

# **The Peculiar Political Logic of Max Weber**

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Submitted by

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## 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.

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Liam Stone

## **Abstract**

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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.

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## **Publications**

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

Stone, L. 2008. 'Civil and National Duty: Christian Thomasius's Ethics of *Decorum* and Max Weber's Ethics of Conviction and Responsibility' in S. Eliaeson and R. Kalleberg (eds.), *Academics as Public Intellectuals*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 49-64.

Stone, L. 2005. 'Max Weber's Cameralistic Social Policy' presented at the 37<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology in Stockholm, Sweden (June 2005).

## **Introduction**

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This thesis identifies and delineates three different types of political logic in the writings of Max Weber (1864-1920): a civil philosophy of political ethics and national duty; an advocacy of sovereign power based upon pragmatic use of liberal political mechanisms; and a restriction of the social as a topic of scholarly enquiry, including a delimitation of society as a source of political authority. By comparing Weber's writings on academic freedom with the civil philosophy of the early-modern political and social reformer, Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), the thesis provides an alternative reading of Weber, revealing similar logic in their respective uses of ethics to train political leaders and civil servants, and their respective uses of these same ethics to invoke allegiance to the nation-state and to the absolute-state. Further, by comparing Weber's writings on bureaucracy, parliamentarism and democracy with Carl Schmitt's (1888-1985) legal and political philosophy, the thesis establishes that Weber, before Schmitt, acknowledged that the sources of political authority were exceptional, extra-legal, extra-moral and extra-sociological. The thesis argues that, like his use of democracy and parliamentarism, Weber's nationalism was ultimately pragmatic in the sense that he understood the nation to be the stronghold of political pluralism, sovereign power, and difference and opposition. These were the values that national politics represented for Weber.

Following the identification and delineation of Weber's civil philosophy, sovereignty and pragmatism, the thesis summarises and divides the Weber



scholarship into three categories. It draws these categories from the disciplines and histories of sociology, political economy and political theory, and argues that these uses have, until now, tended to maintain that Weber promoted democracy as a goal in itself or as a means to the ends of individual autonomy. By placing these uses in their own historical context, the thesis contends that they are based upon an inadequate methodological understanding of Weber as, primarily, a methodological individualist who attempted to conceptualise all spheres of life, including political reality, from the viewpoint of social or economic action. To reveal a different side of Weber, one that has not been adequately captured in the Weber scholarship to date, the thesis inspects some of Weber's alternative conceptualisations of the social, particularly those found in his substantive encounters with the 'social question'. The 'alternative Weber' that is uncovered through this process is a political thinker committed to: the pursuit of historical accuracy; the substantive restriction of society to the sociological role of moral idea (and the subsequent methodological delineation of society as a topic of scholarly enquiry); and the delimitation of society as a source of political authority. Reading Weber's restriction of the social in this way forbids the overuse of his sociological and political-economic method as a source for explaining his political logic, which offers a more adequate reading of his political judgements, including his rejection of the liberal-social mechanisms of civil society and democracy as sources of political authority and ordering.

## **The superficial treatment of Weber's political logic**

There are a number of factors contributing to the secondary literature's superficial treatment of Weber's political logic. The first of these is the tendency to label Weber as either a social or political theorist. The second, which has developed in response to the inadequacies of the theoretical approach, is the method of focusing on Weber's social and political concept-formation and its intellectual context. This approach was first applied to Weber by Wolfgang Mommsen in *Max Weber and German Politics 1890-1920* (1984) and Wilhelm Hennis in *Max Weber: Essays in Reconstruction* (1988). This approach contributes to one understanding of Weber's political thought but this understanding is restricted to the concept formation and intellectual context contemporary to Weber. Unfortunately, this also limits our explanations of the peculiar political logic that he developed in his writings on political ethics, national duty, parliamentarism and democracy to this contemporary context.

Stephen Turner and Regis Factor argue that Weber was 'an enemy of the project of social theory itself' because he '*repudiated* social theory in its contemporary form' rejecting 'all the standard explanatory devices of nineteenth-century social theory' including 'the idea of collectivities, social forces, human nature and a common human *telos*' (Turner and Factor 1994: 1; 10). Turner and Factor contend that Weber built his concepts not from a contemporary tradition of social theory but from traditional ideas in the philosophy of law. They (Turner and Factor 1994: 8) argue that 'neither in the case of "social theory" nor for the bulk of his

“methodology” has the direct link to a well-developed tradition of social thought been established’. The lack of a contextual basis for Weber’s so-called social theory and his methodology has, according to Turner and Factor, permitted the secondary literature to construct all kinds of erroneous interpretations and sometimes deliberate misinterpretations of Weber’s social thought. Turner and Factor offer their solution in the form of a contextual approach that provides the conceptual context of Weber’s ideas; specifically, their approach establishes that Weber developed his social thought from the ‘well-developed intellectual tradition’ of the ‘philosophy of law’ (Turner and Factor 1994: 8). Turner and Factor argue that Weber drew heavily from Rudolf Jhering’s philosophy of law in formulating his famous concept of the state as the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence. The novelty of Weber’s approach, according to Turner and Factor, was that he took the concepts and precepts of one discipline and applied them with revolutionary results to another.

The contextual approach of Turner and Factor (1994) is the contemporary standard for Weber scholars, but it is not without its pitfalls. Restricting our readings of Weber to the historical context of the debates, their central tenets and concepts contemporary to Weber, this approach forgoes opportunities to draw similarities between Weber’s political logic and the logic of others developed in different milieus. For instance, restricting our understanding of Weber’s concept of the modern state to the philosophy of law during the late-nineteenth century prevents our appreciation of Weber’s portrayal of the role of the state as a peculiar

form of logic to be considered in its own right. Applications of both the theoretical and contextual methods to understanding Weber, performed in the discipline of political theory, have led to similar inadequate results.

Today political theorists speak of the key themes of political theory as being the analysis of power, particularly the legitimacy and authority of different forms of government and the relationship between politics and social life (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* 2003). Using these key themes, Bellamy et al (2004) portray both social and political aspects of Weber's work as contributions to political theory. Bellamy et al argue that political theory in Germany at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries was largely concerned with 'the nation-state, national identity, the nature of democracy, liberalism, and the rule of law' (Bellamy et al 2004: 395). In Bellamy et al's account, German political theorists discussed these themes within the context of a general pessimism about the culture of modernity. These theorists, especially before the unification of Germany, were divided by their allegiance to either Roman or Greek ideas about politics (Bellamy et al 2004: 396). The Roman political theorists 'emphasised politics in terms of relations of power', whereas the Greek political theorists emphasised politics 'as a component of a cultural ideal' (Bellamy et al 2004: 396). Following this polarisation, political theorists in Germany tended to either identify politics with 'the state, power, and the apparatus of ruling (*Herrschaft* and *Macht*)' or with the 'aim of creating or presupposing an ideal polity of universal reason and culture' (Bellamy et al 2004:

396). According to Bellamy et al, Weber subscribed to the Roman idea of politics as relations of power, but he combined this idea with some of the themes developed by Georg Jellinek (1851-1911) – who argued that the state and society were no longer distinct entities – replacing the state with the ‘association’ as his ‘central political concept’ (Bellamy et al 2004: 396). Using the Roman association as his central political concept, Weber portrayed the state as ‘no more or less than an association of the rule of human beings over human beings’ (Bellamy et al 2004: 397).

In placing Weber’s analysis of associations at the centre of their political theory, Bellamy et al offer two possible readings of Weber, both of which relativise his conceptualisation of social and political relations. The first reading portrays Weber as essentially a social theorist who conceptualised all political relations fundamentally as social relations; where social relations are defined as struggles amongst individuals or associations for a variety of forms of power including cultural, economic, and political. The second reading portrays Weber as essentially a political thinker who conceptualised all relations – social, economic and political – as, fundamentally, political relations of power. The problem with both of these readings is that they relativise Weber’s portrayal of social and political relations as relations of power, which diminishes any distinction that he may have provided between these types of relations and, worse still, weakens his concept of power.

In avoiding the theoretical approach to Weber, Peter Lassman has pointed out the ‘theme of the distinctiveness of the political domain’ and the ‘autonomy of the political domain’ in the work of Weber (Lassman 2000: 88; 98). Lassman distils this theme solely from Weber’s conceptual work in *Economy and Society* (1968). He argues that what makes the political domain distinct from the social, in Weber’s basic concepts in *Economy and Society* (1968), is its use of, and threat of, force (in Lassman 2000: 88). The basic concepts in *Economy and Society* (1968) suggest that both social and political associations are based upon the power and struggle of rule among men. In these concepts, the ultimate political association – the modern state – contains no moral supremacy to rule over other associations, only the power of force to govern all associations existing within its territories. Lassman’s reading does much to highlight Weber’s distinction between social and political relations, and associations, but it is not representative of Weber’s entire political thought. Restricted to the basic concepts, Lassman’s reading does little to reveal the political that emerges in Weber’s writings on the ethics of political leadership and his writings on parliamentarism and democracy, and it also does little to reveal Weber’s attempts to delineate the social as a topic of scholarly enquiry and his attempts to delimit society as a source of moral authority.

### **Weber’s peculiar distinction between the political and the social**

The thesis avoids the relativisation of Weber’s political and social thought. Instead, it treats Weber’s political logic as a peculiar form of logic to be

considered in its own right. In so doing, it attempts to draw a distinction between Weber's political, social and economic thought. These three areas of thought regularly come into contact with one another in the work of Weber, and the overlaps must be acknowledged, but the three areas also operate in their own unique ways, each of which can be understood as having its own peculiar logic. The thesis uses both contextual and long-range comparative approaches to draw out three peculiarities in Weber's political logic: one, a civil philosophy; two, a concept of politics as national relations of difference and opposition; and three, a delineation of society as a moral idea devoid of political authority. In the case of misinterpreted aspects of Weber's work, such as his ethics of leadership and nationalism, this style of long-range comparison is very useful.

There is nothing novel in applying the long-range comparative approach to understanding Weber's ethics. Wolfgang Schluchter, for instance, argues that, whilst Weber based his ethics of leadership on Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) 'formal ethic of conviction', the results Weber achieved differed greatly from those of Kant (1996: 86). According to Schluchter, Kant developed the formal ethic of conviction as an ethic for the individual to live harmoniously with other human beings through a commitment to reason (Schluchter 1996: 89). In Kant's ethic, the commitment to reason requires the individual to uncover the universal laws of living harmoniously through metaphysical reasoning or philosophy. In taking this approach, Kant removed the need for empirical knowledge of context-specific cultural values and replaced it with the conviction of universal duty.

According to Schluchter, Weber, by contrast ‘reopened several of the channels of sanction closed by Kant’ by removing Kant’s universal duty and reintroducing requirements for empirical knowledge of cultural values. The element of empirical understanding in Weber’s ethic allows the individual to use cultural values as a guide to responsible conduct. In highlighting differences between Weber and Kant, Schluchter draws attention to an important element of Weber’s ethics: the need for practical knowledge of contemporary values. But Schluchter gives Weber’s political ethic the social or cultural role of emancipating individuals from the value pluralism of modernity, which fails to account for Weber’s political logic and his restriction of leadership ethics to specific political functions and outcomes.

Chapter one of the thesis combines a contextual approach with a long-range comparative approach to provide a new appreciation of the logic of Weber’s ethics of political leadership and nationalism. It compares Weber’s ethics with the civil philosophy of Christian Thomasius by placing the works of both thinkers in their respective political and intellectual contexts before drawing out similarities in the logic of those works. Combining these approaches, chapter one provides a new reading of Weber’s ethics of political leadership and nationalism as a civil philosophy of cultivating responsible political leaders through historical-experiential learning.



Thomasius developed his civil philosophy in response to the carnage of the European confessional conflicts of the seventeenth century (Hunter, 2001: 89). At a time when his contemporaries were busy promoting religious unification and confessional states as solutions to the violence, Thomasius was urging princes to consider a more neutral approach to governance. Civil philosophy, for Thomasius, promoted historical awareness, practical learning and a distinction between moral and civil domains. To accompany his distinction between moral and civil domains, Thomasius promoted separate roles for individuals: one role for private morality and one for civil service. For Thomasius, the civil domain can only be understood through experience and not through any metaphysical speculation. His ethics of *decorum* give instructions on how the individual can learn about the civil domain through practical experience.

Chapter one argues that Weber approached the political domain with a civil philosophy similar to that of Thomasius. Like Thomasius's ethics, Weber's ethics of leadership and his nationalism portray the political as extra-moral and they also similarly call for a practical-experiential understanding of the political. The main difference between Thomasius and Weber's ethics is that whilst Thomasius concentrates on the civil and moral domains, Weber adds the political domain and gives it priority over both the civil and the moral.

Chapter two extends the reading of Weber's peculiar political logic into his arguments about the political mechanisms of authority, democracy, parliament

and nationalism. To achieve this, it provides a comparison between Weber's and Carl Schmitt's ideas about these mechanisms. By looking at the similarities and differences between the two, this chapter offers a uniquely political reading of Weber's ideas and, in the process, avoids relativising the social and the political in his work. The chapter argues that Schmitt appropriated Weber's political logic to form his explicit concept of politics. By showing this, the chapter stresses that Weber's political domain is not the functional domain of a battle with the paradox of modernity, or of an opposition to bureaucracy alone, as some Weber scholars would have us believe, but rather a domain of the specific ends of political pluralism, difference, opposition and sovereign power.

In his *Concept of the Political* (1996), Schmitt delineated the domain of politics as friend-enemy relations and he demarcated the nation and its international relations as the prime arena in which these friend-enemy relations occurred. Schmitt's originality stems from his reworking Weber's implicit logic into his own political thought. Schmitt reworked Weber's ideas into his own friend-enemy distinction and he emphasised Weber's demarcation of the nation as the true domain of politics. Weber did not explicitly state that the nation was the foremost domain of politics. However, the manner in which he ruled out any emancipative role for the nation, and the manner in which he pragmatically restricted domestic-political mechanisms such as democracy and parliament to the role of educating citizens about the importance of the nation and providing a degree of participation that would allow all citizens to realise the importance of nationalism, suggests that he

did, before Schmitt, perceive the nation to be primarily an entity of friend-enemy relations. In thinking of the nation as the primary political domain in this way, Weber distinguished the political domain from the civil domain, going beyond Thomasius's civil philosophy. While we can appreciate this distinction through examining Weber's concepts of political authority and bureaucracy, we cannot appreciate the role of practical-experiential learning in Weber's demarcation of the political if we restrict our reading to these concepts. The comparison of Weber and Schmitt highlights how Weber used domestic political mechanisms, such as democracy, as mechanisms of practical-experiential learning to give citizens an opportunity to discover both the importance of the nation and its role as the primary political domain.

