

Max Weber and German sociology*

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On an international scale, the sociology of the imperialist epoch has increasingly abandoned the heritage of the philosophy of history, and of philosophy itself as a universal science. As part of the general triumph of agnosticism, it consciously restricted itself, transforming itself into a specific discipline alongside a plurality of others.

In Germany, this development was nuanced by the fact that sociology exhibited a particular receptiveness to the Ranke school's romantic and irrationalist conceptions of history; and it is for this reason that Neo-Kantian gnosticism designates it only a minor place within the system of sciences. *A propos* of this question it is revealing to compare Dilthey's critique of the status of sociology as a science with that of Rickert. In contrast to Dilthey, Rickert considers, that from the point of view of logic and methodology, there is no contradiction whatever in submitting the phenomenal manifestations of social life to conceptual 'generalisation'. In this sense, therefore, a sociology is perfectly possible on the condition that it does not pretend to tell us 'how the life of humanity unfolded in its individual, incomparable and unique course.' The possibility of sociology is thus never equivalent to its being capable of replacing history.

We should aspire to deliver sociology from its methodological 'innocence'. The sociologists themselves—Max Weber in the vanguard—stress that they have no pretension to reveal the unitary meaning of history. Sociology is rather, *in Dilthey and Rickert's sense*, a science auxiliary to history. Simmel's position is typical in this respect: the affirmation of the possibility of an autonomous, strictly formalist sociology is accompanied, in his works on the theory of history, by the equally enthusiastic defence of the point of view of the 'uniqueness' and 'incomparability' of historical facts.

The orientation taken by history facilitates this amicable rapprochement between philosophy and history. The apology for the existing order, for example the brutal form this will assume with Treitschke, is rejected by the historiography of the pre-imperialist period. And, with Lamprecht, there are even certain definite tendencies, however insufficient, to 'sociologise' history. However, if the majority of German historians refuse to take this step forward, it remains true that many begin to

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accord an increasing importance to sociological categories in their approach to historical writing (this is particularly clear in Delbruck's great *Military History*). The cause lies in the rapid development of German capitalism which imposed the inevitable necessity of explaining the essence of capitalism and of defining its future tendencies. There is a simultaneous modification of the German historians' position *vis à vis* Marxism. Pure and simple ignorance or apodictic rejection appears anachronistic and superseded, if only because of the growing strength of the workers' movement a more 'subtle' refutation of Marxism becomes indispensable. This movement is paralleled by the adoption of certain constituent parts of Marxism which once distorted and falsified prove to be compatible with bourgeois imperialist ideology.

German Sociology and Revisionism

This new position could be adopted because of the theoretical and practical progress of revisionism within the Social Democratic movement. It is well known that Bernstein aspired to eliminate everything revolutionary within the workers' movement: materialism and the dialectic in philosophy, the dictatorship of the proletariat in the theory of the state, etc. The practical and theoretical liquidation of the class struggle and its replacement by the collaboration of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat exerts a great influence on the bourgeois sociologists who are able to use revisionism as a platform for class collaboration. Marxism which until then they had sought to refute as a unified system now seems capable of being split into segments, as in revisionism, and what bourgeois sociology could use could be incorporated into the latter.

The struggle against materialism, that is, in sociology against the priority of social being over social consciousness, and against the determinant role of the development of the productive forces, continues to be conducted with as much animosity as previously. However, the *relativist* methodology engendered on the basis of *Neo-Kantianism* and *Machism* permits bourgeois sociology to allow for the interaction between base and superstructure in certain limited and abstract forms. This is clearly apparent in Simmel's *Sociology of Money* and in Max Weber. Weber examines the reciprocal relations between religious and economic systems but resolutely rejects the priority of the economy: 'An economic ethic is not a simple "function" of a form of economic organisation; and just as little does the reverse hold, namely, that economic ethics unambiguously stamp the form of the economic organisation.' (Weber 1922a, p. 238; trans: Gerth and Mills 1948, p. 268.) 'However incisive the social influences, economically and politically determined, may have been upon a religious ethic in a particular case, it receives its stamp primarily from religious sources. . . .' (Weber 1922b, p. 240; trans: Gerth and Mills 1948, p. 270.)

Max Weber's point of departure is the interaction between the material world and ideologies, but his struggle against historical materialism inheres in his pretension to establish the 'unscientific' character of the primacy of the economic. Let us leave on one side the fact that historical materialism ascertains very complex interactions in concrete social reality: Engels said that economic motivations determine the totality only '*in the last instance*'. Even though such a form of interaction has no place in modern relativism it is greatly to its taste. In fact, this is simply a *prologemena to a polemic against historical materialism*. In the last instance, Weber's analyses always tend to accord ideological (religious) phenomena an 'immanent' logic and law of development. They result solely from themselves in such a way that they continually appear as the final cause of the total process: 'Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the "world images" that have been created by "ideas" have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest.' (Weber 1922a, p. 252; trans. Gerth and Mills 1948, p. 280.) Thus, Weber commits sociology in the direction of *Geistwissenschaft*, to the idealist interpretation of history. And, even though Weber's conception is consciously anti-irrationalist, it is not lacking in nuances of irrationalism. His sociology aspires to demonstrate *that a necessary irrationalism was engendered on the very terrain of capitalist rationalisation*. A consideration of Weber's mode of analysis of the genesis of capitalism (= *spirit* of capitalism) cannot but find it significant that in this analysis modern rationalism is linked with religion through the latter's submission to a '*lurch towards the irrational*'. Troeltsch and others share this view but exhibit even clearer links with *Geistwissenschaft*.

This 'refined' form of criticism of historical materialism corresponds to a new attitude towards the workers' movement. The primitive illusions, which saw Bismarck's 'bayonet and a lump of sugar' putting an end to the proletarian class organisations, collapse with the fall and abrogation of the anti-Socialist law. Certainly, we may still witness attempts from outside to turn the workers' movement away from class struggle, efforts often supported by the German sociologists (Stocker and later Gohre and Naumann). But, later, sociology considers its most essential task the systematisation of the reformist tendencies of social democracy: hence its tendency to 'scientifically prove' the utility of the separation of the trade unions and the Social Democratic party (in this domain Werner Sombart played the main role).

German Sociology and the Theory of Capitalism

In the imperialist epoch the central problem of German sociology is to find a theory of the origins and essence of capitalism, to 'surmount'

historical materialism in this domain through the creation of a conception which is incompatible with it. Its stumbling block was primitive accumulation, the violent separation of the producers from the means of production. In other areas, the adherence of the majority of German sociologists to 'marginalism' engenders the pretension to consider the Marxist theory of surplus-value refuted. Thus, the appearance *en masse* of new theories and hypotheses destined to serve as 'sociological' *ersatz* for primitive accumulation. Though, among others, Sombart works feverishly to suggest a series of explanations of the genesis of capitalism, the Jews, war, luxury, urban ground rent, etc., in the long run, Max Weber's conception had most influence. The problem which he poses is to explain how capitalism arises and 'takes root' in Western Europe and not elsewhere. In contrast to previous conceptions in which capitalism is equated with any quantitative accumulation, Weber sets out to grasp the specificity of modern capitalism, to account for its appearance in Europe and in Europe alone through the difference between the ethico-religious evolution of the West and of the East. In the first place, this pre-supposes the 'de-economisation' and *spiritualisation* of the phenomenon of capitalism. The essence of capitalism appears as the *rationalisation* of social and economic life, 'universal calculability'. Weber undertakes an outline universal religious history in order to demonstrate that Protestantism alone (and in particular the sects) possessed an ideology of such a nature as to proceed in the direction of and favour this rationalisation, in contrast to all ancient and oriental religions which possessed 'economic ethics' that constituted retarding and inhibiting factors to the rationalisation of everyday life. Weber ceaselessly resists the deduction of economic ethics from economic structures; for instance, here is what he says concerning China: 'This absence of a religiosity of an ethico-rational character is here the primary fact and seems to have influenced the surprisingly limited rationalisation of technique.' (Weber 1922b, p. 277.) Because he identifies, in a simplistic and vulgar manner, technique and the economy, and consequently recognises *industrial capitalism alone* as authentic, he arrives in a facile manner at the 'decisive' historical 'argument': he considers historical materialism superseded because of his belief that this Calvinist economic ethic which favoured and accelerated capitalist development had already existed '*before capitalist development*'.

