The Peculiar Political Logic of Max Weber

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University

2009

Submitted by

Liam Stone BA (Hons)

Sociology Programme
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Murdoch University
Perth, Western Australia
DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

________________
Liam Stone
Abstract

This thesis argues that Max Weber’s peculiar political logic consists of three modes of thought: a civil philosophy of politics and nationalism; a reduction of politics to sovereign power; and a control of society’s role in politics. To demonstrate these modes of thought, the thesis compares Weber with the civil philosopher Christian Thomasius and finds strong similarities in their respective uses of political and civil ethics. It compares Weber with the legal philosopher Carl Schmitt and argues that both thinkers based their politics on a sovereign power that is at once exceptional, extra-legal, extra-moral and extra-sociological.

The thesis appeals to contemporary context by summarising and dividing the Weber scholarship into three categories. In doing so, it avoids the trend in secondary literature of conflating Weber’s political logic with his social theory and sociological methodology, and instead argues that his political logic must be assessed in terms of its own merits as well as the ideas of other political thinkers.

The thesis encourages more assessment of Weber’s political logic along these lines by summarising Weber’s various responses to the ‘social question’. Ultimately, the thesis provides a new understanding of Weber’s analysis of the social and its role in politics.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................... i
Table of Contents........................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements......................................................................................... iv
Publications ...................................................................................................... v

Introduction ................................................................................................. 1
   The superficial treatment of Weber’s political logic .................. 3
   Weber’s peculiar distinction between the political and the social ................... 7

Chapter 1: Civil and Political Duty: Christian Thomasius’s Ethics of Decorum and Max Weber’s Ethics of Responsibility .......... 16
   The Civil Philosophy and Decorum of Christian Thomasius ...................... 21
   The Capacity to Think Clearly and the Responsible Politics of Max Weber ................................................. 33
   Summary .................................................................................................. 45

Chapter 2: Towards the Political: Parliamentary Process and Democracy in the work of Max Weber and Carl Schmitt ........... 48
   Bureaucracy, parliament, democracy and political authority in the work of Weber ........................................... 51
   Parliament, democracy, politics and pluralism in the work of Schmitt .......................................................... 63
   Summary .................................................................................................. 73

Chapter 3: Three Categories of Uses of Weber: An Introduction to the Weber Scholarship ................................................................. 75
   Theory: the legacy of classical sociology .............................................. 77
   The theoretical uses of Weber ............................................................... 79
   The contextual uses of Weber .............................................................. 89
   The emancipative uses of Weber ......................................................... 97
   Summary ................................................................................................ 110
Chapter 4: Max Weber and the ‘Social Question’: the social as a sphere of scholarly enquiry and its limitations as a source of political authority .................................................................113
   Studying the social using legal and economic concepts .................................................................116
   Delineating the social as a moral idea .....................120
   Studying the social comparatively: revealing the false sense of democracy in Germany ......................129
   Studying the moral ideas behind society ...................135
   Summary ......................................................................141

Conclusion ........................................................................143
   The uniqueness of Weber’s political logic summarised ..................................................................148

References ........................................................................151
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Gary Wickham for his unflagging support and belief in my ability to successfully complete this thesis. Gary, I know you aren’t fond of compliments, but you deserve at least one for providing me with much inspiration through your sober, dedicated and unique pursuit of knowledge, your inimitable charisma and your cheeky, engaging and sometimes forceful approach to colleagues and friends. It has been an absolute pleasure to work with you. Thanks mate and cheers!

I would like to thank the most beautiful, enigmatic and admirable woman in the world, my future wife, Jodie Hine, for her encouragement and support during the last stages of completing this thesis. Jodie you bring so much light into my world. I hope that this thesis gives something back to you for all the difficult times you have gone through supporting me and encouraging me during the final stages. I love you, gorgeous.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their support and advice on various sections of this thesis, particularly Barbara Evers, Rachel Kitchens, Jo Goodie, Kirsten Harley, Eric Whittle, Andy Stebbins and Angela Leahy.

To my good friend Dr. Steeg Hoeksema for his support and understanding of the stress of it all.

Finally, Mum, Dad, Ray and Nan, I love you all very much.
Publications

The following papers relevant to the research have been published or presented at conferences:
