigure it into cultural terms. This approach does not confront the question of differences and possible combinations of culture-centred and state-centred conceptions of the nation, particularly relevant in the German context. Weber's own insistence on Germany's mission to become a "*kultureller Machtstaat*" was clearly a step beyond the interpretation that focused on a mere transfiguration of power, and the same applies to his occasional remarks about German culture as a counterweight to the threatening division of the European world between Anglo-Saxon and Russian models.

The upshot of these reflections is that Weber was not only sensitive to the central role and cultural significance of the nation in the modern world; in principle, he was also aware of the main steps to be taken towards a historically grounded theorizing of its constant and variable components, but did not complete the task thus outlined. It would, however, be misguided and unfair to close this discussion without highlighting one particularly interesting formulation in the abovementioned text. At the beginning of a paragraph, Weber notes that if the concept of the nation can at all be defined in an unequivocal way, it certainly cannot be done "on the basis of common empirical properties of those who belong to it" [*MWS I/22-1: 74*]. This is a clear statement on the limits of methodological

individualism, the necessity of concepts relating to supra-individual patterns of the kind known in Hegelian language as the realm of the objective spirit, and the legitimacy of a position that Gert Albert [*2005*] has described as moderate holism.

The last version of politics-centred interpretations mentioned above is the reading that gives pride of place to Weber's vision of political options, demands and constraints characteristic of modern societies. *Politics as a Vocation*, often translated and published separately, then appears as a key text; but while it is true that no other sociological classic wrote a comparable guide to political action, it is also the case that Weber's reflections on this subject depend on concepts in progress and incomplete theoretical arguments. The main focus of his thoughts on modern politics is on the tension between expanding bureaucratic power on one side, charismatic and democratic counterweights on the other, these categories are building-blocks of an evolving political sociology that was left unfinished in crucial respects but invites further elaboration. That set of problems will be discussed elsewhere in this issue, chiefly in a paper on ways of reading Weber.

As we have seen, the philosophical and political aspects of Weber's intellectual profile are salient enough to demand attention when his legacy comes up for debate. Many scholars have also written about Weber as a historian, but here we will reserve comments on that part of his work for another context. To define him as a historical sociologist is to stress the permanent and essential (though not untroubled) intertwining of history and sociology in his writings; his conceptualizing efforts reflect this twofold focus, including the tensions that surface from time to time, not least because of the simultaneous interest in recurrent patterns and individual constellations. In short, the historical dimension of Weber's work is best discussed in close connection with sociological themes (which he tackled before identifying with sociology as a discipline) and with the overarching conceptual schemes. The last paper in the issue will return to these interconnected questions.

Czech Encounters with Weber

This is, to the best of my knowledge, the first time that a Czech journal devotes a special issue to Max Weber (a Slovak one was published in 2012). It seems appropriate to include a brief survey of earlier Czech responses to Weber's work. That is, for obvious historical reasons, a discontinuous record, but it includes some significant moments. Given the limited space, no detailed account is possible, but some landmarks should be mentioned.[2]

As with other aspects of twentieth-century Czech thought, the work of T. G. Masaryk is the obvious starting-point. Given their biographical and geopolitical proximity, the question of affinities and indirect contacts between Weber and Masaryk has not gone unnoticed; on the political level, it is tempting to compare Weber's criticism of the immature German *Bürgertum* to Masaryk's struggle against the particularist and mythologizing aberrations of the Czech national movement. Ilja Šrubař's article in the Czech Sociological Journal [*Šrubař 1998*] is the most systematic discussion of sociological and political views held by the two thinkers, and some of his observations merit further comment. The fact that Masaryk alludes to Protestant sources of capitalist dynamics seven years before

[2] Thanks are due to Miloš Havelka and Marek Skovajsa for conversations that have helped to clarify this complex story.

the publication of Weber's first essay on the subject is not as significant as Šrubař thinks; not only because that theme had been in debate for quite some time, but also for the reason that – as the *Gesamtausgabe* has now clarified – Weber's distinctive approach to it was already being adumbrated in lectures during the 1890s. More interestingly, Šrubař notes two references to Weber in Masaryk's writings. In the book on philosophical and sociological foundations of Marxism, published in German in 1899, Masaryk mentions Weber's work on Roman agrarian history in connection with critical remarks on Marx's oversimplified picture of pre-capitalist economic regimes. This shows that Masaryk, fifteen years older than Weber, was already following the latter's early work and appreciating it as a contribution to the critique of Marxism. The other reference is from Masaryk's book on Russia and Europe; in the context of reflections on Russia's developmental perspectives, Masaryk adds a footnote mentioning Weber's thesis on the importance of the Protestant ethic for modern capitalism and indicating agreement, with the proviso that the question must also be posed in a broader moral and social setting.

That said, some reservations about Šrubař's comparative perspective are in order. The claim that both thinkers deal with the modernization of societies is a bit on the anachronistic side; they both used the adjective "modern", but did not translate it into the kind of modernization theory that was to triumph in a later stage of sociological inquiry. On one occasion though, late in his career, Weber came closer to that than Masaryk ever did. In the 1918 text on parliament and government in the new German order (a reworked version of articles published during the preceding year), he made the following statement: "the so-called progress towards capitalism from the Middle Ages onwards is the obvious criterion for the modernization of the economy, and similarly, the progress towards bureaucratic officialdom, based on employment, salary, pension, promotion, professional training and division of labour, clearly defined competences, filing system, hierarchy of subordination and seniority, is an equally obvious criterion for the modernization of the state, be it monarchic or democratic" [*MWS I/15: 212*].[3] Two implications of this somewhat unwieldy formulation should be noted. The reference to "so-called progress" reflects fundamental doubt about the direction of the process in question, at odds with the belief in progress built into later modernization theory. Secondly, the qualifying clause at the end shows that the question of democracy is a minor issue; democracy is neither a path-determining force, nor can it be seen as a counterweight to the bureaucratizing trend.

Šrubař maintains that for both Masaryk and Weber, the democratization of society plays a central role as "a demand and at the same time as a necessary part of its modernization"; he also writes that both thinkers saw the "effectivity of religious values and of norms derived from them in everyday life" as essential to the modernizing process [*Šrubař 1998: 418, 424*]. Such claims exaggerate the affinities and obscure the differences between the respective intellectual and political visions. In Weber's writings during World War I, the concept of democratization is sometimes used in a more emphatically positive sense than before [especially in the text on democracy and the right to vote, *MWS I/15: 155–189*]; but there was no basic change to his conception of the relationship between nation and democracy. Democratizing measures were to serve the purpose of educating, integrating

[3] This text has not been as widely discussed as it deserves. It contains statements that link fundamental historical perspectives more closely to political issues of the times than anywhere else.

and mobilizing the nation. It was only in his very last writings that Weber began to consider the idea of democratic legitimacy as a distinctive type. Masaryk's frame of reference was different. His political philosophy (to all intents and purposes identical with a philosophy of history) centred on the dichotomy of democracy and theocracy. His concept of theocracy was much broader than the Weberian one; it covered all political regimes with at least a remnant of a sacralized hierarchy, thus including – in particular – the incompletely or fraudulently constitutionalized monarchies of Central and Eastern Europe. A religious connection was, as Masaryk saw it, also essential to the rise and progress of democracy: it was, first and foremost, grounded in the Protestant Reformation and the cognitive as well as moral autonomy of individuals that represents the most important cultural legacy of Protestantism. But Masaryk also placed a much stronger emphasis on the continuity of Protestant religious mentality than Weber did. The conclusions of the latter's analysis of the Protestant ethic and its fate did not support that expectation.

In short, Šrubař's comparison of Masaryk and Weber overstates the case for convergence. But even a more balanced account of contrasts and affinities would suggest a fruitful terrain for further discussion. Given Masaryk's central position in Czechoslovak intellectual and political life after 1918, one might expect favourable conditions for a sustained reception of Weber's work. That is not at all what happened. The paradoxical story of Czech encounters with Weber is best summed up in two facts: the first translation of *Politics as a Vocation* was a Czech one, published in 1929, but a complete translation of the *Protestant Ethic* was not published until 2023, and is – worldwide, to the best of my knowledge – the most recent to date. This record calls for a closer look at developments, positive and negative, during the near-century in between. Its second half was marked by four decades of Communist rule, but even that period saw some significant initiatives, and before the totalitarian turn, there were noteworthy episodes during the interwar years (the time of the German occupation, with universities closed and intellectual life severely constrained, was obviously less relevant).

The first landmark to be taken note of is the Czech translation of *Politics as a Vocation*, published in 1929. It was, as noted above, the first translation of this seminal text, now available in very many languages (for comparison: a Japanese translation was published in 1939, together with a translation of Carl Schmitt's *Concept of the Political*, an English one in 1946 and a French one in 1959). The translator, Jan Mertl, wrote an introduction that merits a closer look. It begins with a praise of the work as a foundational contribution to political sociology, and of Weber as an exemplary practitioner of the "objectivist" approach to politics, explicitly contrasted to the normativist stance that had hitherto prevailed among Czech scholars, mostly due to Masaryk's influence. But that is not the whole story. Mertl goes on to stress that Weber's idea of value-neutral science was not at all incompatible with strong personal commitments (he only objected to the illusion that the second could be derived from the first), and to describe Weber's political engagement. Mertl's Weber is not quite the same figure as the man now known through detailed and intensive historical research; the former appears as a nationalist reformer, concerned with social justice and more sympathetic to the Social Democrats than the latter is now known to have been. In short, Mertl's portrait looks a good deal more like Masaryk than the real Max Weber was. This shows how difficult it was to move out of Masaryk's shadow; and when it happened, it tended to result in shifts and disputes so massive that they obstructed the dialogue with

Weber in another way. That was confirmed by the controversy succeeding the publication of Mertl's translation, which became known as the debate on objectivism. On one hand, defenders of sociology as a young and still insecurely institutionalized discipline barricaded themselves behind a notion of objectivity that fell far short of Weberian standards. On the other hand, critics of that position were attracted to the idea of a "balance-sheet sociology", introduced by the philosopher and scientist Emanuel Rádl; this kind of social science was meant to distinguish and evaluate the positive and negative effects of progress.

Mertl was increasingly marginalized in a discussion sparked but not lastingly inspired by his comments on Weber; he gravitated rightwards and became attracted to authoritarian politics. He published a book on bureaucracy [*Mertl 1937*] which reflects a decisive shift from Weberian ideas to a position inspired by Carl Schmitt. Weber is credited with the first serious attempt to formulate a historically grounded theory of bureaucracy, but then dismissed as an exemplary spokesman of obsolete liberal views; the idea of a plebiscitary leader democracy, capable of confining bureaucratic officialdom to an instrumental role, is rejected as a last refuge of liberalism in crisis. The real hallmark of the post-liberal condition is mass democracy, opening the way for multiple social groups to pursue their interests in ways detrimental to coherent administration, but also for bureaucratic particularisms. Mertl then embarks on a comparative study of the interaction between democratization and bureaucratization in four countries: Czechoslovakia, France, Britain and the United States. The overall picture is of a transitional phase, with an authoritarian turn in the air; and there was worse to come. Mertl developed a sympathetic interest in National Socialism. His conduct during the German occupation was ambiguous enough for him to be accused of collaboration in 1945; the court absolved him, but he was ostracized by the academic community and did no scholarly work after the war. He died in 1978.

A pioneering translation was thus not enough to initiate a sustained engagement with Weber's work. But he did not disappear altogether. A prolonged but somewhat centrifugal debate on the meaning of Czech history was conducted during the first Czechoslovak republic and had some interesting echoes after World War II; this was another offshoot of the agenda imposed by Masaryk's efforts to Europeanize and modernize the Czech national movement, and it opposed critics of his project to those who sought to defend or develop it in ways more attuned to contemporary realities and reasonings. At one point in the 1930s, references to Weber surfaced in this context, but in a curiously one-sided way. The most principled part of the controversy involved opposite poles of Czech historical scholarship: Josef Pekař, a conservative with Catholic leanings and a prominent adversary of Masaryk, and Jan Slavík, a decidedly non-Communist socialist whom Masaryk asked to write a postscript to the second edition of his book on Russia and Europe. The matter most central to their disagreement (and to the whole debate) was the interpretation of the Hussite revolution, seen by Masaryk and his followers as an early harbinger of modern democratizing trends. Pekař condemned this as an anachronistic projection and insisted on the medieval character of the Hussite movement. In his anti-critical response [*Slavík 1995: 599–622 and 623–672*], Slavík invoked Weber's essay on objectivity, which he saw as a convincing defence of the kind of philosophy of history still needed but mostly ignored by professional historians. Visions of total history or universal laws were no longer on offer, but reflections on the presuppositions of historical knowledge had not lost their relevance.

Weber's version of that approach hinged on the concept of culture as a background to choices of themes, problems and perspectives. Slavík quoted what he called Weber's "excellent definition" of culture as a value-concept and went on to argue that in the case at issue, a value relation to modern democratic culture could justify a search for antecedents in earlier history (such as the Hussite upheaval) even if the self-articulation of actors and times seemed to belong to another world. But when he summed up his Weberian lesson in a statement to the effect that evaluation and knowledge were inseparably fused, he was obviously overstating his case; and as Miloš Havelka notes in his comments on the debate, this enabled Pekař (who did not quote Weber) to defend a position more attuned to Weber's idea of *Wertfreiheit*, even though his overall conception of historiography was much closer to Ranke than to Weber.

There is more to be said on Jan Slavík. A few years after his contribution to the debate on Czech history, he wrote a series of newspaper articles with the title "Reflections on Dictatorships" [*Slavík 1936*]. It is a pioneering attempt to use Weber's concept of charismatic rule for a comparative analysis of the interwar European dictatorships. Slavík begins with an explicit reference to Weber, crediting him with explaining the origins of monarchic rule better than anybody else: as a monopolization of contact with supernatural powers. That is the original meaning of charisma. What the then recent experiences showed was the possibility of charismatic rule returning as a response to crises (economic, social and geopolitical) and in conditions that differed from earlier ones in two very significant ways. The traditional frameworks and supportive social arrangements of monarchic rule have disappeared; at the same time, dominant currents of thought and public opinion have moved away from the religious cultures of the past. New kinds of charismatic rule have proved capable of adapting a disguisedly religious content to overtly anti-religious claims; as Slavík saw it, the development of Soviet ideology was a prime example. Nevertheless, the changed historical setting necessitated some additional pillars of power. The sheer compelling authority of charisma may be self-sufficient at the very beginning of a regime (as it was during the few years of Lenin's rule after 1917), but in the longer run, a complementary development sets in. It is not the routinization or institutionalization of charisma, familiar to Weber; Slavík thinks that it is best understood as dogmatization, the institutionalization of infallibility, and it does not so much replace charisma as reinforcing it. Again, the Soviet Union serves as the clearest illustration: the cult of Stalin as the fourth and last classic of Marxism-Leninism went hand in hand with the construction of an all-encompassing ideology. Slavík has less to say on the specific features of Fascist dictatorships, although he thinks that the mutual reinforcement of charisma and dogma is also at work there; but he draws a sharp distinction between the two new types of dictatorship. The Soviet policies summed up in the slogan of socialism in one country are described as mobilization for self-strengthening, whereas the Fascist regimes are mobilizing for outright conquest and a more extreme form of colonialism.

This was not the end of Slavík's engagement with Weber. During the war, he embarked on a long-term study of nation formation in the Czech lands. The second volume of that project, dealing with cities and nation in the later Middle Ages [*Slavík 1948*], contains no direct reference to Weber, but the echoes of his work on the city are unmistakable. Slavík describes the medieval city as a new form of social life, a new type of economic regime, and an embryo of the modern state. He goes beyond Weber in explicitly characterizing it as

a key phase in a long-term democratizing process (which in his view could also be traced back to the efforts of nobilities to limit the power of kings through elected representatives).

The work on nation formation was never completed. After 1948, Slavík was barred from publication, subjected to police harassment and twice briefly arrested, but not brought to trial. Some of his manuscripts were confiscated. Attempts to re-establish contacts with the community of Czech historians in 1968 were cut short by the Soviet invasion and the following purge. He died in 1978.