The tendency of the Weber scholarship to treat Weber's peculiar political logic superficially is in part due to its persistence with inadequate readings of his concepts of the social and the political. In these readings, the social subsumes the political and reduces the themes of conflict, struggle and power to teleological or emancipative roles in the work of Weber. Chapter three introduces three categories of uses of Weber: theoretical, contextual and emancipative. It argues that each category promotes the abovementioned inadequate readings of Weber's distinction between social and political domains.

Peter Baehr has divided Weber scholars into two 'modalities': historicists who are 'concerned with exegesis' and presentists who are concerned with 'reworking

Weber's ideas for the modern conjuncture' (Baehr 2008: 189). The historicists focus on historical reconstructions of Weber's milieu and ways in which they can understand his work within the context of the intellectual, social and political problems of his time. The presentists use contemporary theory to focus only on those aspects of Weber's work that have something relevant to say about contemporary intellectual, social and political issues. Chapter three adds a third category to Baehr's schema of Weber scholarship: the 'emancipative uses of Weber'. The chapter uses the term emancipative to refer to those uses of Weber that combine both theoretical and contextual approaches.

Chapter three argues that the theoretical uses made by Talcott Parsons (1968 [1937]), Reinhard Bendix (1966) and Anthony Giddens (1971) turn Weber's concepts of social action into structural-functionalist, status-group conflict and action-modes conflict respectively. These three theories of society each contain the universal laws of social action. The contextual uses made by Mommsen (1984 [1959]) and Hennis (2000 [1988]) remove any pretence to a theoretical Weber, with Mommsen introducing the political-economic analysis of power as self-realisation, albeit in a liberal-nationalist and imperialist conviction, and Hennis the central theme of the personality of modern man and the peculiar problems of life in the modern world. The chapter contends that despite their historical accuracy and detail, both of the contextual uses unintentionally make Weber's work primarily relevant to social concerns. The emancipative uses made by Lepenies (1988), Goldman (1992), Kim (2004), Jenkins (2000), Nafissi (2000),

Palonen (1999; 2004) and Schroeder (2001) combine the contextual with their own theoretical concerns to exaggerate the theme of social problems in the work of Weber. These authors stress themes such as the aesthetic role of power, the existential philosophy of power, democracy and 'soulcraft' (Kim 2004: 189), and the liberal concern with freedom of choice and individual autonomy, or democracy and individuality, as being central to both Weber's social and political thought.

To begin the process of correcting the balance in favour of a non-theoretical-emancipative reading of Weber, and to reinforce the reading of Weber's peculiar political logic provided in chapter one and two, chapter four adds a non-individualist reading of Weber's themes of society and voluntary associational life. It examines these themes in light of debates that surrounded the social question in Germany. The social question refers to the public and intellectual debates on the problems and potential solutions associated with economic downturn, immigration and industrialisation occurring after Germany's unification in 1871. This chapter argues that Weber's ongoing involvement in the social question throughout his career reveals the following agendas: the conceptual restriction of the social to voluntary associations; the delimitation of society to the role of moral idea; the restriction of democratic and civil society to North America and England; and a commitment to study the role of the press in promoting moral ideas about society. The chapter contends that Weber's involvement in debates about the social question was not the product of his

concern with the material and psychological well-being of the working classes (although this cannot be ruled out as a concern of his), but rather it was the result of his concern with the actual separation of the social and the political. Reading Weber's concept of the social in this way shows that he did not place much stock in individual autonomy as a social phenomenon. Reading Weber in this way also emphasises his restriction of the social as both a topic of scholarly enquiry and as a source of political authority.

## **Chapter 1: Civil and Political Duty: Christian Thomasius's Ethics of Decorum and Max Weber's Ethics of Responsibility**

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This chapter introduces the civil philosophy of Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), examines his legacy and discusses its implications for our understanding of Max Weber (1864-1920). Thomasius was a great reformer of German intellectual life in the early modern period. He contributed to a general move away from theology-based philosophies toward secular, practical sciences of economics and agriculture (Lindenfeld 1997: 21). He contributed to the heterodox Lutheran Pietist movement with fellow students August Hermann Francke and Paul Anton at the University of Leipzig (Ahnert 2003: 267). He made philosophy and science more accessible by publishing the first journal to appear in the vernacular, the *Monatsgespräche*, in 1688. Thomasius and Weber were kindred spirits. Although separated by some 200 years, both intellectuals engaged in lifelong projects of public scholarship. Thomasius helped to forge the secular public domains necessary for practical science and civil service whilst Weber contributed substantively to the disciplines Thomasius helped to create, such as political economy, as well as contributing to ongoing public debates about the importance of public scholarship and national politics. Where Thomasius strove for public scholarship in the service of the absolute state, Weber strove for public scholarship in the service of the nation-state. Both intellectuals harnessed a strong historical awareness, using historical examples to justify their ethical standards.

The public spheres that Thomasius helped to create, to free the absolute state from the tyranny of the church, were eventually turned against this type of state in the struggle for social autonomy (Habermas 1989: 25). In the hands of the ‘reason’ scholar, these spheres became the bastion of reason. Public intellectuals began demanding the same standards of rational discourse from the state as they did from themselves. Immanuel Kant made the greatest contribution to this movement with his publication of *The Critique of Pure Reason* (2003) demanding that all men, subjects and rulers alike, lead their lives according to the universal duty of pure reason. In effect, he helped establish ‘bourgeois public spheres’ with authority over the state. This chapter argues that Weber, as a public intellectual, attempted to redress this balance back towards that which Thomasius achieved, in favour of the authority of the nation-state.

Thomasius lived in an era where confessional conflict crippled the economic and cultural development of the Germanic states. Many scholars promoted religious unification and control of the states by unified religion as a solution but Thomasius, following his mentor Samuel von Pufendorf (1632-94), thought that history had proven the shortcomings of the confessional state. Through his civil philosophy, Thomasius taught complete subservience to the neutral state. In fact, he developed a means of training civil servants in the art of subservience. Following Pufendorf, Thomasius taught the art of compartmentalising life into separate personae. Each persona corresponded to a particular office with specific



duties. This, Thomasius thought, would keep religious life separate from the duties of civil service.

Weber's encounter was similar in structure, but it occurred at the other end of the enlightenment and thus the institutions and actors were quite different. He lived in an era where entrepreneurs and political parties exercised great influence on bureaucracy and the system of higher education in Germany. He complained that this was no better than the systems of rule under the confessional states of the late Middle Ages (Weber in Josephson 2004: 213). His solution was to teach the capacity for sober thought and an ethic of political responsibility to political economists and future political leaders.

Contemporary debates about the role of academics as public intellectuals, particularly sociologists as public intellectuals, all but neglect the type of state-based, nation-focused intellectual represented here by Thomasius and Weber (the exceptions include Pels 1991, 1998, 2001; Wagner 1994; Wickham 2007). For instance, Michael Burawoy's 2004 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association presents four types of sociology: policy, public, professional and critical (Burawoy 2005: 266-69), but not once does Burawoy mention the need for a state-based sociology. The reason for this is that Burawoy envisages sociology as a public discipline with the one theme of defending 'civil society' against the 'encroachment of markets and states' (Burawoy 2005: 259). Burawoy claims that the viewpoints of sociology are predominantly shaped by

public issues and extra-state associations, such as the ‘civil rights movement’, which informs a ‘sociologist's understanding of politics’, or the ‘feminist movement’, which gives ‘new direction to so many spheres of sociology’ (Burawoy 2005: 275). In the debate that followed Burawoy’s address, published in a series of articles in the *British Journal of Sociology*, not one author pays credence to the type of sociological research oriented towards the interests of the nation-state. Lauder, Brown and Halsey (2004: 3), for instance, speak of sociology ‘holding governments to account’. Johnson (2004: 24) discusses the role of social scientists in making governments aware of social problems such as child poverty. Wiles (2004: 34), despite concerns for the practical abilities of sociology, also calls for the discipline to help ‘citizens so that they can effectively hold government accountable’. Davies (2004: 447) also discusses sociology ‘challenging government policies and holding them to account’. There are only two authors who deviate, subtly, from the theme of holding governments to account: Hammersley (2004) and Kalleberg (2005). Hammersley (2004: 444) notes the inescapability of ‘political orientation’, but he stops short of suggesting any alternative orientations. Kalleberg (2005: 388) widens the lexicon to include scope for political orientations of the state through his ‘sociology as teaching’, but his emphasis is in favour of the kind of public spheres envisaged by Kant; that is, social spheres with autonomy from the state. This chapter brings a new dimension to this open debate by re-examining some of the hitherto neglected, more nation-centred philosophies and sociological research.

The first section of this chapter discusses Thomasius's civil philosophy and its wider context in the early enlightenment. This section focuses on his instructional essay, 'How a Young Man is to be Educated' (Thomasius 1994) ('Wie ein junger Mensch zu informieren sei' – originally published in 1689). Through this essay, Thomasius sought to instruct students of jurisprudence and future statesmen in the art of *decorum*. The second section discusses Weber's academic standards and political ethics, and their context in Imperial Germany. This section focuses on his essays 'The Power of the State and the Dignity of the Academic Calling in Imperial Germany' (Weber 1973), and 'The Profession and Vocation of Politics' (Weber 1994) – the essay more famously known as 'Politics as a Vocation'. With these essays, Weber sought to teach the 'sobriety of judgment' required for political responsibility to both academics in the humanities and students of political economy (in Hennis 2000: 117-124). It is important to note that there is no reason to believe that Weber was familiar with the work of Thomasius. As a student of the legal historian Otto von Gierke (1841-1921), Weber may have encountered Thomasius in a superficial light, but there is no reason to believe that Weber was familiar with Thomasius's ethics of *decorum*; Weber certainly makes no reference to Thomasius in any of his published works. Nevertheless, this chapter contends that both Thomasius and Weber, in their capacity as public intellectuals, encouraged similar styles of practical learning in their respective attempts to cultivate civil and political personalities.

## **The Civil Philosophy and Decorum of Christian Thomasius**

One of the concerns of Christian Thomasius was legitimating the early-modern secular state and, as a scholar living in Saxony and Prussia in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, he was very much involved in the German enlightenment. Like other scholars of the period, much of what he had to say involved deliberation over the relationship between human reason and will, and the need for authoritarian forms of governance. His ethics are therefore best understood within the context of the political, religious and intellectual conflicts of the early modern period in Germany and its neighbouring states.

The ongoing resistance of the German princes to central forms of authority, on the one hand, and the development of competing Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist confessions in the sixteenth century, on the other, led to a century and a half of particularly destructive wars, which reached their most devastating impact during the Thirty Years War (Holborn 1964: 3-5). These confessional conflicts prompted new legal reforms, such as the 1555 Peace Treaty of Augsburg and the 1648 Peace Treaty of Westphalia, which represented attempts to separate the powers of the church and the state to achieve peace and order (Hunter 2001: 13). During this period a number of intellectuals rejected established philosophical traditions in search of new ethical doctrines that were capable of teaching peaceful civil conduct according to its own merits: Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) rejected Athenian philosophies in favour of Roman Stoicism, and Samuel von Pufendorf and Christian Thomasius embraced Epicureanism in place of Aristotelianism

(Oestreich 1982: 5-6; Hunter, Grunert, and Ahnert 2007). In a more practical sense, the English common-law defender and practitioner, Sir Matthew Hale (1609-76), epitomised the type of conduct that these intellectuals aimed for (Saunders 1997: 87). One common theme unites the ethical doctrines of these intellectuals: the conduct of life in separate spheres or personae, which amounts to the separation of civil conduct – the duties of office – from the pursuit of salvation and moral perfection.

Lipsius, the Dutch philologist, provided an early, albeit primitive, ethics of conducting one's life in separate personae. He witnessed the carnage of religious conflict in the form of the Dutch revolt against Spain and, becoming frustrated with Greek philosophy for its lack of practicality, he turned to the Roman Stoicism of Seneca and Epictetus to provide a secular ethics of conduct for Holland's civil servants, merchants and military officers (Oestreich 1982: 5-9, 14-15, and 31). The idea, according to Lipsius, was to unite the conflicting confessions using an ethic of active yet undogmatic faith, one suited to both Catholicism and Calvinism, and a type of rational impartiality. He achieved this through a combination of humanistic piety and the reason of Roman Stoicism, giving birth to early modern neo-Stoicism, which he presented in the ethical triad 'steadfastness, patience and firmness (*constantia, patientia* and *firmitas*)' (Oestreich 1975: 182). According to this triad, modern man must be 'secure in the doctrines of the Roman Stoa', meaning he must be patient and endure the 'ills of the world'. When combined with humanist piety, the Stoic ethic of steadfastness

gave Lipsius the perfect philosophy for separating inner values from the external world, which, in practice, provided a method for leading an active religious life without engaging in dogmatic confessional conflict (Oestreich 1982: 33).

David Saunders suggests that Lipsius's ethics were designed to give men 'a capacity to set aside their religious beliefs in order to perform official functions for the state' (Saunders 1997: 87). According to Saunders, although there are no direct links between the two figures, the lifestyle led by the English common-law defender Sir Matthew Hale provides a perfect example of the performance of the 'official functions for the state' in the neo-Stoic manner (Saunders 1997: 41). Above all else, Hale 'was a great practitioner of the common law'; he demonstrated a similar neo-Stoic ethic to that of Lipsius through his own civil conduct. A brief recount of Hale's life-conduct may help our understanding of the neo-Stoic ethic and the separation of life into different personae. The common-law way of life was, for Hale, 'a specific mode of practical reason' learnt not through abstract philosophies but through 'habituation' (Saunders 1997: 42). Through 'habituation', Hale successfully separated 'his religious convictions from his legal work' (Saunders 1997: 55). He was a Puritan in an era of confessional conflict and civil war but his practical neo-Stoic reasoning afforded him an "'extreme centrist" disposition' in civic affairs, evinced by neither sanction nor denunciation of religious dogma. Through a 'code of judicial conduct' for his civil life and a code of Puritanism for his personal life, Hale managed to prevent his religious convictions from encroaching on his civil duties.

Pufendorf and Thomasius were perhaps the first of the early modern thinkers to turn the idea of conducting one's life in separate personae into an explicit ethical doctrine. A brief word about the intellectual context of their work in general may help to clarify the aims of their ethics. It is not uncommon for historians of moral philosophy, particularly those representatives of 'post-Kantian dialectical historiography', such as Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann and Werner Schneiders, to view Pufendorf and Thomasius as early modern contributors to the liberal enlightenment project of free will, reason and self-legislation (Hunter 2001: 16-19; Hunter 2005: 114). By this view, Pufendorf and Thomasius are placed in the same category as Leibniz (1646-1716) and Wolff (1679-1754), as predecessors to Kant (1724-1804), who features as the great intellectual figure who makes the ultimate breakthrough with his discovery of 'the transcendental conditions of subjectivity'. But according to Ian Hunter, these intellectuals belong to two rival groups of enlightenment thought: Leibniz, Wolff and Kant form the '*Schulmetaphysik*' or 'university metaphysics' camp, and Pufendorf and Thomasius the 'civil philosophy' camp (2001: 33-34).

Rather than 'throwing off' their 'theological past', 'the university metaphysicians' drew upon a tradition of 'Protestant *Schulmetaphysik*' containing a neoscholastic universal theory of reason. In their view, this theory of reason was capable, with modifications, of guiding man towards moral perfection in the eyes of God (Hunter 2001: 33). The university metaphysicians of course had both political and

academic interests in retaining a Protestant theology in their metaphysics. In an era of confessional conflict and absolutism, and during a time when the church was gradually being excluded from the politics of government, the university metaphysicians wished to reunite or resacralise the church and the state to ensure that Lutheran religious morals continued to exert an influence on the government of the German people.

Drawing on a “spiritualist” theology’, the civil philosophers sought to protect state politics from religion and religion from state politics by designating separate spheres of life (*personae*): one for the civil duties of government and one for the personal, spiritual pursuit of salvation (Hunter, 2001: 89). The civil philosophers in part wished to reflect ‘the profound transformation in the relations between civil and religious governance that had already been achieved in the domain of politics and jurisprudence’ – exemplified by the Treaty of Westphalia – in the university curricula of politics (Hunter 2001: 88-89; Lindenfeld 1997: 18-20). They also wished to strengthen and prolong the peace gained by the Westphalian treaties by preventing monarchs from engaging in confessional conflict. For this they extended their doctrines of separate civil and religious *personae* to the office of the prince himself (Hunter 2001: 90). Of particular importance to this chapter is the manner in which the civil philosophers’ ethical doctrines provided a capacity for cultivating separate *personae*.



Thomasius was not unlike Lipsius in that both thinkers approached the problem of civil conduct in a deconfessionalised state via a triad of ethical categories: Lipsius with ‘steadfastness, patience and firmness’ (Oestreich 1975: 182) and Thomasius with ‘*honestum, decorum, and justum*’ (Barnard 1971: 236-39). The main difference is that whilst Lipsius treated his ethic of steadfastness as a neo-Stoic type of inner-distance, Thomasius preferred to treat his ethic of *decorum*, or ‘Galanterie’ (1994: 257), as a practical-experiential type of ‘rational accountability (rechenschaft)’ (Barnard 1988: 593). Thomasius believed this to be a unique contribution to ethics: in the essay ‘How a Young Man is to be Educated’, he stated:

...until now, to the extent of my knowledge, *decorum* has not yet been studied by anyone in formal disciplines or arts, man has either neglected to separate it or has commonly mixed it with *justum* and *honestum* (Thomasius 1994: 257-58) [my translation].

The failure of systems of knowledge to recognise an ethic of *decorum* was, for Thomasius, symptomatic of the general failure of philosophy to conceptualise the extra-legal and extra-moral characteristics of the civil sphere or political order. He addressed this failure in a pedagogical sense with two complimentary ethics, or ‘two ethics of mutuality’: an ethic of ‘intrinsic’ values and an ethic of ‘instrumentality’ (Barnard 1988: 582). With these ethics, Thomasius sought to

distinguish ‘the ordering principle of political life from that of religious life’ (Barnard 1988: 582), or as Hunter puts it, to develop a ‘dual strategy... of spiritualising religion by secularising the visible church, and desacralising the state by establishing its religious neutrality’ (Hunter 2001: 258). Focusing on the instrumental ethic, Thomasius realised that by distinguishing or developing distinct spheres of conduct, the order of political life was neither based on law nor on morals but on a voluntarist ethic of a pluralistic civil order: a civil code of conduct requiring citizens to maintain ‘rational accountability (*Rechenschaft*)’ or responsibility for acknowledging the plurality of truths and values existing in the absolute state (Barnard 1988: 583). To conceptualise and promote this civil ethic of accountability and maintain civil order, Thomasius proposed the ethic of *decorum*: ‘a middle term between positive law and moral law, between the enforceable *justum* and the unenforceable *honestum*, connoting a property that would generate a measure of self-imposed civility’ (Barnard 1988: 584).

Thomasius’s doctrine of *decorum* is undoubtedly a product of his heterodox arguments with the orthodox Lutheran church and its theologians. Thomasius supported the Pietist reform movement at the University of Leipzig and was outspoken against the theological faculty there (Ahnert 2003: 267). Along with other Pietists, he was eventually banned from Leipzig for promoting a practical form of faith that did not please the University’s orthodox Lutheran theologians. He moved from Saxony to Brandenburg where he was welcomed by the state, mainly because of his support for the Elector’s struggle against the orthodox

Lutheran church. There Thomasius promoted the idea that faith and piety should be based on love of God alone, not on any particular doctrinal beliefs, because love of God is innate for all human beings. The orthodox Lutheran church, on the other hand, promoted a consensus on doctrine (Ahnert 2003: 268). Thomasius believed that the only reason for the orthodox Lutheran church to promote a doctrinal consensus was so that the ‘clergy could define those who did not agree to its doctrines as heretics... and persecute these dissenters or have them persecuted by the secular authority’ (Ahnert 2003: 270). In other words, for Thomasius, the orthodox Lutherans promoted doctrinal consensus to maintain control over their followers. The orthodox Lutherans could achieve their doctrinal consensus through a combination of *justum* and *honestum* – law and morality – alone. In fact, as Ahnert argues, the orthodox Lutherans relied on the threat of persecution to compel their followers to adhere to their universal morals. Any public associations that posed a threat to the morality of the church could, on the basis of a state which followed *justum* and *honestum* alone, be persecuted. *Decorum* gave subjects of the state an ethical basis to respect secular rule as well as engage in practical piety. It could also, theoretically, allow religious as well as secular public associations to exist harmoniously under the rule of an absolute state. All that was required, in Thomasius’s view, was a degree of self restraint.

Self restraint, or ‘self-imposed civility’, in Thomasius’s words, required a type of practical reason that combined exercises in ‘inner-tranquillity’, ‘public discourse’ and political mediation (Barnard 1971: 233; Barnard 1988: 586). Reason in this

sense was not to be confused with self-legislation or acceding to moral truth through metaphysical speculation; Thomasius discounted the use of abstract knowledge (*Gelehrtheit*) as a credible means of understanding the order of political life. Instead, he championed practical knowledge (*Gelahrtheit*) as not only a means of understanding the political life-order but also as a means of engaging in public discourse and appreciating the mediating role of politics.

By contemporary standards Thomasius's process of practical learning seems archaic. The first step in the process is to achieve an inner-tranquillity not unlike Lipsius's neo-Stoic steadfastness. Although alike, the main difference is that Lipsius's neo-Stoicism allows the individual to disengage from passionate political involvement, whereas Thomasius's inner-tranquillity actively encourages engagement in political discourse in a restrained manner. The idea, according to Hunter, is to remain calm in 'threatening public circumstances' so as to penetrate the 'dissimulations of others' who are involved in public discourse (2001: 215). Barnard points out that Thomasius's ethical exercise in political understanding is a reciprocal process whereby the political actor not only attempts to understand these dissimulations but also gives account of his own intentions and takes responsibility for his actions, thus ensuring 'accountability (*Rechenschaft*)' (1988: 587).

Once he had created his system of *decorum*, Thomasius sought to promote and teach it through the University of Halle. To achieve this, he had to determine who

met the selection criteria for his new ethic. For this reason, he limited the use of his practical learning to a select minority of citizens who had the predisposition for *decorum* (Hunter 2005: 119-120). Thomasius used a typology of foolishness to determine whether a citizen had this predisposition. With this typology, he distinguished three degrees of foolishness: ‘the greatest fools, who allow their inner passions to break out in civil disruption’; the middle fools, who manage to achieve inner-tranquillity but do not take the next step towards rational accountability, and; the least foolish, who manage to both calm their inner passions and develop rational accountability. Thomasius felt that the greatest fools would be suitably governed by *justum* and middle fools by *honestum*, whereas the least foolish could achieve *decorum* through a special form of practical learning.

It is quite possible that Thomasius was thinking of his Pietist friend August Hermann Francke’s (1663-1727) orphanage, the *Paedagogium*, when deciding who had the ability to practise *decorum* and who did not. Francke established the *Paedagogium* to teach orphans ‘true piety’, the ‘necessary sciences’, and ‘good manners’ (Ahnert 2006: 17). Thomasius was sceptical of the ability to teach true piety to the orphans. He felt that, at best, it would teach them a superficial piety, which would lead to an ‘avarice and ambition’ that would degrade the *decorum* of secular life. He hoped that his new ethics would be practised by students of jurisprudence and cameral sciences, and by future court officials. In a normative-sociological sense, he limited his ethics to the civil ordering of court life.

As a court official for King Frederick William I – the Elector of Brandenburg – Simon Peter Gasser (1676-1745) was the perfect example of a cameralist who practised the art of *decorum*. The King appointed Gasser to the first chair of cameralism at the University of Halle, in the year of Thomasius' death in 1727 (Tribe 1988: 38, 42, and 1995: 8-9). Like Pufendorf and Thomasius, Gasser was an opponent of Aristotelianism and scholasticism. As an admirer of Thomasius, Gasser was more than capable of separating the sciences of economics and agriculture from the moral philosophy of theology. Following the King's policies and the civil philosophy of Thomasius, Gasser introduced specialised scientific training to improve the financial management of agriculture in the state of Brandenburg-Prussia (Small 1909: 178-79). His was a purely practical science in the service of the state.

The ethical teachings of Thomasius were also directed towards the university metaphysicians. Whilst Leibniz, Wolff and, later, Kant intended to use transcendental reason to develop a unified moral community based on consensus, Thomasius aimed to use practical reason to prevent moral consensus within the civil order (Barnard 1988: 594).

In Thomasius's process of practical reason, moral consensus is dismissed as being detrimental to *decorum* for the main reason that it denies the pluralism of political society. If pluralism is denied, the process of political discourse is disengaged and the all-important practise of political accountability comes to an end. In

Thomasius's process, the role of the secular state is to ensure the ongoing process of accountability and *decorum*; and the citizen, through engaging in the experiential process of practical reason, or public discourse, realises the legitimacy of *decorum* and the civil sovereign state. Of course one may ask: to what degree does the recognition of sovereignty represent a consensus? The answer, according to Thomasius, is that *decorum* and the recognition of sovereignty represent a pragmatic political agreement about the instrumentality of the state in relation to specific historical contexts and not a universal consensus or teleological recognition of its eternal goodness. The context in which a political agreement about the sovereignty of the secular civil state may be reached would include, as was the case during Pufendorf's time, the Thirty Years War and the Peace of Westphalia, or in Lipsius's time, the Dutch revolt against Spain. The importance of this empirical-historical justification of a political agreement, especially for our understanding of Weber's ethics, is that it always requires ongoing reflection and renewal in the light of changing circumstances.

Contemporary sociology is too often concerned with the role of sociology as a public discipline that holds governments to account regarding social policy. This is perhaps due to its tendency to trace the philosophy of institutional roles in society back to the moral philosophy of Kant. As we have already seen, Habermas speaks of the prominent position that Kant held in the promotion of 'bourgeois public spheres' that exist to promote the universal good (1989: 25). Donald Levine also asserts that 'In transforming the field of moral philosophy Kant

introduced ideas and themes that inspired a library of seminal works of German social science' (1995: 181). According to Levine, Kant inspired Weber, who was preoccupied with 'the constriction of individual voluntarism by the inanimate forces of capitalism and the animate mechanisms of bureaucracy' (Levine 1995: 204). In other words, according to Levine, Weber was concerned that bureaucratic rationality was taking away the individual's ability to choose between and create different meanings in life. If we follow Levine's point to its logical conclusion we must believe that Weber was also preoccupied with the public spheres responsible for guaranteeing this individual voluntarism. The chapter suggests this belief is not an accurate depiction of Weber's political logic.

### **The Capacity to Think Clearly and the Responsible Politics of Max Weber**

The context of Weber's work is somewhat different to that of Thomasius. Weber did not have to contend with the traditions of religious and scholastic natural law as powerful forces in the academic endeavour to produce knowledge. Instead, he faced the competing truth claims of value pluralism (Eliaeson 2006: 283). Much of his intellectual activity was given over to addressing the problem of value pluralism. He consistently presented the postulate 'sobriety of judgment' (Weber in Hennis 2000: 118) as a way of conducting oneself in the scientific and political life-orders of his pluralistic nation. Weber utilised the 'sobriety of judgment' in this manner in his speeches and writings on higher education reform to promote standards of academic freedom at the 1908 University Teachers' Congress in Jena



(Josephson 2004: 206). He also enlisted the sobriety of judgment in his famous speech on politics as a vocation (cited here as 'The Profession and Vocation of Politics' 1994) to teach the ethics of political leadership and nationalism to his students of political economy. He wrote this speech at the end of the Great War, at a time when some of Germany's highest statesmen had abandoned their country. General Ludendorff had, for example, failed to publicly accept responsibility for his country's defeat. Instead, he had ushered in a system of parliamentary rule, an act which, in Weber's opinion, burdened that system with the responsibility for the defeat (Mommsen 1984: 283; Weber 1988: 651-654). These writings offer an insight into Weber's political logic and they also provide a solid example of his hierarchical structure of nations governing public spheres.

Peter Josephson has provided an excellent summary of the academic context of Weber's writings on higher education reform in 'Lehrfreiheit, Lernfreiheit, Wertfreiheit: Max Weber and the University Teachers' Congress in Jena 1908' (2004). By Josephson's account, Weber developed his doctrine of value-free science in response to the particular definitions of academic freedom discussed at the 1908 University Teachers' Congress in Jena (Josephson 2004: 206).

The chairman of the congress, Karl von Amira, restricted the discussion of academic freedom to those already holding university positions because he did not want the congress to degenerate into an uncontrollable fracas. Amira declared academic freedom to mean that all holders of university positions should be

allowed by the state to conduct their research unimpeded. His reasoning was such that scientific discovery was in the best interests of the state. He even suggested that those scientists who made anti-government arguments should be allowed to continue their research because such research was potentially beneficial for society, as in the case of removing tyrants from rule (Josephson 2004: 207). Weber, along with his brother, Alfred Weber, stated that they could only accept Amira's proposals if he included the right for all candidates to apply and be considered equally for university positions (Josephson 2004: 208). In one of the daily newspapers reporting on the congress, a journalist suggested, in response to Weber, that the role of the university was to provide 'well-educated public officials' and not provide revolutionaries with the ability to disseminate socialist propaganda (Josephson 2004: 209). Subsequently, Weber was given an opportunity to publish a piece in the journal *Hochschul-Nachrichten*, where he expressed his argument to a wider academic audience that the refusal to consider candidates with radical political views for university positions could be associated with a 'comprehensive ideological standardization' (Weber in Josephson 2004: 212). As it was, academic freedom was reserved for those candidates who were willing to abstain from publicly criticising 'the established political system' (Josephson 2004: 212). According to Josephson, Weber ultimately argued that the academic freedom of his time, whereby university-appointed teachers could preach pro-government propaganda, should be restricted to prevent all academics, pro- or anti-government, from preaching to their students (Josephson 2004: 215).

This, in Weber's view, was the only way to ensure rigorous scientific standards and equal consideration of all candidates for teaching positions.

Nevertheless, Weber's desire to prevent a 'comprehensive ideological standardization' throughout the faculties of all German universities should not be mistaken for a desire to subvert the authority of the nation-state. Weber's concern with ideological standardisation was a reflection of his general concern that state governments, especially in the Prussian state, were being taken over by businessmen who held the interests of private enterprise above those of the nation.

Weber's views on academic freedom were also related to the broader context of higher education reform in Prussia. The 'Althoff system' was the system of higher education in operation during Weber's time, created by and named after the Director of the Prussian Ministry of Culture, Friedrich Althoff (1839-1908) (Backhaus 1993: 9-15). Althoff, like many other leading public intellectuals of his time, understood universities to be the largest determinant of the economic performance of a country. Consequently, he sought to 'bureaucratize' Prussian universities and make them more 'rational' and 'consistent', thereby extracting their maximum economic productivity. In fact, Althoff succeeded in homogenising the Prussian and, to some extent, the German system of higher education, gaining a 'paternalistic' control over its entire complex of institutions and running the system as a 'multidivisional firm' (Backhaus 1993: 9-15).

Through his writings on higher education, Weber argued that the ‘Althoff system’, whilst yielding a great degree of short-term benefit, was ultimately detrimental to the intellectual and long-term economic health of the German nation. He was convinced that it was the role of the university to ‘sharpen the student’s capacity to understand the actual conditions of his own exertions’; to ‘teach the capacity to think clearly’ (Weber 1973: 591) - to teach ‘sobriety of judgement’. The ‘Althoff system’, Weber stated, ‘has formed something like a cartel’ or a unified approach amongst the universities, ‘which has annulled [the] competitive relationship [that might otherwise teach sobriety of judgement]’ (Weber 1973: 596). The system, according to Weber, had also allowed the ‘new generation of businessmen’ to reintroduce the old ‘form of student life’ with its status-proving activities, such as duelling. This, he felt, had come ‘at the cost of intensive study’, which might have been beneficial to commerce and private industry in the short term, but would ‘not be a lasting advantage to [Germany in its] economic competition with the great industrial powers of the world’ (Weber 1973: 606, 608).

These comments on the ‘Althoff system’ of higher education in Germany, originally published between 1908 and 1911, give us a relatively early indication of Weber’s ethical-pedagogical intentions, to cultivate the ‘capacity to think clearly’ not only as a scientific postulate of objectivity – the secondary literature has all but exhausted this reading – but also as a political ethic. This suggests that Weber was willing to commit science to a particular cause, but what exactly was

that cause? Weber was convinced that the German ‘university teacher’ had certain ‘civil rights and duties’ to refrain from ‘imparting a political tone to university teaching’ or from adopting ‘a point of view which was “acceptable in the highest circles” of church and state’ (1973: 589). Instead of adopting and teaching ultimate values, the university teacher had a duty to ‘make his chair into a forum where the understanding of ultimate standpoints... is fostered’ (Weber 1973: 592). The consequences of not following this rule were evident during Weber's time:

The fact that... [theology] and the related apologetic and practical specialties which can only be taught with dogmatic commitment are now taught by state-appointed university teachers whose academic freedom is thereby limited, instead of being taught by institutions established by free religious communities, does not flow from any necessity of the religious life, but rather solely from the desires of governmental bodies concerned with the regulation of cultural and religious affairs (Weber 1973: 593).

Weber certainly made no secret of the fact that he abhorred the selective teaching of extra-scientific curricula at state universities. Time and time again he reiterated the ‘sobriety of judgment’ or ‘value freedom’ as a standard for all scientific teaching and research and he remained consistent in these views even when teaching his own form of political ethics.

Between the time Weber engaged in the debate on academic freedom and the time he delivered his 1918 lecture on the vocation of politics, the political circumstances had changed dramatically in Germany. Karl Ludwig-Ay has already suggested that Weber's famous statement of the value of national honour, made in the 1918 lecture, must be read in the context of the Great War (Ay 2004: 222, 232-33). This chapter argues that this context can be applied to the entire lecture. During the war, Weber wrote a number of articles for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on the issue of parliamentarisation. In these articles, he protested, amongst other things, the lack of a 'political education' capable of producing future leaders and statesmen in Germany (Weber in Mommsen 1984: 87). After the war, Germany faced some rapid changes in political organisation, including the hasty introduction of parliamentary government and the virtually simultaneous declaration of defeat and responsibility for the war (Mommsen 1984: 283). Weber's involvement in the Peace Treaty of Versailles and his perception of the consequences of these changes led him to speak once again of a political leadership crisis in Germany. The crisis, as perceived by Weber, came to a head when General Ludendorff hastily introduced the new system of parliamentary democracy during the peace negotiations with the allies (Mommsen 1984: 283). In the 1919 written version of the lecture on politics as a vocation, Weber elaborated his ethics of conviction and responsibility, arguing that politicians must combine a conviction for their values and policies – charisma – with responsibility for the outcomes of implementing those policies. It is quite possible

that in this lecture Weber modelled the ideal type of the conviction politician on Ludendorff; as far as Weber was concerned, Ludendorff was incapable of accepting responsibility for his part in the defeat and, even worse, he was unable to see the damage he had done to the German nation (Mommsen 1984: 324-25; Weber 1988: 651-654).

In both lecture and published form, 'Politics as a Vocation' engaged students of political economy and academic readers in general with a discussion of the ethics of leadership. In the published version, Weber argued that the politician who acts according to the "ethic of principled conviction" is forever seeking moral justification for his political actions (Weber 1994: 359, 361). But, he warned his audience, the political leader who acts according to the ethic of conviction 'suddenly turns into a chiliastic prophet', preaching "love against force" one minute' and issuing 'a call to force the next', in the name of achieving an eternal peace on earth. By way of contrast with the ethic of conviction, Weber stated that the politician who acts according to the "ethic of responsibility" is constantly aware of the 'diabolical powers that lurk in all violence' and accepts responsibility for the '(foreseeable) *consequences*' of using these 'diabolical powers' (Weber 1994: 360, 366). Weber united the two ethics in a curious manner. He suggested that conviction is important if not vital to all political activity because it gives the politician his charismatic edge, but the politician who acts according to conviction alone is bound to seesaw in a kind of passive-aggressive manner between perceived moral duties and political violence. The

true leader, Weber stated, requires a ‘trained ability to look at the realities of life with an unsparing gaze, to bear these realities and be a match for them inwardly’ (Weber 1994: 367). In short, Weber required the political leader to develop a sober ethic of responsibility.

Following Sung Ho Kim’s (2004) reading of Weber’s ethics as a secular kind of salvation for the modern soul in a pluralistic society, one must assume that, between the time Weber engaged in the debate on academic freedom and the time he published his ethics of conviction and responsibility, he drastically altered his perspective on value freedom. If we are to follow Kim’s argument, then we must assume that Weber betrayed his own 1908-11 postulate of value freedom. As we have seen, much had changed between 1911 and 1918. The endurance of the Great War might have been enough to alter Weber’s perspective. But, if we restrict our interpretation of the ethics of conviction and responsibility to the circumstances outlined above, namely the Great War and the crisis of leadership, we can conclude that Weber remained faithful to his own definition of value freedom and that, therefore, Kim may be mistaken. Weber intended his ethics as basic training for students of political economy, the wider academic community and future statesmen, to provide them with a greater understanding of the prerequisites of political leadership. As noted by Mommsen, Weber did not develop his lecture into ‘normative-ethics’ for universal usage (Mommsen 1984: 442). As further evidence of Weber’s intended application, it is worth noting that Weber reiterated his 1908-11 views on academic freedom in his 1919 essay,



‘Science as a Vocation’ (1948) – the essay Weber presented to compliment ‘Politics as a Vocation’.

This brings us only a fraction closer to understanding how Weber thought he could teach an ethics of leadership without promoting ultimate values. For this we must turn to his scientific understanding of the political order and its relation to the order of voluntary associations. According to Kim, Weber thought of the political order as a sphere of ‘contestation, competition, struggle, and... conflict’ between ‘voluntary associations’ (Kim 2004: 186). Kim argues that, for Weber, the political conflict of voluntary associations could form a civil society by uniting disciplined individuals with a ‘common purpose’. By Kim’s account, Weber conceptualised the political life-order as a united public and private realm, where civil duty was bound up with the interests of free communities. But this reading does not seem consistent with Weber’s message in his writings on higher education reform and the ‘Althoff system’; Weber’s attack on those ‘governmental bodies’ who were seeking to ‘regulate cultural and religious affairs’ instead indicates that Weber thought of voluntary associations not as groups born of moral consensus but rather as groups with a reciprocal civil duty. In ‘The Profession and Vocation of Politics’, Weber was quite explicit about the sphere of politics:

Anyone seeking to save his own soul and the souls of others  
does not take the path of politics in order to reach his goal, for

politics has quite different tasks, namely those which can only be achieved by force... Machiavelli had such situations in mind when, in a beautiful passage in his Florentine histories (if my memory does not deceive me), he has one of his heroes praise those citizens who placed the greatness of their native city above the salvation of their souls (Weber 1994: 366).

Weber's thinking was far from ambiguous. As far as he was concerned, the political sphere was defined by the application of force and was not suited to the salvation of souls. What, then, are we to make of Weber's reference to the Machiavelli passage emphasising the importance of civil duties over personal values? Kim may read this as a moral consensus arrived at via the higher purpose of self discovery and assertion, but it is essentially a type of national duty drawn from the practical experience of free associational life, something not unlike Christian Thomasius's process of public interaction and appreciation of the civil duty of *decorum*. Kim's idea is perhaps closer to Kant's principle of duty than to Weber's principle of ethical responsibility. In his *Political Writings* (1991) Kant derived his concept of duty from his theory of a universal morality, which he deduced from pure reason. He argued that,

duty is nothing more than a limitation of the will within a universal legislation which was made possible by an initially accepted maxim. The object or aim of the will can be of any

kind whatsoever (even including happiness). But in this case we completely abstract from whatever end is adopted. Thus so far as the principle of morality is concerned, the doctrine of the highest good as the ultimate end of a will which is determined by this doctrine and which conforms to its laws can be bypassed and set aside as incidental. And it will emerge from what follows that the actual controversy is not in fact concerned with this at all, but only with morality in general (Kant 1991: 65-66).

Further:

The maxim of absolute obedience to a categorically binding law of the free will (i.e. of duty), without reference to any ulterior end, is essentially different (i.e. different in kind) from the maxim of pursuing, as a motive for a certain way of acting, the end which nature itself has imposed upon us and which is generally known as happiness. For the first maxim is good in itself, but the second is not. The second may, if it conflicts with duty, be thoroughly evil (Kant 1991: 67).

As Hunter argues, Kant insisted that individuals treat duty as an ‘obscure feeling of the unconditional laws governing individuals’, which was diametrically opposed to the propositions of civil philosophers like Pufendorf, who thought of

duty as the ‘imposition of obligations by the civil authority’ (Hunter 2001: 292). The contrast between Kant and Thomasius is even starker: as Hochstrasser suggests, for Thomasius, ‘All ethical norms ultimately derive from a close study of human psychology on the individual and social planes rather than from metaphysical absolutes and scriptural evidence’ (Hochstrasser 2000: 134). The most important difference between Kant and the civil philosophers is that the civil philosophers sought to ground their ethical norms on historical and positive-legal evidence rather than on appeals to metaphysical speculation. Weber is as one with the civil philosophers on this matter.

There is a practical/experiential element to Weber’s understanding of politics that is difficult to reconcile with any moral philosophy. Weber did not accede to the value of the nation through metaphysical speculation or discovery of the value of soul-craft. In its greatest time of need, the German nation had called upon its citizens to fulfil their civil and political duties. Ludendorff, the man of pure conviction, could not answer the call. For Weber, this was a matter of urgency; the nation required responsible leaders and he saw it as his duty to help provide them.

## **Summary**

This chapter has highlighted certain elective affinities between Thomasius’s ethic of *decorum* and Weber’s ethics of responsibility. Thomasius thought that the civil sphere was ordered in an extra-legal and extra-moral fashion. In his view, it

originated in voluntary association and was ordered by an initial recognition of pluralism, which led to restrained public interaction and mutual accountability. Through mutual accountability, politically mature citizens could offer an account of their intentions and seek to understand the intentions and actions of others. Through this process of practical reason, politically mature citizens had the ability to develop a sense of civil duty and come to realise, through involvement in specific political events, the pragmatic instrumentality of the sovereign state as a mechanism for achieving certain political ends. As mentioned earlier, the court official and cameralist, Simon Peter Gasser, was a model example of a public intellectual whose allegiance was with the secular state. From what we can gather from the political ethics of conviction and responsibility, Weber took a similar view, except that he began with what he considered to be the historically evident instrumentality of the nation-state, its use of force being its main distinguishing feature. Thus, Thomasius began with the problem of conceptualising the unique order of secular civil life whilst Weber began with the problem of the immaturity of conviction-politicians who developed moral guilt for their extra-moral conduct. Weber's ethical solution, sobriety of judgment and political responsibility, contained elements of Stoicism combined with rational accountability.

This chapter has drawn attention to two public intellectuals who championed alternatives to the universally-authoritative public spheres of the kind championed by Kant and Levine. Through historical awareness and political engagement, both

Thomasius and Weber became supporters of the political interests of the Elector of Brandenburg and the German nation-state, respectively.

## **Chapter 2: Towards the Political: Parliamentary Process and Democracy in the work of Max Weber and Carl Schmitt**

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Over the past two decades a number of Weber scholars have portrayed Weber as a liberal theorist with an ultimate interest in the emancipation of modern individuals from the disenchantment of rationalisation and bureaucracy. One of the first of these portrayals was Harvey Goldman's *Politics, Death and the Devil: Self and Power in Max Weber and Thomas Mann* (1992), which, through associating Weber with the German tradition of *Bildung*, or self-cultivation, twists Weber's conception of power into a liberal theory of politics as an aesthetic pursuit of meaning in everyday life. Since Goldman's work, a number of similar portrayals have emerged including: Kari Palonen's *Max Weber's Reconceptualisation of Freedom* (1999) and *Max Weber, Parliamentarism and the Rhetorical Culture of Politics* (2004), and; Tamsen Shaw's *Max Weber on Democracy: Can the People Have Political Power in Modern States?* (2008). Palonen (1999 and 2004) and Shaw (2008) both argue that Weber attempted to provide a modern concept of liberty and the freedom from bureaucracy to act meaningfully in everyday life. The most striking feature of all three portrayals is the manner in which they each stress the social function of power in the work of Weber; they stress that the political institutions that Weber promotes, such as parliamentary process and democracy, are intended to deliver power to all citizens through the creation of meaning in everyday life and that for Weber, therefore, power is ultimately social.

In an alternative reading, with a discussion of the respective concepts of power in the work of Weber and Carl Schmitt, Stephen Turner (1989: 552-53) argues that for both thinkers the analysis of power was simply a jurisprudential question of the sources of legal authority. In Turner's reading, the fundamental question for both Weber and Schmitt was: what is the extra-legal foundation of legal authority? Formulated as a legal argument, the problem related to the tracing of the basis of laws to more fundamental laws, the basis of which were then ultimately traced to some extra-legal source. For Weber, this extra-legal source was the simple 'sociological fact' that laws 'were obeyed' (Turner 1989: 552). Turner argues that Weber extended this reasoning into his concept of political power, distinguishing between political and other forms of association by arguing that an association was political and had power over other associations, if it had a 'territorial monopoly on the legitimate use of violence' (Turner 1989: 553). Schmitt, according to Turner, took Weber's definition of power to its logical conclusion by locating legal authority in one specific law and its extra-legal foundations:

the legal device of the exception, the declaration of a state of emergency or siege involving suspension of laws, rights and normal legal processes. The striking fact about declarations of this kind, for Schmitt, was that they could not themselves be subject to law: the law presupposes normal conditions; sovereign power is revealed in the power to decide what is



normal and thus when the law is to be suspended. This power, Schmitt stressed, was necessarily personal: some individual had to be designated who personally made these decisions (Turner 1989: 552).

This chapter compares the respective arguments of Weber and Schmitt on parliamentary process, democracy and political authority. By comparing their arguments, it reveals that they differed significantly in their respective judgments of democracy and parliamentary process. On the one hand, Weber seems at first sight to have been a supporter of democracy and was certainly a supporter of parliamentarism. Schmitt, on the other hand, had no qualms in dismissing both mechanisms as irrelevant and impotent facades. However, by comparing their respective views on democracy and political authority, this chapter argues that Weber, like Schmitt, strove to preserve political or sovereign power. This chapter argues that Weber's promotion of democracy and parliamentary process was purely pragmatic in the sense that he did not see these political institutions as inherently ideal or capable of delivering the liberal freedom they promised to deliver. Instead, for Weber, these political institutions were techniques for establishing sovereign power, promoting nationalism and protecting the future of the German nation. The comparison of Weber and Schmitt's implicit and explicit views on pluralism also allows this chapter to argue that the German nation was not the ultimate interest for Weber but rather that the nation was the main arena for genuine political action or sovereign power. Thus, the same can be said of

Weber as can be said of Schmitt: he remained true to the political things themselves such as political action and sovereign power and not to what they could protect or provide to the individual or the social world.

### **Bureaucracy, parliament, democracy and political authority in the work of Weber**

Weber's sociology of bureaucracy was part of a general, pessimistic sociology of modernity. In this sociology, Weber saw modernity as a process of disenchantment and rationalisation (Jenkins 2000: 12). As western cultures became disenchanted with religious and mystical explanations of the world, and as they became less accepting of the truth and guidance of natural law, they sought rational explanations of the phenomena they encountered. In Weber's pessimistic sociology modernity delivered the popularity of science including the practicable explanations of reality that it offered in the analysis of cause and effect. Through the analysis of cause and effect, science offered something that religion could not: the ability to solve practical problems and get the job done – a much more appealing knowledge for the day-to-day lives of a farm labourer, factory worker or businessman than the divine wisdom of scripture. However, when the moral guidance of religion and natural law was replaced with the practical guidance of science, the hierarchy of values offered by religion and natural law was lost. Science, in Weber's account, did not claim the ability to determine which practical knowledge was more important; it may have provided the ability to save lives, but it did not judge whether or when the saving of lives

was inappropriate (Weber 1948: 144). For Weber, this predicament was the indicator of the onset of modernity's 'value-polytheism' (Eliaeson 2006: 283), also known as value-pluralism, and its ramifications could be seen throughout every sphere of life: economic, social and political.

In his account of the impact of rationalisation and value-polytheism on political authority, Weber noted that rationalisation undermined political authority. For Weber, this was an unintended consequence of rationalisation. The replacement of universal morals with value-polytheism left no authority to order associations hierarchically other than that of true political authority, but, ironically, the process of rationalisation and its attempts to maintain value-polytheism, especially that of bureaucracy, unintentionally limited the possibilities of true political authority by undermining the value-based legitimacy of that authority.

Palonen (2004) would have us believe that the most dismaying aspect of this paradox for Weber was its reduction of liberty and personal freedom. According to Palonen, Weber sought a solution to the paradox of rationalisation and bureaucratisation in the parliamentary process of arguing for and against. Furthermore, Palonen argues that Weber's commitment to parliamentarism was the most important feature of his concept of politics. Whilst many of Weber's German contemporaries expressed hostility to the idea of 'politics by talking', Weber actively embraced it: 'It was precisely this rhetorical culture of speaking for and against... seen as the crux of the British parliamentary tradition, that was

so commonly despised in Wilhelmine politics, and it was this that Weber defended' (Palonen 2004: 274-77).

Palonen argues that in Weber's account the procedure of arguing for and against provides an avenue for individuals to create their own life-meaning in a world of bureaucratic rationality. But this argument does not pay sufficient attention to Weber's analysis of politics. Individual liberty was not a major concern of Weber's. Weber was concerned instead, as this chapter argues, with the power of political leaders and the political and economic future of the nation. In Weber's account, only political charisma could produce the type of value-based authority required for free, meaningful action. In Weber's account, free, meaningful action was reserved for the minority of people with political charisma, and so his ideal of political action cannot be read as a liberal ideal of human freedom or as a solution to the paradox of rationalisation and bureaucracy.

In Weber's sociological analysis, bureaucracy appeared as a purely rational form of administration with no inherent cultural value or meaning, just a great self-perpetuating thirst for the technical improvement of administrative procedure. This technical improvement was characterised by 'precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs' (Weber 1985: 214-15). The mechanism of bureaucracy was, in Weber's account, an apparatus of administration that could easily become a permanent feature of a society for two

reasons: first, its constant improvement of technical procedures was self-perpetuating, and second, the individuals who operated in bureaucratic administrations were merely subordinate contributors to the self-perpetuating thirst for technical improvement; they were ‘single cog(s) in an ever-moving mechanism’ (Weber 1948: 228). This mechanism was so perfect from the perspective of rationality that it led Weber to conclude that ‘once it is fully established, bureaucracy is among those social structures which are the hardest to destroy’ (Weber 1948: 228-29). Weber armed himself with this sociological analysis for the task of condemning bureaucracy for its depoliticising effect, which he carried out in his political writings.

In his political writings, Weber revealed that he did not wish to ‘destroy’ bureaucracy so much as prevent it from neutralising the power of politics. In these writings, Weber referred to bureaucracy as a ‘lifeless machine’ (Weber 1994: 158). He stated that modern politicians ‘may have to submit powerlessly’ to bureaucracy especially ‘*if they consider that the ultimate and only value by which the conduct of affairs is to be decided is good administration and provision for their needs by officials* (that is “good” in the purely technical sense of rational administration) (Weber 1994: 158).

This emphasised statement from Weber need not be read as liberal guidance to emancipate all individuals from the pure rationality of bureaucracy. It can simply be read as advice to a select minority of politicians who possessed the qualities of

genuine charisma. This reading is qualified by Weber's sociological understanding of legitimacy.

Weber provided a sociological analysis of legitimacy that contrasts the authority of charisma with that of rationality. Weber was particularly interested in the authority of charisma. Its value-based legitimacy was distinct from the validity-based legitimacy of modern rational structures of domination, such as positive law and bureaucracy. As is the case with many of Weber's works, he provided an historical-sociological explanation of the roles of value-based and validity-based legitimacy. In ancient and medieval societies, legal systems were legitimated through the values of an external religious affiliation, as was the case with the reinforcement of 'juridical procedure' by the 'special deities' of the 'Eleusinian mysteries' (Weber 1948: 273-74). Through the process of rationalisation, discussed earlier in this chapter, these legal systems lost ties with the values of religion and were replaced with the 'validity of statute and functional "competence" based on rationally created rules' (Weber 1948: 79). The rationalisation of modern societies undermined the value-based legitimacy of all structures of authority except for that of the genuine charisma of the political leader. Weber argued that the survival of political charisma was attributable to the 'extraordinary and personal *gift of grace*... the absolutely personal devotion and... confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership' (Weber 1948: 79). Seen as irrational from the point of view of bureaucracy, charisma, nevertheless, through its ability to invoke confidence, retained the

authority to create the necessary difference and opposition required for political action.

Weber carried this insight into his political writings, where he argued that the role of the genuine political leader was different from that of the state administrator. He made this distinction because he felt that there were too many state officials and not enough charismatic leaders in positions of political leadership in Germany during his lifetime. The politician, Weber stated, 'is not required to demonstrate any *qualification based on training*. This fact indicates that the meaning and purpose (*Sinn*) of his position differs from that of other officials' (Weber 1994: 160). But, if a politician 'is incapable of saying to his master, whether this be a monarch or a *demos*, "Either you give me this instruction or *I* resign", he is not a leader but merely what Bismarck called a miserable "clinger" to office'. 'Ever since Bismarck's resignation, Germany', Weber stated, 'has been governed by men who were "officials" (in mentality)' (Weber 1994: 161).

Weber's challenge to political leaders to stand up to bureaucrats and mark themselves apart from mere clingers to office, was an attempt to reintroduce into the art of political leadership in Germany what Machiavelli described in *The Prince* (2005) as political innovation (Pocock 1975: 156-57). In *The Prince* (2005), Machiavelli talked about the sovereign as an innovator 'self-isolated from moral society' by his attempts to control the *fortuna*, or outcomes, of the political contingency in his midst (Pocock 1975: 157). Through pure political attempts to

control *fortuna*, such as taking territories by force, Machiavelli's prince freed himself from the judgements of moral society and relied upon his own 'exceptional and extraordinary qualities' (Pocock 1975: 161). Palonen argues that there are no connections between Weber's and Machiavelli's ideas of political contingency (Palonen 1999: 537). In Palonen's reading, Weber believed that the bureaucratisation of western societies rendered *fortuna* obsolete because all modern forms of contingency could develop only in opposition to bureaucracy. However, Palonen's argument fails to account for Weber's fundamental faith in the contingency of difference and opposition in national politics. The comparison of Weber and Schmitt at the end of this chapter reveals how much intellectual weight Weber placed on the contingency of national politics.

As mentioned earlier, Palonen's work is part of a growing school of thought within the Weber scholarship that has tended to read Weber's political writings as contributions to the liberal tradition of emancipation (other emancipative uses of Weber include Goldman 1992; Palonen 1999 and 2004; Kim 2004, and; Shaw 2008). Shaw places her reading firmly in this school of thought when she argues that Weber attacked democratisation and bureaucratisation for their restrictive effects on human freedom and meaningful action (Shaw 2008: 33-37). Shaw insists that, in Weber's view, the democratisation of western states led to 'uncontrolled rule by officials' because the only way of administering large states without imposing domination of one group over another was through bureaucracy (Shaw 2008: 37). By setting her chess board up in this way, Shaw is forced to



make a false move and argue that the ‘Caesarist election of a charismatic leader’ is the ‘best compromise that Weber can envisage’ for ‘meaningful action by leaders on behalf of the people’ (Shaw 2008: 38).

Weber’s actual compromise was much more nuanced than Shaw’s reading suggests. In a tribute to the swan song of German politics at the end of the Great War, Weber sought to grant exceptional powers to the president of the *Reich* to guarantee sovereign power in an overly bureaucratized state. However, he also pragmatically sought an avenue for democratic input into the decision-making process through parliamentarism. He had four reasons for doing this: one, he wished to provide legitimacy to the president; two, he wished to provide a guarantee of security, in the form of democratic normativism, against outright dictatorship and ongoing negligence in political decision-making; three, he wished to spread nationalism through democratic access to education for the citizens of Germany, and; four, he wanted to secure an avenue for trained political economists to have significant influence on the political decision-making process.

There is perhaps no better account of Weber’s reasons for promoting plebiscitary leadership and parliamentary democracy than his own political writing during the constitutional crisis at the end of the Great War. The Great War ended when Germany admitted defeat and committed itself to creating the infamous Weimar Republic. The task of drafting the constitution for the Republic was the ultimate test for jurists, economists and social theorists of the time because there was no

‘broad democratic tradition’ of constitutional theory to draw upon (Mommsen 1984: 332). Drafting the constitution was therefore largely a process of improvisation. It is in this process of improvisation that Weber developed his arguments for combined parliamentarism and plebiscitary leadership. He argued for a ‘working parliament... one which *continually shares in the work of government and the control of the administration*. This did not exist before the war. After the war is over, however, parliament *must* be transformed into a working parliament’ (Weber 1994: 177). At the same time, he did not want the parliament to elect the nation’s leader. Instead, he argued that the direct election of the president would endow him with greater authority than if he were nominated by the parliament and, further, greater authority for the president was the only basis for any possible countenance of the *Reichstag* if it should, again, become impotent in the hands of state officials (Mommsen 1984: 340-41).

To appreciate Weber’s concept of power, we must bear in mind that his combination of parliamentarism and plebiscitary leadership was much more than an attack on bureaucracy. His combination of parliamentarism and plebiscitary leadership also struck a balance between the institutional normativism of bureaucracy and the genuine charisma of a popularly-elected leader. To strike this balance, Weber used a working parliament as a kind of buffer. For Weber, the working parliament could control the bureaucracy of state administration and, at the same time, safeguard the nation against the detrimental effects of a dictatorship. He did this not because he thought a popularly-elected leader could

act meaningfully on behalf of the people, but because a popularly-elected leader could make exceptional decisions resulting in genuine political action.

Weber had at least three more arguments for adopting democratic processes in the Weimar Republic, which related to his interest in nationalism and the nation more generally. First, he argued that democratic education was responsible for the spread of nationalism in Germany: 'It is only natural that nationalism should be spreading amongst the masses in particular in an age that is becoming increasingly democratic in the way it provides access to the goods of national culture, the bearer of which is, after all, the language of the nation' (Weber 1994: 82). In fact, for Weber, as a consequence of democratic participation, the most unlikely constituents acceded to the aims of nationalism: 'Even the truly modest measure of actual, and precarious, participation conceded to the representatives of radical democracy in Germany during the war was sufficient to persuade them to place themselves at the service of objective (*sachlich*) national politics' (Weber 1994: 82). Democracy, in Weber's account, served to spread nationalism both through equal access to language and national culture (meaning through access to education and knowledge, and through participation in domestic politics).

Second, Weber explained how democracy could function specifically to secure the economic future of Germany:

In the area of economic policy... the maximum rationalisation of economic work, giving economic rewards to rational economies in production, in other words to “progress” in this technical-economic sense... is a question of vital importance, not only for the position of the nation in the world but simply to enable the nation to have any kind of tolerable existence at all. Thus it is a compelling political necessity for us to grant to those who are the bearers of this rational work at least that minimum level of political influence which only *equal* voting rights can give them (Weber 1994: 87).

Democratic participation, for Weber, could guarantee that economists with the skills and knowledge required to create rational economic policy would have enough influence on bureaucratic and political decision-making to improve Germany’s domestic economic management and international economic competition.

And third, Weber explained the importance of parliament as a democratic tool for promoting economic interests:

First and foremost, modern parliaments are assemblies representing the people who are *ruled* by the means of bureaucracy. It is, after all, a condition of the duration of any

rule, even the best organised, that it should enjoy a certain measure of inner assent from at least those sections of the ruled who carry weight in society. Today parliaments are the means whereby this minimum of assent is made manifest. For certain acts, the public powers are obliged to use the form of an agreement in law after prior consultation with parliament; the most important of these is the budget... the right to control the budget, the power to determine the manner in which the state procures its finances, has been parliament's decisive instrument of power (Weber 1994: 165).

A number of Weber scholars have acknowledged the prime value of the nation in Weber's work (see Scaff 1973; Mommsen 1984; and Hennis 2000), and the above quotes on nationalism, economic policy and parliament certainly do reinforce this reading. But these scholars, in my view, have not placed enough emphasis on the aspects of Weber's work that stress sovereign power as the fundamental basis for the only truly meaningful action available in a bureaucratic world – the 'confidence in revelation' and 'heroism' of political charisma (Weber 1948: 79) and the contingency of politics, in the Machiavellian sense. Weber was under no illusions about the ability of democracy to provide freedom to individuals and the same can be said of his views of the nation; he did not see the preservation of the German nation as a means of guaranteeing the future freedom of individuals. However, Weber must have had a reason to advocate the nation as a prime value

to be considered by constitutional theorists. Unfortunately, he did not clarify this reason and so, as scholars of his work, we must either extend his logic or search for intellectual context for a clarification.

The advocacy of the nation as the most important political association is a legal philosophy that found its best representation in the work of Schmitt on the friend-enemy dichotomy of politics. This work made some important points about the exclusively political role of the nation and these points have implications for the way we read Weber.

The next section of this chapter provides a reading of Schmitt's rejection of the political institutions of parliamentary democracy and democratic normativism, his philosophy of politics as friend-enemy dichotomy and his stress on sovereign power. In summarising his views, this section shows how Schmitt diverged from Weber. At the same time, this section argues that Schmitt formulated a pragmatic role for the nation as a preserver of friend-enemy politics and sovereign power, and that his formulation merely clarifies a theme implicit in Weber's scientific and political writings.

### **Parliament, democracy, politics and pluralism in the work of Schmitt**

Schmitt, like Weber, was wary of the possibilities for genuine democracy. However, unlike Weber, who found a pragmatic use for democracy, Schmitt

argued vehemently against it and against what he perceived to be its illusions. He argued that democracy had a great mythologising ability, which was detrimental to politics, and, in an intellectual engagement with parliamentary democracy, he developed his infamous concept of politics as friend-enemy relations between nations.

Schmitt's commitment to politics is unprecedented. He continuously revised his position so that he could 'remain true to the political things themselves' (Balakrishnan in Norris 2005: 892). For this reason, Schmitt appeared as an unsystematic thinker; his concepts changed and were not entirely consistent between one work and the next. Schmitt himself had an explanation for this inconsistency: "As the epoch of European statehood began its great ascendancy three hundred years ago, majestic conceptual systems arose. Today it is not possible to build like that. . . . [the] other, alternative possibility would be to leap into aphorism. As a jurist, this is impossible for me. In the dilemma between system and aphorism there remains only one way out: to keep the phenomenon in view and to probe the criteria of what are always novel questions thrown up by what are always novel, volatile situations" (cited in Balakrishsan 2000: 113-14).

Schmitt believed in 'the power of myth to mobilise the masses' (Kahn 2003: 72). The myth need not be reality. As Machiavelli suggested, the myth would 'become true by virtue of mobilising the masses' (in Kahn 2003: 72). In his analysis of democracy, Schmitt argues that the great myth of democracy is its ability to hide

the decisionism of particular interests behind the normativism of democratic ideals.

According to Cristi (1984: 524), Schmitt drew a contrast between normativism and decisionism. In this distinction, normativism appears as ‘the rule of generality and pure rationality’ whilst decisionism appears as ‘the rule of particular, concrete measures’. In Schmitt’s distinction, normativism fails to take into account the exceptional nature of politics; in its attempt to be equal and its inability to incorporate the exceptional, it presents an indifference to consequences. In this respect, capitalism is a perfect example because its technological production satisfies the market with indifference (capitalism follows the demand to produce both silk gown and poison gas). By contrast, in Schmitt’s account, decisionism accepts that ‘behind the abstract definition of laws one always finds the concrete interests of a (particular) will’.

Schmitt was critical of the mythologising techniques of mass democracy, especially those of parliamentary democracy. To launch his attack on parliamentary democracy, Schmitt provided a history of parliamentarism with a summary of contemporary theory. Schmitt pointed out that ‘numerous brochures and newspaper articles’ had demonstrated ‘the most prominent deficiencies and mistakes of the parliamentary enterprise’ (Schmitt 1985: 19). These deficiencies, according to these media, included:



the dominance of parties, their unprofessional politics of personalities, “the government of amateurs,” continuing governmental crises, the purposelessness and banality of parliamentary debate, the declining standard of parliamentary customs, the destructive methods of parliamentary obstruction, the misuse of parliamentary immunities and privileges by a radical opposition which is contemptuous of parliamentarism itself, the undignified daily order of business, [and] the poor attendance in the house (Schmitt 1985: 19).

Schmitt posed a serious question to the parliamentary system: with so many deficiencies, how could it continue to exist as a political system? In answering this question, he set out ‘to find the ultimate core of the institution of modern parliament’ (Schmitt 1985: 19). He found ‘that the systematic basis from which modern parliamentarism developed’ was ‘scarcely discernable in terms of current political and social thought’ (Schmitt 1985: 19-20). He also found that ‘the institution itself’ had ‘lost its moral and intellectual foundation and only’ remained ‘standing through sheer mechanical perseverance as an empty apparatus’ (Schmitt 1985: 20). Finding that parliament was an empty apparatus, Schmitt argued that it was necessary to look to its ‘provisional characterisations’ – ‘democracy, liberalism, individualism and rationalism’ – to find its ultimate core (Schmitt 1985: 21).

Schmitt selected democracy as the main provisional characteristic of parliamentarism. He began his definition with a statement about the ‘history of political and state theory in the nineteenth century’, which he summarised ‘with a single phrase: the triumphal march of democracy’ (Schmitt 1985: 22). In his assessment, he drew three conclusions: 1) democracy had no political form of its own; 2) democracy failed to produce equality, and; 3) democracy made individuals conform to a fictitious general will of the people.

In drawing the first of his three conclusions, Schmitt argued that democracy ‘was essentially a polemical concept’ that developed in opposition to ‘established monarchy’ (Schmitt 1985: 24). For this reason, ‘democratic convictions could be joined to and reconciled with various other political aspirations’ and democracy could become a vehicle for various political aims. Ultimately, in Schmitt’s view democracy had ultimately always been realised in conjunction with other political orders and never on its own, as a clearly defined political principal.

In the history of so-called democratic societies, ‘its most important opponent, the monarchical principle, disappeared, [and] democracy itself lost its substantive precision and shared the fate of every polemical concept’; that is, it became the bastion of other sometimes conflicting ideologies. To demonstrate this point Schmitt listed a number of alliances: ‘At first, democracy appeared in an entirely obvious alliance, even identity, with liberalism and freedom. In social democracy it joined with socialism. The success of Napoleon III and the Swiss referenda

demonstrate that it could actually be conservative and reactionary' (Schmitt 1985: 24).

It is from these arguments that Schmitt drew his first conclusion: 'If all political tendencies could make use of democracy, then this proved that it had no political content and was only an organizational form' (Schmitt 1985: 24). Democracy, for Schmitt, was like science from a Weberian perspective: it could provide a structural basis for organising life or a method for conducting life but it could not decide the ultimate aim of politics or life.

In the second of his conclusions, Schmitt argued that democracy, despite its universal claims, allowed for its subjects to be treated differently (Schmitt 1985: 25). He stated: "The various nations or social and economic groups who organise themselves "democratically" have the same subject, 'the people', only in the abstract.' Further, according to Schmitt, in reality 'the masses are sociologically and psychologically heterogeneous. A democracy can be militarist or pacifist, absolutist or liberal, centralized or decentralized, progressive or reactionary, and again different at different times without ceasing to be a democracy.'

Schmitt drew the third of his conclusions about democracy based on its overall claim to equality and universal fairness. He stated, 'It belongs to the essence of democracy that every and all decisions which are taken are only valid for those who themselves decide' (Schmitt 1985: 25). Further, according to Schmitt,

In democracy the citizen even agrees to the law that is against his own will, for the law is the General Will and, in turn, the will of the free citizen. Thus a citizen never really gives his consent to a specific content but rather *in abstracto* to the result that evolves out of the general will, and he votes only so that the votes out of which one can know this general will can be calculated. If the result deviates from the intentions of those individuals voting, then the outvoted know that they have mistaken the content of the general will (Schmitt 1985: 26).

That is, in Schmitt's account of democracy, if the will of a citizen does not comply with the general will then he or she is not really free. In order to be free, he or she must be in compliance with the general will.

In context, Schmitt used this distinction to analyse and define the problems of the Weimar constitution (Cristi 1984: 525). The constitution, with its democratic form, required more power to be reserved for the *Reichspräsident* because, in its parliamentary-democratic form, the *Reichstag* was incapable of making exceptional decisions. In his model Weber set the *Reichspräsident* up as a replacement charismatic figure for the monarch. There were, however, a number of constraints in the actual constitution that prevented Weber's *Reichspräsident*

from exercising true sovereign power. Schmitt dedicated himself to removing these constraints.

In *The Concept of the Political* (1996), Schmitt attempted to rescue politics from aesthetic and democratic ideals. Schmitt began his conceptualisation of 'the political' with a history of the modern European state, politics and society. Turning to the history of the German state, politics and society, he pointed out that during the eighteenth century it was acceptable to speak of the state and politics as one and the same, because the state had 'the monopoly on politics' and 'had not recognized society as an antithetical force' (Schmitt 1996: 22). This treatment became problematic in the nineteenth century, because, in this period, the state began to recognise the antithetical force of society and its administrators began to devise ways of controlling it. However, '[t]he equation state = politics becomes erroneous and deceptive at exactly the moment when state and society penetrate each other'. At this moment of entwine, the hitherto distinctly separate affairs of the state and society become indistinguishable and the state loses its purely political character. Instead, it takes on the interests of non-political entities such as religion and education; that is to say, its administration is directed towards controlling religion and education.

Schmitt suggested that just as there is a fundamental dichotomy in the 'realm of morality... between good and evil', the realm of 'political actions and motives can' always 'be reduced' to the distinction 'between friend and enemy' (Schmitt

1996: 26). He insisted that this distinction is unique to politics and it cannot be identified with the other distinctions such as those of morality – good and evil, and aesthetics – beautiful and ugly; ‘The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly’ (Schmitt 1996: 27). For Schmitt it was thus impossible to settle conflict between political enemies by recourse to a third party neutral umpire, or some predefined norm. Regardless of ideals, in reality the distinction between friend and enemy was undeniable. This friend-enemy distinction was particularly evident in the conflict between different nations (Schmitt 1996: 28).

For Schmitt, politics always occurred at a national level. Domestic party politics, in Schmitt’s view, was only political when it threatened the well being of the state (Schmitt 1996: 32). Only then did it involve the friend-enemy distinction. In terms of the state, politics did not always eventuate in physical conflict between friend and enemy (Schmitt 1996: 33). Instead, it might have involved preventing war, but the fact that there had always been war between nations, between friend and enemy, meant for Schmitt that international relations had always been political. Schmitt firmly believed that a world free of war, and hence the friend-enemy distinction, was a world free of politics (Schmitt 1996: 35).

In the first few years of the Third Reich, Schmitt moved away from decisionism towards an “‘institutional” conception of the state’ (Bates 2006: 416). He drew upon religious concepts to describe ‘the new state of the twentieth century’. Later, after witnessing Hitler’s erratic exercise of power and his reluctance to make

domestic policy decisions, Schmitt recognised that the state required an institutional control to limit the extent of the *Reichspräsident's* power. Schmitt united decisionism with normativism to place sovereign power into an institutional context; he proposed the use of institutional constraints on sovereign power to provide a normative context for the making of exceptional decisions (Bates 2006: 423).

Even though he united decisionism and normativism, Schmitt did not relativise the state and other associations. In Rasch's account (2000: 3), Schmitt rejected Han's Kelsen's attempts to replace state sovereignty with the rule of law and 'Gierke's... analysis of associations' because they each relativised the state and civil society, and neutralised the power of the state. Schmitt argued that the liberal relativisation of the state and neutralisation of its power was a problem because it reduced the state to a technological administration and left it open to manipulation by an overarching international order (Rasch 2000: 4). He was critical of the liberal idea of an international order because he was convinced that it promoted 'sham pluralism' and actually prevented all possibilities of politics (Rasch 2000: 15). The 'sham pluralism' of liberalism, Schmitt argued, served to unite all differences in an ultimate 'monism', but the problem as he saw it was that this unification of differences prevented the development of multiple unities of associations, or states, which thus prevented the development of political pluralism. If, as a service to humanity, liberalism was permitted to end all violent conflict, it would have to end all possibilities of politics – of difference and

opposition – and a world without difference and opposition would, Schmitt stressed, serve the ‘unfolding and global expansion of a new type of moral and economic imperialism’ (Rasch 2000: 17).

## **Summary**

Weber’s concern with the nation was ultimately related to his desire to preserve the function of politics, in the Schmittian friend-enemy sense. Before Schmitt, Weber had an ultimate interest in difference and opposition. Weber had also already recognised the impossibilities of liberal pluralism in his writings on bureaucratisation and the paradox of modernity. However, his tendency to view the paradox of modernity as an unintended consequence of rationalisation, and not as a direct result of the shortcomings of liberalism, explains his reluctance to attack liberalism’s ‘sham pluralism’. Still, by virtue of his sociologies of bureaucracy and authority, and his unique view of parliamentary democracy and plebiscitary leadership, Weber’s work is fundamentally at odds with the liberal ideals of an international consensus. Weber admitted that the only way of administering large states (including international orders) was through impersonal rule and the division of intellectual labour. He argued that the rational division of intellectual labour and bureaucratic rule made states antagonistic towards political authority because of the irrational nature of political authority. For Weber political authority was the last bastion of difference and opposition, and Weber, before Schmitt, was aware that if the possibilities of difference and opposition



were to be maintained, then the German nation must be preserved as a separate political association in a world of political pluralism.

### **Chapter 3: Three Categories of Uses of Weber: An Introduction to the Weber Scholarship**

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This chapter sketches three categories of uses of Weber: theoretical, contextual, and emancipative. In an attempt to help readers differentiate between sociological readings of Weber's methodology, the Weber scholar Sven Eliaeson speaks of 'three paradigmatic conceptions of Weber' (Eliaeson 2002: 55-96). This chapter, however, differentiates on a much broader level, going beyond sociology into historical and political-scientific readings, sometimes aligning the readings of authors who share no disciplinary basis but instead draw on common themes within Weber's work. The theoretical category refers to those sociological readings that deliberately construct Weber's work for the purpose of their own theoretical endeavours, such as Talcott Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action* (1968). In this work, Parsons portrays Weber as an idealist who formulated a sociological theory of action. The contextual category refers to the historical readings that have no particular disciplinary allegiance apart from the pursuit of historical accuracy, readings that reconstruct Weber's work in opposition to the theoretical readings. This category includes Wilhelm Hennis's *Max Weber's Central Question*, which was first published in English in 1988 as *Max Weber: Essays in Reconstruction*. Here, Hennis masterfully situates Weber's work within political-economic, jurisprudential, religious-psychological and moral-philosophical studies to highlight Weber's concern with the existence and transformation of different spheres of life and their influence on the life-conduct of individuals. The emancipative category refers to the readings that again have

no disciplinary bias but reconstruct Weber's works for the purpose of recovering a degree of contemporary applicability, usually in the form of its emancipative rather than scientific ability. This category includes Wolf Lepenies's *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* (1988). In this book, Lepenies argues that for Weber sociology protected the aesthetic spheres of life against the pervasive scientific worldview and its rationalisation of life-conduct (1988: 247).

This chapter argues that the theoretical uses of Weber contribute to a negative legacy that continues to plague Weber scholarship and its recent attempts at historically-accurate portrayals of his work. The sterilisation of Weber's work into a theory of society, by the theoretical uses, is refuted by the authors of the contextual uses as an overly one-sided approach that misses the complex backdrop to Weber's work – the emergence of complicated forms and interrelations between democracy and nationalism, the changing international economy and its influence on individual conduct. The contextual uses highlight themes in the work of Weber revolving around the influence of ideas on individual conduct and the creation of individual power in economic action. Following the contextual uses, some of the authors of the emancipative uses draw on the themes of power creation through economic action whilst simultaneously attempting to surmount or circumnavigate the complex backdrop of Weber's work by focusing on some key problems such as the absence of a tradition of liberal-democratic social thought in Germany. Using this largely Anglophone viewpoint – a symptom of the Kehrite preoccupation with explaining the rise of National

Socialism in terms of the failed German bourgeois revolution of 1848 and the consequential failure to establish a tradition of liberal and democratic thought in Germany (Blackbourn and Eley 1984: 154-55; Tribe 1989: 89) – the authors of the emancipative readings are able to formulate Weber’s central concern simply as either the replacement of *Bildung* (see Goldman 1992) – the German equivalent of Anglo/French liberal social thought – or as the development of an ethics of voluntary associational life (see Kim 2004). By this reading, Weber was not so much concerned with a static theory of society, or the influence of economic ethics on individual conduct, as he was with the actual building of a social-emancipative tradition to match those of the English and French.

### **Theory: the legacy of classical sociology**

Any outline of English Weber-scholarship has to begin with a history of Anglophone sociology from the early-twentieth century and this history is dominated by theory. Despite the problems it has produced, theory remains an indispensable part of both methodological thinking (see Turner 1996: 5) and historical thinking about social science. Particularly in the historiography of social science, due to the work of Parsons and Giddens, theory is an inescapable part of the legacy of sociology. The theme of this inescapable legacy of theory forms one of the undercurrents of this chapter.

Since the time of Parsons, histories of social theory and sociology have repeatedly portrayed Durkheim, Weber and Marx as ‘the classics’ or the ‘canon’ of

‘founding fathers’ in the history of social theory and sociology (Turner 1996: 5; Connell 1997: 1512). Pointing out the deficiencies of these histories, Stephen Turner (Turner 1996: 5) argues that social theorists such as Parsons have ‘plundered’ the classics to the benefit of their own theoretical endeavours; through the cunning use of theory they have set the agenda for social change and ideologies about social change (Turner 1996: 5). For his part in this appropriation, Parsons is responsible for the ‘purposeful misinterpretation of the classics to produce his own best results’ (Wearne in Turner 1996: 5). Following Turner, Connell questions the very idea of a ‘canon’ of ‘founding fathers’ revolving around the principal three: Marx, Durkheim and Weber (Connell 1997: 1512). Connell argues that the idea of a canon was a retrospective construction: ‘Durkheim and Weber’s academic contemporaries did not see them as giants and often disregarded Marx’ (Connell 1997: 1513). The trouble with the retro-canon, according to Connell, is that whilst Marx, Weber and, mainly, Durkheim were undoubtedly contributing to sociology on some level or another, the contemporary texts from the likes of Franklin H. Giddings, Robert E. Park, Howard Becker and Harry E. Barnes listed no particular leading figures but rather included a multitude of authors all contributing in a ‘broad... impersonal’ manner to an encyclopaedically defined discipline; that is, a discipline where all contributions were included with no favouritism (Connell 1997: 1514).

Whilst Frank Knight provided the first English translation of a Weber text in 1927, with *General Economic History* (Emmet 2006: 107), the first translation to

bring Weber to a wide English-reading audience was Parsons's version of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (PESC), first published in 1930 (Tribe 1988: 7). After PESC, Parsons went on to interpret Weber's sociology and present its theoretical meaning and purpose to American sociologists in *The Structure of Social Action* (1968), first published in 1937. This chapter argues that subsequent readings of the work of Weber are frequently forced to contend with the legacy of the theoretical reading instigated by Parsons.

### **The theoretical uses of Weber**

This section introduces three major theoretical uses of the work of Weber. The first use is Talcott Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action* (1968). In this work, Parsons emphasises the similarities between the theoretical aims of Vilfredo Pareto, Alfred Marshall, Emile Durkheim and Weber, towards a sociological theory of action, in which Pareto and Durkheim represented a positivist approach and Weber an idealist approach (Parsons 1968). The second use is Reinhard Bendix's *Max Weber: an Intellectual Biography* (1966), first published in 1959. Here Bendix treats Weber as an idealist – and individualist – theorist of society. The third and final use introduced here is Anthony Giddens's *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (1971). Giddens emphasises both the foundational roles of Marx, Durkheim and Weber in the creation of the field of sociology, with Weber as a theorist of rational society.

In the 'Preface' to *The Structure of Social Action* (1968), Parsons states his intention to trace the development of a 'single body of systematic theoretical reasoning' through the writings of Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim and Weber (Parsons 1968: xxi). Parsons boldly states that his 'convergent theoretical development' is 'a major revolution in the scientific analysis of social phenomena' (Parsons 1968: xvi). Indeed, there is a sense of irony to Parsons's project. In order to reveal the coherence between the work of these four authors – itself a questionable endeavour – Parsons has to undertake a great deal of 'laborious critical interpretation' especially where the 'actual differentiations [between their work] had already become overlain with a welter of secondary interpretations and misinterpretations' (Parsons 1968: xvii). The point here is that Parsons has to work extremely hard to reveal his theory and the separate works of the canonical theorists.

The version of Weber that emerges from this difficult excavation is empirical on one level, but ultimately theoretical. Parsons begins the recovery by informing us that Weber was 'an encyclopedic mind' with 'an omnivorous appetite for detail' encouraged by his training in the historical traditions of jurisprudence and economics (Parsons 1968: 500-02). However, Parsons continues, 'Weber's was too actively theoretical a mind to remain indefinitely immersed in detailed historical research for its own sake. His own theorizing started... from the basis of the historical tradition, though it was eventually to transcend it' (Parsons 1968: 502). When this transcending occurred, Weber's ultimate concern became the

creation of a theory ‘of the modern economic order... as a socioeconomic system’ (Parsons, 1968: 504). This process, according to Parsons, began with the thesis on the Protestant work ethic, which was of course contained in Parsons’s translation of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (PESC) (1930). Through the PESC thesis, Weber was determined to demonstrate, contra Marx, that the genesis of modern capitalism depended on more than such materialistic factors as means of production; that it also depended upon the ‘ultimate values and value attitudes’ of a ‘definite metaphysical system of ideas’ in the Protestant work ethic (Parsons, 1968: 510). Weber extended his preoccupation with the genesis of the capitalist order, so Parsons argues, to a series of comparative studies of world religions, designed to demonstrate why the development of ‘modern rational bourgeois capitalism’ was peculiar to the West (Parsons 1968: 512). For Parsons, the comparative studies, along with PESC, together prove that the economic ethics of, for example, Taoism and Hinduism, were not as favourable to the rational type of conduct associated with capitalism as was the economic ethic of Protestantism (Parsons 1968: 513). Through an excavation process, Parsons manages to uncover the ‘general system of religious typology’ essential to Weber’s primary concern of the capitalist order (Parsons 1968: 563). Parsons’s excavation seems to imply two categories of typologies within Weber’s comparative sociology. The first category includes developmental historical types, such as ‘primitive’ and ‘developed’ religion, which serve the scholarly purpose of delineating time (Parsons 1968: 564). The second includes value types, such as tradition and rationality, which serve the structural function of guiding human actions. The second category is



crucial to Parsons's own sociological project, and he claims that for Weber these types formed an actual 'structure of ideas' encompassing all 'possible attitudes' from which actors had to choose in order to form their own worldviews (Parsons 1968: 567). In other words, these types were not only functional for Weber in his study of the genesis of the capitalist order, but they were also functional for the actors whom he was studying.

The Swedish scholar Sven Eliaeson, who has pursued affinities between Weber and the value-nihilist Gunnar Myrdal in their shared belief in value-pluralism (see for instance, Eliaeson, 1990; 2006), argues that Parsons's reading of Weber was rooted in 'an American middle-class conception of stratification' (Eliaeson 2002: 64). In response to the North American social and economic problems of the 1930s, and as an alternative to Marxism, Parsons 'watered down' Weber's concepts of '*Stände* (classes)' to 'status group', and '*Herrschaft* (rule, power)' to 'authority', to fit his own 'system of value-integration' (Eliaeson 2002: 64-65). He developed this system into the theory of structural functionalism, which placed more emphasis on the study of a hierarchy of general concepts than on explanations of empirical facts (Eliaeson 2002: 73). The most obvious trait of Parsons's hierarchy of concepts is its 'top-down' structure whereby actions are guided by the shared goals of status groups and societies, and whilst some aspects of Weber's work do contain some hierarchical properties, such as his typology of value-based action, Parsons's emphasis on these aspects means that 'the Weberian anguish of polytheism is lost' (Eliaeson 2002: 74).