The real character of the methodology of the German sociologists is revealed here: *an apparent comprehension of the essence of capitalism which permits the avoidance of the real economic problems* it poses. Though the phenomenon of free (unservile) labour, the separation of the workers from the means of production is certainly mentioned and even plays a not insignificant role in Weberian sociology, the decisive characteristic remains rationality and calculability. In spite of many divergences in detail this remains true to Toennies's conception of 'society' (*Gesellschaft*), a conception which inevitably amounts to the

standing of the capitalist economy on its head; *surface* phenomena are promoted to the absolute and vulgarised to the detriment of the analysis of the development of the productive forces. These deforming abstractions give German sociology the possibility of allowing ideological formations such as Law and Religion an equal role to the economy, and even to the attribution of a 'supervisor' causality to them.

One of the consequences which derives from this is the ever increasing replacement of the relations of causality by *analogies*. Thus, for example, Weber stresses the striking analogy between the modern state and a capitalist enterprise. However, since he refuses, in the name of agnostic relativism, to envisage the question of the primary cause this remains at the level of analogous *description*. It is on the basis of such analogies that an extensive 'critique of modern civilisation' (*Kulturkritik*) develops which never 'debases itself' with the fundamental problems of capitalism. This permits the free display of the malaise and dissatisfaction engendered by capitalist civilisation but at the same time, in considering the rationalisation of capitalism as 'fate' (*Schicksal*, Rathenau's word) it proves, through the critique, the necessity and eternity of the capitalist system. The apparent *historicity* of these sociological considerations always results in the founding of the ineluctability of capitalism, a system which appears incapable of substantial transformation, and also to the discovery of contradictions in socialism, which establish its theoretical and practical impossibility. Furthermore, as the German sociologists situate themselves on the terrain of the new vulgar subjectivist economics, they can neither understand nor even be acquainted with Marxist economics, which is all the more reason for their inability to engage in a valuable polemic against it. As ideologists of the bourgeoisie in the imperialist epoch, they draw out *more of the implied consequences of revisionism, which its spokesmen* are obliged to veil to maintain their position within the workers' movement.

Max Weber and his Democratism

In Germany this *Kulturkritik* assumes a specific form. In conformity with the whole tradition of reactionary German irrationalism, it sets out to prove the 'superiority' of the social structure and organisation of the German states over that of the Western Democracies. We know that precisely in this period the contradictions of bourgeois democracy (for example in France) find a 'literary' echo as much in the anti-republican laws as in anarcho-syndicalism. The German sociologists systematise all the results of this critique of democracy, they give it a profound, philosophical and 'sociological' form. They present democracy as a machine which through its essentially *mass* character 'violates' 'life', 'freedom' and 'individuality'. In contrast, the German regime appears as an 'organic' order in the face of 'mechanistic' anarchy, as the rule of responsible and competent leaders in the face of the 'demagogy'

of 'irresponsible' elements under democracy. In the same way as the economists of the Historical School had exalted the 'superiority' of the Bismarckian regime, German sociology makes itself the apologist for Wilhelmine imperialism.

Max Weber occupies a place apart in this development. His methodological premisses resemble many of those of his contemporaries, and he is receptive to the Western publicists' critique of democracy. However, he adopts a contrasting attitude *in so far as he sees in democracy the mots appropriate form for the imperialist expansion of a great modern power*. He perceives the fragility of German imperialism precisely in the absence of internal democratisation:

'A people granted political maturity alone is a master people (*Herrenvolk*) . . . Master peoples alone are qualified to intervene in the course of world history: If peoples who do not possess this quality still attempt this, not only will the sure instinct of other nations revolt against them, but the attempt also leads to their internal collapse. The will to impotence internally which is preached by the Literati is incompatible with the will to power in the world which is exalted in such a voluble fashion. (Weber 1921, p. 251 ff.)

Here, the root of Weber's 'democratism' can be grasped, he shares with the other German imperialists the conviction that the 'master people' have a world 'colonising' mission. However, he distinguishes himself from them in that, not only does he not idealise the German reality which conceals itself behind the facade of parliamentarianism, but on the contrary, he harshly criticises it. For him, Germany could only become a 'master nation' with a democracy on the English model, which is why internal democratisation must not be pushed further than the realisation of German imperialist goals requires. This would imply a clear rejection of the 'personal regime' of the Hohenzollerns and of its other side the omnipotence of the bureaucracy. It is not in politics alone that Weber opposes them, they are equally represented in a sombre perspective in his sociology. He shows that the German political regime in no way represents 'organic liberty' but on the contrary the stifling of all freedom and individuality through the mechanisms of bureaucracy. At the same time he utilises this anti-bureaucratic perspective in order to warn his readers against socialism which he represents as the complete bureaucratisation of life. The criticism of the debility of German foreign policy whose causes are inscribed within the system itself and are not due merely to individual failings is pursued in order to continually affirm that only a Parliament granted effective power will be capable of the selection of true leaders. The singularity of Weber's democratism can be seen from his imperialist pre-suppositions. In a conversation which he had with Ludendorff after the war, which his wife relates,

Weber declares: 'In a democracy the people choose a leader in whom they trust. Then the chosen leader says, "now shut up and obey me". People and party are no longer free to interfere in his business. Later the people can sit in judgement. If the leader has made mistakes—to the gallows with him!' (Marianne Weber 1926, p. 665; trans. Gerth and Mills 1948, p. 42.) To which Ludendorff—comprehending this—replied: 'I could like such democracy' (*ibid.*). In short, Weberian democracy transforms itself into Caesarism.

The Subjectivism of Weberian Sociology

With the extension of the sociological *Kulturkritik* into concrete politics we can see that even its oppositional manifestations exhibit a profound affinity with the contemporary philosophy of imperialism, with the diverse forms of Neo-Kantianism and with *Lebens Philosophie* (Philosophy of Life). This is why, in sociology as in other spheres, methodology is characterised by an extreme formalism and gnosticism by a total relativism, an agnosticism quick to degenerate into mystical irrationalism. Sociology parades itself as a particularised science, a science auxiliary to history. At the same time, however, its formalism precludes the possibility of historical explanation. The development of the diverse disciplines is pursued in parallel, each continually becoming more formalist, each forging its own immanent casuistry, *each referring to the other for the solution of the most essential problems, those of its origin and true content*. To take the example of jurisprudence, Jellinek considers the problem of the content of legal rules as 'meta-juridical', Kelsen says of the birth of law: 'It is the great mystery of law and of the State which is fulfilled in the act of legislation', and Preuss declares 'the content of legal institutions is never of a juridical character but rather economic and political'.

It would therefore seem that sociology would have the function of illuminating these contents and specific geneses, but this is only appearance. Its formalist sublimations lead to the substitution of *analogies for causal explanations*, with Simmel this analogic formalism becomes a trivial game when he affirms the possibility of identical forms of sociality in spite of completely different contents: for example, does he not find analogies between a religious society and a band of brigands? The method of the 'particularised' sciences of society which consists in mutually reflecting their problems, condemns the latter to remain ever without solution in the manner of the bureaucracy which 'shelves' questions in referring them from file to file. Though it is true that Weber polemicises against Simmel's excessive formalism, his sociology is full of the same formal analogies. Thus, he assimilates the ancient Egyptian bureaucracy and socialism, the Soviets and estates (*Standes*). His concept of 'charisma' (irrational sign of election conveying the

blind confidence of the masses to one man) rests upon analogy, which allows him, in a similar manner, to classify a Hindu shaman and the social-democratic leader Kurt Eisner under the same 'sociological' category. This is just one example among many others.

The formalism, subjectivism and agnosticism of sociology make it, like the philosophy contemporaneous with it, incapable of going beyond the construction of *types*. Its function is to establish a *typology* and to force historical phenomena into it. It is in this sense that the influence of the philosophy of Dilthey's second period begins to prove to be decisive on German sociology, though it will only find its realisation after the war with Spengler. In Weber, this problem of types became the central problem of methodology. The establishment of 'ideal types', pure conceptual construction, is in his view the primary task of sociology, it is in departing from them alone that sociological analysis could be possible. From this point the analysis does not lead to the disengagement of a plan of evolution but to the *juxtaposition* of *Idealtypen* ordered and chosen in relation to a specific casuistry. The episodes of social evolution are illuminated in so far as they are unique and incapable of repetition (*einmalig*.) This evolution, conceived in the manner of Rickert, acquires an insurmountably irrational character, it not being submitted to any law or internal logic. However, for the casuistic 'rationality' of the *Idealtypen* the irrational appears as a 'deviation' or 'perturbation' in relation to the type.

Nothing demonstrates the definitively subjectivist character of Weberian sociology as well as his concept of *law*. On the subject of the categories of 'general sociology' he declares: 'The mode in which sociological concepts are formed is essentially an affair of opportunity and utility. . . . We are in no way *obliged* to form categories in the mode in which we have established them before.' This pragmatist theory of knowledge leads him to give the following definition of sociological law: 'It is customary to designate various sociological generalisations . . . as laws. These are chance confirmed by observation to the effect that under certain given conditions an expected course of social action will occur, which is understandable in terms of the typical motives and typical subjective intentions of the actors.' (Weber 1922; trans: Weber 1968, Vol. I. p. 18.) Here the whole of objective social reality is dissolved into subjectivity. While the social facts acquire, here, a complexity which has the appearance of exactitude, however, in reality they can only be rendered in an inexact form. For example, here is how Weber describes the 'product of labour' in his *Wissenschaftslehre* (Weber 1922c, p. 325): after having enumerated all the obligations of the workers he continues,

if he does all that, he has a chance to receive periodically certain pieces of metal or sheets of paper-money made in a certain way which once put into other people's hands have the effect of procuring bread, coal, trousers for him . . . so that in the case

where someone would wish to retake these objects from him, there would be some probability that in accord with his appeal some people would help him up to the point of footing the bill for their recovery.

It is clear in this example that Weber's sociological categories reflect nothing more than *the abstract formulation of the psychology of the calculating individual in the capitalist system*. The concept of 'chance' is on one hand derived from the Machist (empirico-criticist) interpretation of the phenomena of nature and on the other hand from the psychological subjectivism of 'marginalism'. It transforms the objective formations and their transformations, the events themselves, *into a chaotic criss-crossing* of confirmed or unconfirmed '*presumptions*' of fulfilled or unfulfilled 'expectations' (in the sense of 'anticipations'). The laws of evolution are no more than the 'chance', more or less probable, of seeing one of these 'presumptions' or 'expectations' realised on each occasion. Weber defines the most diverse social realities, Law, Power, the State by 'chance'. We can clearly see here that in the case of a sincere scientist, like Weber, who is consequently attached to the founding of his science on the maximum of objectivity the imperialist tendencies of pseudo-objectivity prove to be stronger than the *forging of an objective methodology applicable in practice*. Thus it is clear that a sociology working in this way merely attains abstract analogy.

German Sociology and the Dialectic

However, the sociology of the imperialist epoch also sought to satisfy 'metaphysical needs', the 'thirst for *Weltanschung*' which engendered the 'Philosophy of Life', the renaissance of romanticism and of Hegel's 'pantragic'. Sometimes these tendencies express themselves directly in sociology, for example when Rathenau calls it to the irrational revolt of the 'soul' against the mechanical apparatus of capitalism (or in the school of Stefan George). Though in Simmel the dualism between formalist sociology and the 'philosophy of life' in the problem of the 'tragedy of culture' is already more complex. Here again, Weber occupies a singular position, his struggle against irrationalism *leads to his carrying the latter, on a higher level* to a more radical extreme. On several occasions, Weber defends himself against the reproach of relativism. However, he holds up his formalist and agnostic method as the only truly 'scientific' method, as he argues that it permits nothing to be introduced into sociology that cannot be proven precisely.

For him, only *technical* criteria can be expected from sociology; in other words, only, 'which means for the achievement of a proposed end are appropriate or inappropriate' (Weber 1922c, p. 149; trans: Weber 1949 p. 53), can be investigated. On the other hand it can 'determine

the consequences which the application of the means to be used will produce in addition to the eventual attainment of the proposed end'. *Everything* else will be outside of the domain of science, an 'irrational' article of faith. Thus, Weber demands the 'neutrality' of sociology, the total absence of value judgements (*Wertfreiheit*), he desires it purged of all apparently irrational elements. However, this leads, with much more certainty to the irrationalisation of the development of the social totality. Here, in effect, the result is the affirmation that the irrational character of the 'choice of values' (*Wertungen*) is profoundly rooted in social reality, without the realisation that this suppresses all rational method. He says, 'the impossibility of scientifically founding practical engagement (the adoption of a political position) derives from very profound causes: it is in principle unjustifiable because of the insoluble conflict between the order of values which divide the world.' (Weber 1921, p. 545). The problem that is Weber's obstacle here is that of the *Communist Manifesto*, history is the history of class struggle, however, because of his world view he does not recognise this fact. Consequently, as he neither can nor wishes to *adapt to this dialectical structure of social reality a thought which is also dialectical* he is reduced to *the flight into irrationalism*. We may grasp with particular clarity the way in which the irrationalism of the imperialist epoch is engendered *by false replies to correct questions* (correct because posed by reality itself). How (for methodological reasons, relating in the last instance to their social environment) the ideologists fail to dialectically resolve the problems of the dialectic which are posed to them. Irrationalism is the form taken by a thought which *flees before a dialectical response to a dialectical question*. This apparently scientific character of sociology, this 'severe' neutrality represents in *reality the furthest degree which irrationalism has attained up to this time*.

Max Weber's Irrationalism

The consequence of Weber's attitude and its rigour reveals its irrational foundations much more clearly than in strictly observed Neo-Kantianism. Weber is certainly an enemy of the forms which irrationalism assumes in his time. He is contemptuous of certain elements' thirst for 'authentic life': *those who want to "see"* (intuitionists) *should go to the cinema!* However, it does not escape him that thought can only be irrational relatively, in relation to other thought. It is remarkable that he excludes people such as Klages and Jaspers, the future leader of German existentialism, from the accusation of irrationalism. His critical mind is therefore deployed only against *established* forms of irrationalism. As his own methodology is full of irrationalist tendencies, of motifs appropriate to the imperialist epoch, which engender his paradoxical attitude in respect of German expansionism and the democratisation of his country, he finds himself forced to accept the new,

more 'refined' form of irrationalism, which is inspired in some cases by his own methodology. It is probable that he would have repudiated the massive and salient form of irrationalism of fascism and the pre-fascist period. However, this in no way contradicts the links which exist between his methodology and the course taken by German history. Spengler and Stefan George are truly in a similar position in respect of fascism, *mutatis mutandis*. He struggles against the traditional irrationalism of historians and economists such as Treitschke, Roscher and Knies and the more modern but equally naive irrationalism of Meinecke: 'human action will thus be characterised by the fact that it will be inexplicable, therefore incomprehensible'. He struggles against romantic personalism where 'man shares the privilege of personality with the animal'. However, this vibrant, often spiritual polemic against vulgar irrationalism does not remove the irrational kernel of Weber's world view and method.