After the completion of the Communist takeover in 1948, there was no public space for encounters with Weber. But under these very oppressive circumstances, one of the most interesting – though strangely muted – Czech variations on Weberian themes was developed in clandestine conditions. Jan Patočka, now unanimously recognized as the greatest Czech philosopher, continued to work on a wide range of themes after he was expelled from the university in 1950. One of his main concerns was the problematic of modernity, not least in light of the experience of a Communist alternative that had gained more mass support in Czechoslovakia than elsewhere in Europe. He was, to the best of my knowledge, the first thinker to interpret modernity as a new type of civilization. That idea is first adumbrated in his philosophical diaries from the end of the 1940s, and it comes out of critical engagement with two authors. Patočka had read the first volumes of Toynbee's *Study of History*, seen reason to rethink the question of modernity on the basis of Toynbee's civilizational paradigm and found the most convincing clues to an answer in Weber's work. Weber is explicitly quoted in support of defining modernity as a rational civilization; but compared to Weber's own work, Patočka's emphasis is on the multiple and mutually sustaining rationalizing processes in modern societies, rather than on long-term developments that go back to Greek and Jewish origins. His most substantial discussion of this subject is to be found in an undated and unfinished text, probably written in the early fifties, much later circulated as *samizdat* and subsequently included in his collected works [*Patočka 1996*]. There he uses the term "super-civilization", obviously in order to stress the modern break with preceding types of civilization. Weber is only briefly mentioned, but implicit references to him are still significant, and the main innovation of this text is a variation on a Weberian theme. Patočka distinguishes two versions of super-civilization, moderate and radical. The former version, more or less identical with societies shaped by a liberal political regime (Patočka's view of economic liberalism was less clear), confronts a central cultural problem with social and political consequences. Its break with the traditional type of civilization, followed by diverse rationalizing processes and concomitant social differentiation, left it without the unifying patterns of meaning that had been possible in earlier cultural worlds. The moderate super-civilization, as defined by Patočka, develops various ways of coping with this problem, but he was particularly interested in the ability to enter into dialogue with older traditions. Patočka's main emphasis was on Greek sources, but the general perspective was in principle applicable to a broader spectrum.

The other version of super-civilization, radical but secondary in the sense that it emerged as a response to the moderate one, was characterized by an attempt to derive a definitive and comprehensive meaning from a totalized conception of rationality. In somewhat more Weberian terms, this was a project aiming to stave off a threatening loss of meaning through an imaginary absolutization of reason. It is worth noting that this interpretation avoids any reference to charisma; there is no trace of any "charisma of reason". As

Patočka saw it, antecedents of this historical phenomenon can be found in earlier phases of modernity, sometimes in seemingly diverse currents of thought, such as French Jacobinism and English utilitarianism); but the consummate expression of modern civilizational radicalism was the twentieth-century Communist project, with its pretensions to a scientific world-view, knowledge of historical laws and comprehensive planning of progress.

Patočka's writings from the later 1950s and the 1960s did not pursue the question of modernity as a civilization. He returned to this theme (among others) in the 1970s, with his "heretical essays on the philosophy of history" [*Patočka 2007*], widely regarded as his concluding philosophical statement. He now returned to the concept of rational civilization, again with an explicit but less than exhaustive reference to Weber; there was less emphasis on internal divisions of this civilizational formation than before (that change was surely not unrelated to the manifest decline of the Communist alternative). Further details of the evolving argument cannot be discussed here, but it is surely justified to speak of a "hidden dialogue with Weber", as does Jakub Homolka in his doctoral thesis [*Homolka 2016*], so far, the best discussion of the subject.

The cultural and intellectual revival that unfolded in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s (culminating in the Prague Spring) did not do much to rekindle interest in Weber; other themes and thinkers seemed more topical. But there are a few cases that merit mention. One of them has to do with the most interesting philosophical work of the decade, Karel Kosík's *Dialectics of the Concrete*. This book was very much an attempt to show that a revitalized Marxist mode of thought could match challenges and assimilate lessons from other traditions; responses to it have disagreed on the relative weight of phenomenological and Hegelian sources. There is no comparable Weberian connection, but a brief comment is meant to clarify the difference between Marxian and Weberian visions of history. It is certainly not one of the strongest parts of the book, but its very weakness is instructive and throws light on an issue often overlooked by self-professed Weberians. Kosík [*1965: 74–81*] argues that the difference between Marxian and Weberian views on economy and society is a matter of basic conceptual options: Marx (properly understood) thematizes the economy as a structure, Weber treats it as a factor among others. This distinction between structure and factor obviously posits the former as a "structuring structure", a totalizing part of the whole, in the sense that Marx had in mind when he referred to production as an "übergreifendes Moment". What Kosík overlooked was that precisely this kind of structure had been outlined by Weber in the *Zwischenbetrachtung*; the economic order of life, particularly in its capitalist version, is a structure with potentially macro-social implications.