He aspires to save the scientific rigour of sociology in expurgating all value judgements from the latter, but this is *in order to re-introduce irrationalism more effectively in practical decisions and political choice* (let us remember his sociological considerations on the rationality of the Economy and the irrationality of Religion). Here is how he sums up his position:

If anything, we realise again today that something can be sacred not only in spite of its not being beautiful, *but rather because and in so far as* it is not beautiful. . . . And since, Nietzsche, we realise that something can be beautiful, not only in spite of the aspect in which it is not good, but rather in that very aspect. You will find this expressed earlier in the *Fleurs du Mal*, as Baudelaire named his volume of poems. It is commonplace to observe that something may be true although it is not beautiful and not holy and not good. . . . for here, too, different gods struggle with one another, now and for all time to come. . . . According to our ultimate standpoint, the one is the devil and the other the God, and the individual has to decide which is God for him and which is the devil. And so it goes throughout all the orders of life. Many old gods ascend from their graves: they are disenchanted *and hence take the form of impersonal forces*. They strive to gain power over our lives and again *they resume their eternal struggle*. . . . (Weber 1922c, pp. 546 and seq.; trans: Gerth and Mills 1948 pp. 147–9.) This irrationality thus seeks refuge in men's practical decisions *and in their most essential practice, that most decisive for history*. In fact, Weber makes social life a given, outside and beyond history.

However, he presents certain traits as specific to the contemporary epoch. In particular he stresses the necessity to abstain from all public

life. It is the isolated individual conscience that judges without appeal when called upon to decide, Weber saw this *annulling of the possibility of any objective instance* serving to reinforce the irrationality of choice. The latter is imposed on us, for him, by the 'disenchantment' of our world, the modern reign of 'prose' where the struggling gods have lost their mythical figuration, their plasticity and their sensuous character and appear to us under the form of abstract antinomies.

The Weberian vision of the world issues into the 'religious atheism' of the imperialist epoch. The absence of the gods, the 'disappearance of the sacred' is presented as the real physiognomy of our times, which it is necessary to accept as an historical inevitability but which invokes in us an infinite melancholia and profound nostalgia for the good times when there was a 'science of the true, good and beautiful', when there were 'sacred' things. There is less romanticism in Weber than in the majority of the 'religious atheists' who are his contemporaries, however, it is with as much saliency that the *absence of historical perspectives* appears in him as the foundation of 'religious atheism'. As always he proceeds with more prudence than those who will be his successors. He is much more anxious than them to maintain his relations with scientific objectivity. This is why, with him, there is no absence of *a priori* perspectives, he affirms this only *in the present* which indicates his intellectual honesty.

The actual realisation of what was suitable for Germany in his view would alter nothing in his judgement of social reality. The democratisation of his country is only in his eyes a '*technical*' measure *permitting imperialism to function more effectively*, in alignment with the Western Democracies. However, as he sees very clearly, the latter are also submitted to the process of 'disenchantment'. This is why when he observes them he sees only darkness everywhere. He describes this general situation in a very moving way. The cardinal virtue of the scientist is 'simple intellectual honesty'. However, he adds:

Integrity, however, compels us to state that for the many who today tarry for new prophets and saviours, the situation is the same as for the Jew in the period of exile 'He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return come.' The people to whom this was said had enquired and for more than two millennia, and we are shaken when we realise its fate. From this we want to draw the lesson that nothing is gained by yearning and tarrying alone and we shall act differently. We shall set to work and meet the 'demands of the day,' in human relations as well as in our vocation. (Weber 1922c, p. 555; trans. Gerth and Mills 1948, p. 156).

Here it appears that Weber pushed the absence of perspectives far beyond Dilthey and even Simmel. The nihilism of the existentialist

philosophers finds here a direct point of insertion (see Jaspers). Weber makes *the passage between Neo-Kantianism and existentialism for the first time*. It is not by chance that Jaspers saw in him a philosopher of the new type. Weber had driven irrationalism from methodology and the analysis of particular facts in order to make it . . . *the metaphysical foundations* of his world-view with a radicalism of which there had been no previous example in Germany. This expulsion of irrationalism from the methodology is only relative, if he has elegantly reduced all sociology to 'rational' types, his type of 'non-traditional, charismatic' leader is absolutely irrational. Weber expressed with great clarity the general tendencies of the more cultured (and more liberal) German intellectuals in the imperialist period. His confused conception (pathos) of 'pure science' (free of all references to 'values') leads only to the solid and definitive installation of irrationalism in social philosophy. It can be clearly seen through his case, how the better among the German intellectuals are deprived of all means of making a frontal assault on the generalised irrationalism which constituted fascism.

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