A retrospect on Czech encounters with Weber in the 1960s, however brief, should not omit a remarkable input from a Czech in exile. Ferdinand Kolegar had (together with Jiří Musil) been a member of the last cohort of students enrolling in sociology at Charles University just before the discipline was banned and replaced by Marxism-Leninism. Having been excluded from further study and got into trouble because of dissenting views, he emigrated via Germany and Sweden to the United States, where he taught at Roosevelt University in Chicago. In 1964, *The Sociological Quarterly* organized a symposium on Weber; Kolegar contributed an article on rationalization and cultural pessimism in Weber's sociology. This was a very explicit and radical criticism of the then dominant American interpretation of Weber, represented most forcefully by Talcott Parsons. Against the emphasis on systematic theory (especially the theory of action), Kolegar stressed the "concerns

and issues which it has become fashionable to label as philosophical and to exclude from sociology", but also the "historical and comparative aspects" of Weber's work and the commitment to an "interpretative analysis of the totality of social existence" [*Kolegar 1964: 357, 355, 357*]. Taking his cue from the essay on objectivity, Kolegar was fully aware of Weber's debt to Rickert, but he also underlined the rejection of Rickert's "metaphysical axiology" and the focus on the historicity of cultural orientations and problems. Combining Weber's notion of *Wertbeziehung* with the metaphor invoking the light of cultural problems, Kolegar then argues that Weber's gradually emerging central theme was a value that was also a problem, namely rationality (and its processual aspect, rationalization); his insight into the fundamental ambivalence of rationality enabled him to "make the first major attempt at refining the sociological concept of rationality and to dissociate it from the ideology of cultural optimism and progress" [*Kolegar 1964: 363*]. This balanced line of argument allows for a certain recognition of cultural pessimism without making it a dominant note. The result was "a genuinely sociological analysis of a total society at a crucial point of its history" [*Kolegar 1964: 373*], rather than a guide to a general theory of social action or social evolution.

It would be difficult to find another 1960s text on Weber that would be as far from prevailing opinion of the time and as close to views that have gained ground in the wake of the *Gesamtausgabe*; and it may be added that one of its striking features, no doubt relevant to Kolegar's reading of Weber, is a reference to the first edition of Norbert Elias's work on the civilizing process, otherwise virtually unknown at the time.

Sociology was reinstated at Czechoslovak universities and research institutes from 1964 onwards. There were signs of interest in Weber's work (for one thing, a selection from his writings was printed for internal use at the party school), but that was not a major factor in this revival of the discipline. On the Western side, the influence of Talcott Parsons was more important; and as for contacts within the Soviet bloc, Zygmunt Bauman's distinctive conception of Marxist sociology was very well received in Czechoslovakia. There was, however, one episode concerning Weber that deserves special mention. In 1966, Jiří Musil (who later became the first post-Communist director of the sociological institute in Prague) published an article on "Max Weber's views on the role of science in society" in the *Sociological Journal* that had been founded in 1964. This was a systematic discussion of Weber's *Science as a Vocation*, and although there was no mention of official Marxist-Leninist views, Musil's unmistakable message was that Weber's ideas were a better basis for reflection on the subject of science and society than the party doctrine. There was a sharp reaction from the party watchdog, warning the editors of the journal against publishing this kind of heresy; but this was already a time of fluid and uncertain politics, soon to be followed by the reformist turn of the Prague Spring, and no further measures were taken.

The two decades following the invasion of 1968, known as the period of "normalization" (a term first coined by the pro-Soviet leadership that ousted the reformists but later used in a strongly negative sense) were obviously not a favourable time for genuine engagement with Weber, or any other thinkers beyond the pale prescribed by Maxist-Leninist orthodoxy. There was more attention to Weber in official criticism of "bourgeois" thought, but that is not a matter worth further comment. Radical change came with the "velvet revolution" at the end of 1989. The intellectual atmosphere of post-Communist

Czechoslovakia and – after 1992 – the Czech Republic was receptive to previously forbidden classical and contemporary currents of thought, but owing to the disproportionate influence of neo-liberalism, the results were somewhat one-sided. In this context, interest in various aspects of Weber's work found expression in multiple terms and ways: but it can hardly be said that he has received the broad, balanced and critical reception that he deserves. Some significant responses should be mentioned. The most important translations are a selection from Weber's writings on methodology, sociology and politics, translated, edited and introduced by Miloš Havelka, published in 1998, and a full translation of the *Protestant Ethic*, by Miloš Havelka and Aleš Valenta, published in 2023. As for publications on Weber, the most detailed work is a book on Weber and interpretations of his thought, published in 2005 by Marek Loužek; but as reviewers have noted, it is more on the descriptive than the critical-interpretative one. Noteworthy articles were written by Miloš Havelka [*1992*], on Weber and Neo-Kantianism; Jiří Musil [*2007*], on knowledge and action from a Weberian perspective; and Miloslav Petrusek [*2007*], on the reception of Weber's work in Central and Eastern Europe. It is to be hoped that this issue will rekindle interest in Weber and inspire further debate.

Contents of This Issue

All contributors to this issue have, in one way or another, been involved in recent debates about Weber's work. The issue begins with a paper by Keith Tribe, one of the foremost Weber scholars in the English-speaking world; he has written on many aspects of Weber's work and produced better English translations of Weber than were previously available. His present text deals with an early phase of Weber's career. The themes and arguments adumbrated in his Freiburg and Heidelberg lectures during the 1890s are among the aspects brought into better perspective by the publication of his collected works; it has now become clear that these lectures foreshadowed many significant developments in Weber's later work. They throw light on his first approaches to the question of a Protestant background to the spirit of modern capitalism, his critical engagement with Karl Marx, and his evolving views on socialism and the workers' movement.

The two following papers deal with political themes, but of a very different kind. Andreas Anter has published extensively on Weber's political sociology, with particular emphasis on his conception of the state. It has often been noted that Weber's definitions of the state vary from one context to another; his last university course, now known only through note taken by students, was designed to cover this problematic in a more systematic way, but the project was cut short by his death. Anter's paper raises the question of a key to the unfinished and partly divergent lines of interpretation, argues that the main point is to adopt a process-oriented perspective, and specifies this through a definition of the state as a complex of actions that take shape gradually and face challenges and transformations. The focus on degrees and directions of statehood makes Weber appear as a more important pioneer of scholarship on state formation than has mostly been assumed.

Edith Hanke was the general editor of the Max-Weber-Gesamtausgabe and sole editor of the volume on the sociology of rule; she was also co-editor of the Oxford Handbook of Max Weber. Her paper discusses a topic complementary to Anter's analysis of statehood, especially its modern version, but very differently treated by Weber. He did not write

any substantial text on the public sphere, but a picture of his views on this subject – later recognized as a crucial theme of political theory – can be put together on the basis of his various political interventions and suggestions for research to be done. The most interesting piece of evidence is a project of inquiry into the press and its role in the formation of public opinion; it was never realized, but Weber's formulation of the project and ways of justifying it are revealing of his general approach to a field of some importance to his sociology of rule.

Toby Huff's contribution is the first instalment of a larger project, and therefore somewhat less self-contained than the other papers. Weber's sociology of law has been less extensively debated than other major parts of his work, and there is still much work to be done on its place and significance within his overall agenda. Huff proposes to tackle this problem from historical and comparative perspectives; the former is already evident in Weber's analyses of legal development, which Huff reconstructs in some detail, whereas the second was not developed in ways that would have corresponded to the comparative studies of religious and political pattern, and further work in that vein will call for a much broader scope. Huff outlines ideas for comparison with Islamic, Russian and Chinese law.

Among responses to Weber's work outside Germany, the Japanese one stands out as the most intensive and sustained; it began in earnest – with the first translations – in the 1920s and is still vigorous. Edith Hanke's recent survey of Weber translations counts 194 Japanese publications of that kind [*Hanke 2022: 174–180*]. The United States is next on the list with 118 publications, Italy third with 68. Wolfgang Schwentker knows the story of Weber studies in Japan better than any other Western scholar. His book on this subject [*Schwentker 1997*] traces it from the first mention of Weber to the last decade of the twentieth century. His paper in this issue describes the journey (literal and figurative) of a key figure in the field, Andō Hideharu; it throws light on the human dimension of Japanese engagement with Max Weber.

The publication of Max Weber's collected writings has reactivated questions about the unity of his work. Its markedly multi-perspectivistic character makes this issue difficult to settle. Jóhann P. Árnason's paper argues against attempts to apply such concepts as paradigm or research program (both influential in contemporary philosophy of science) and in favour of the concept of problematic, originating from the French philosophical tradition but so far less clearly defined than the two others. It connotes a more ambiguous, consciously fragmented and exploratory set of approaches; by the same token, it invites an effort to excavate latent presuppositions and spell out implicit connections. The result would not be a return to Weber, but might be a better way to combine his insights with those of later thinkers who have – at least in partial regards – moved beyond his horizons.

Thanks are due to the German and anglophone contributors, for agreeing to participate in a project coming from outside the metropolitan domain of scholarship; and especially to Keith Tribe, who helped in various ways beyond writing his paper.

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