Reinhard Bendix makes some progress towards remedying Parsons's fragmented reading by carefully avoiding imputing any structural functionalism to Weber's work. But, although he acknowledges pluralism, Bendix's emphasis on theory leads ultimately to a reading of Weber as a theorist of society. Bendix reconstructs Weber's 'sociological work' with the explicit intention of making it 'more accessible and more thematically coherent than it is either in the original or in translation' (Bendix, 1966: xv). In Bendix's reading, the major theme of Weber's sociological work is contained within a few key research problems. Weber developed these problems to a basic form in his early works and he continued to develop them throughout his later works in a more elaborate application of conceptual frameworks. In Weber's early works on rural labour and the stock exchange, both published in the mid 1890s, Bendix finds 'the basic concepts and central problems which occupied him [Weber] for the rest of his life' (Bendix 1966: xix). The main aim of Weber's study of rural labourers in East Prussia was, according to Bendix, 'to indicate the process by which day laborers were gradually replacing the half-servile peasantry on the large landed estates of the east' (Bendix 1966: 17). Weber's study of stock exchanges revealed his interest in traditional forms of action and comparative approaches to societies (Bendix 1966: 25-27). It was not, however, until PESC that Weber explicitly formulated the 'major theme of [his] ...lifework, a specification of the interrelation of religious ideas and economic behaviour as the focus for further research' (Bendix 1966: 49-50).

According to Bendix, Weber tackled this research program by addressing three problems: first, he studied ‘the effect of major religious ideas on the secular ethic and economic behaviour of the average believer’; second, he studied ‘the effect of group formation on religious ideas’; and third, he studied ‘the determination of what was distinctive for the West by a comparison of the causes and consequences of religious beliefs in different civilizations’ (Bendix, 1966: 84). With these problems in mind, Weber developed a series of conceptual frameworks to carry out each substantive study. Thus, addressing the first problem, for example, he developed his notion of the ‘influence of ideas on behaviour’ and the ‘phenomenon of power’ into a typology of ‘authority’ and ‘legitimacy’ (Bendix 1966: 285-86). Addressing the second problem, he redeveloped the concept of ‘*Stand*’ or ‘status group’, from its earliest incarnation in his studies of rural labour to its mature form in his ‘sociology of religion’ (Bendix 1966: 87).

In Bendix’s reading, Weber failed to explicitly unite his concepts to form a general theory or worldview, but, if we search hard enough, according to Bendix, we can discover the implicit theory of society lurking in the shadows of his corpus: we find the theory that, ‘Each society is a composite of positively or negatively privileged status groups that are engaged in efforts to preserve or enhance their present “style of life” by means of social distance and exclusiveness and by the monopolization of economic opportunities’ (Bendix 1966: 259). And

further, 'The view of society as a balance between opposing forces is the reason why Weber quite explicitly rejected the attempt to interpret social structures as wholes' (Bendix 1966: 261). Bendix continues to stress that Weber was only interested in the ways in which various status groups, their ideas and their struggles with one-another, had influenced the lifestyles of individuals; Weber did not conceive of structures such as the 'state' and 'nation' as 'entities' in the real sense (Bendix 1966: 262).

Under scrutiny, Bendix's reading does not bring us any nearer to the 'true' theme of Weber's work. If no social structures existed in an empirical sense and the state, as well as society, was merely an idea that influenced the conduct of individuals, then Weber's ultimate theoretical concern with society turns out to be nothing more than a concern with a hierarchy of concepts of ideas, or a method of ordering ideas in a conceptual hierarchy of cultural values. Bendix's reading of Weber as a theorist of ideas offers little for those of us who want to understand the context of Weber's argument that political associations, due to their monopoly of the legitimate use of force, have real power over voluntary associations and individuals. The monopoly of legitimate force was a tangible political phenomenon for Weber and this has implications for the way we read his hierarchy of political and social associations.

Giddens, like Bendix, makes an attempt at a reading of the peculiar German influences on Weber's work by acknowledging the importance of early writings

and the German disciplines of legal history and historical economics. Giddens portrays these themes as central factors in the formulation of Weber's oeuvre. Giddens begins his reading by informing us that the 'main intellectual influences in which Weber's work is steeped are as predominantly German as those which shaped Durkheim's writings are French' (Giddens 1971: 119). Having made this statement, it is surprising to find that Giddens deals with these influences in such a swift manner. For example, he suggests that Weber's early works, such as his 1889 doctoral dissertation on 'the legal provisions governing medieval trading enterprise' and his 1891 *Habilitationschrift* on 'Roman land-tenure' and its connections 'with legal and political changes...', are perhaps less important for their substantive content than for what they indicate of the nascent line of Weber's intellectual development' (Giddens 1971: 120-21). They are of concern to us as sociologists, he suggests, only because they contain the 'principal focus of' his 'later work: the nature of capitalist enterprise, and the specific characteristics of western European capitalism' (Giddens 1971: 121). In other words, we should not be concerned with the manner in which Weber's early career and intellectual context shaped his later writings and we should not be concerned with how we might learn to read Weber's later works through the combined lens of these influences. Rather, we should be concerned only with how his early works complement his later writings.

With this approach in mind, Giddens summarises another of Weber's early works – the 1892 published version of a survey of rural labourers east of the Elbe – as,

fundamentally, an analysis of ‘the effects of the spread of market relations’ (Giddens 1971: 122). Through the survey, Weber demonstrated the ‘increasing commercialisation of agriculture’, ‘use of wage-labour’ and consequent ‘accentuation of economic conflict between the workers and their employers’ (Giddens 1971: 123). The theoretical ‘breakthrough’, according to Giddens, came in 1904 and 1905 when Weber made ‘his first attempt to confront certain of these issues on a general plane’, in the twin essays of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (PESC) (Giddens 1971: 124). Here Weber formulated the theoretical distinction between traditional and modern forms of capitalism, introducing the theory of rationalisation to explain the development ‘towards maximising productive efficiency’ characteristic of modern western societies (Giddens 1971: 125-27). Giddens then argues that Weber made his theoretical swansong in *Economy and Society* (E&S), where he ‘moves towards a direct concern with the establishment of uniformities of social and economic organisation: that is, towards sociology’ (Giddens 1971: 145). Through the studies of world religions, Weber conceptualised two types of rational action: formal, whereby action is organised according to the principles of calculability and efficiency, and substantive, whereby action is made calculable and efficient for the purpose of a predefined goal (Giddens 1971: 183). With these concepts, Giddens argues, Weber developed his theory that ‘western society’ is ‘founded upon an intrinsic antinomy between formal and substantive rationality which, according to Weber’s analysis, cannot be resolved’ (Giddens 1971: 184).

The portrayal that Giddens provides sterilises Weber's works into conceptual and theoretical studies. Giddens fails to mention the substantive account that Weber provided in his study of rural farm workers, of the influx of Polish migrant workers, the effects on nationalist sentiments and the change in social dynamics east of the Elbe River. Whilst Giddens's reading of the PESC is fairly accurate – it is, after all, partially a study of the form of economic conduct peculiar to the West – it nevertheless overemphasises the theoretical process of rationalisation that Weber employs. It is necessary for Giddens to overemphasise the importance of the theory of rationalisation so as to connect the red thread of theory in PESC to Weber's concepts of formal and substantive rationality outlined in E&S. The trouble with this reading is that Weber did not speak of western society or even of a theory of western society, and so if we follow Giddens's account, we are led down the same path as Bendix – to the garden of a conflict theory of ideas with no empirical soil.

If there is one thing that these different readings have in common it is this: they suggest that Weber began his career with a general interest in Western capitalism but that this interest only served as a general guide to substantive work, which ultimately, towards the end of his life, led him to some major theoretical conclusions about society. If we are to believe Parsons, Weber's theory serves the purpose of a sociological interpretational system, through which we can, by taking it to its typological conclusion, create a total system of interpretative categories giving us access to all motives for human action throughout the world. If we

follow Bendix's reading we might understand Weber's explanation of the influence of ideas on human action as almost working towards a conflict theory of society. For Giddens, the case is much the same as it is for Bendix, except in his account the conflict is portrayed as a conflict between modes of action, rather than between social groups.

The next section of this chapter introduces an altogether different set of uses, which make a concerted effort to understand Weber's work in a historical-contextual approach rather than from the perspective of reconstructing it according to its usefulness for developing a particular sociological theory some ten to fifty years *post hoc*.

### **The contextual uses of Weber**

This section introduces two major contextual uses of the work of Weber. The first is Wolfgang Mommsen's *Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920* (1984), first published in German in 1959 and translated into English in 1974. Here Mommsen emphasises the interrelation between Weber's politics and his science, providing key biographical information about Weber's political life and his political contemporaries and structures, and their influence on his thought. The second is Wilhelm Hennis's *Max Weber's Central Question* (2000), first published in English in 1988 as *Max Weber: Essays in Reconstruction*. In this book, Hennis emphasises the intellectual politics of Weber's writings, providing



key biographical information about Weber's intellectual contemporaries and their influence.

Mommsen delivers two main theses in his political and intellectual biography. In the first of his two theses, he argues that Weber was both a nationalist and an imperialist, in a particular sense, which can only be understood against the backdrop of the peculiar situation of Germany in the developing world economy, Bismarck's world policy, the peace negotiations of World War I, and the subsequent hasty formation of parliamentary democracy (Mommsen 1984: 37-138). Second, Mommsen argues that Weber's political views and his sociological theory were interrelated in the sense that his scientific work served as both a clarifier and an outlet for his political thought (Mommsen 1984: 93-419).

Mommsen argues that early in his career Weber identified himself as an 'economic nationalist' (Mommsen 1984: 37). Weber's economic nationalism, Mommsen stresses, boils down to his fundamental understanding of the role of power in the production of culture (Mommsen 1984: 47-48). For Weber, all cultural life depended on the struggle for power, which, during his time, meant the struggle for a prominent position in the world economy. During the early 1890s, Weber's involvement in the study of the agricultural economics of East Prussia led him to believe that, for the 'foreseeable future', Germany would be dependent upon international markets for its 'food supplies' (Mommsen 1984: 68). In Weber's opinion, the Reich Chancellor Bismarck's world policy, which was a

policy of appeasement designed to prevent conflict with the imperial powers of England, Russia and the United States, would fail to meet this basic need (Mommsen 1984: 138). In response, Weber adopted an imperialist stance that Germany would have to become a bigger player on the colonial stage by expanding its territories. This, according to Mommsen, was his basic political viewpoint from which all other considerations would follow.

One of Weber's great intellectual abilities, in Mommsen's reading, was his understanding of the 'salience of intellectual and psychological motives in economic life' (Mommsen 1984: 93). In line with his economic nationalism, Weber wished that the German people had developed a much stronger ascetic drive for economic activity; that they had embraced the puritan ethic in order that they might have developed the type of conduct required for strong competition in the world economy (Mommsen 1984: 94). According to Mommsen, Weber affirms this view in his comparative study of forms of German and North American voluntary associational life. In this study, Weber suggests that the form of social selection in North American church-like sects is more conducive to the basic ethic of puritan asceticism than the German form of social selection. This comparative work, in Mommsen's reading, reaffirms Weber's political nationalism.

One of the themes to emerge in Weber's political writings is that of leadership and charisma. Some key events prompted Weber's preoccupation with what he

perceived to be a leadership crisis in Germany. First of all, Bismarck left office during a crucial moment in German political development, having failed to ensure a suitable successor (Mommsen 1984: 163). This was in part due to Germany's failure to cultivate statesmen capable of true leadership. The crisis of leadership, as perceived by Weber, came to a head when the two Generals, Ludendorff and Hindenberg, hastily introduced a new system of parliamentary democracy during the peace negotiations with the allies, which 'thereby burdened the new democratic government with the terrible odium of defeat' (Mommsen 1984: 283).

It would be a mistake, in Mommsen's eyes, to separate Weber's sociological work from his political views in an attempt to distil the central theoretical tenants of his sociology or of his political thought. Reading Weber according to his own method of value-freedom and objectivity 'ought not to lead to the digging of a trench between [his] political views and his theoretical sociological works. They both spring from a common root, the postulate of the self-assertion and self-realization of the personality in an administered world, according to the principles of a rational ethic of responsibility' (Mommsen 1984: 419). Weber's notion of objectivity and value-freedom can only be fully appreciated in the context of his desire to cultivate charismatic leadership and political responsibility.

Mommsen begins the process of reintroducing value-orientations and personal convictions into the scholarly work of Weber after they were removed by the theoretical readings (outlined above). In this way, Mommsen does much to

recover Weber's political-economic thought, providing us with a portrayal of Weber's economic nationalism, parliamentarism and democratic thought. But there is one negative consequence to Mommsen's contextual reading: he focuses too heavily on the economic analysis of conduct in Weber's work and, thus, when he comes to analyse Weber's concepts of charisma and power, he ends up with an economic reading of those concepts. Instead of contextualising the uniquely political elements of power in the work of Weber, Mommsen concludes that power is 'the self-assertion and self-realization of the personality in an administered world' (Mommsen 1984: 419).

Following Mommsen, Hennis begins his reading of Weber by questioning whether it is possible, in the absence of a proper understanding and interpretation of the '*Weltanschauung* and... scientific problems' of his time, to impute to Weber the status of 'an intellectual leader of modern social science' (Hennis 2000: 3-4). To achieve this understanding and interpretation, according to Hennis, 'we must be familiar with the contemporary questions of' disciplines such as '*Nationalökonomie, Staatswissenschaft, law, history, philosophy, and... "sociology"*' (Tenbruck in Hennis 2000: 5). By following this approach, Hennis aims to ultimately recover the 'central preoccupation' and 'red thread that runs' through Weber's entire body of work (Hennis 2000: 9). To begin this project, Hennis turns to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (PE) and to the *Anticritical Last Word on the Spirit of Capitalism*, because here, Hennis argues, Weber reiterated his central theme quite consistently (Hennis 2000: 10-11).

The central theme in these essays is not the genesis of modern capitalism but the ‘rational’ or ‘methodical’ conduct of everyday life (Weber in Hennis 2000: 12-13). Weber was not concerned with the historical forces that may have generated the economic structures of capitalism – an ongoing misunderstanding within the secondary literature. Instead, he was concerned with the influence of particular ‘Protestant ascetic tendencies’ on the conduct of ‘everyday life’ (Weber in Hennis 2000: 14). Hennis’s work makes this point clearer by comparing the *PE* with another study of modern capitalism by one of Weber’s contemporaries, Werner Sombart. Sombart’s famous study, *Modern Capitalism* (1902), had already established the influence of Protestantism as a historical force in the genesis of the modern Western capitalistic order. Weber was not concerned with replicating Sombart’s study by focusing on Protestantism and its historical causation of the rise of capitalism, as an economic phenomenon in the macro sense but, rather, with “the development of that human type... which was created by the conjunction of religious and economic components” (Weber in Hennis 2000: 20).

The ‘conjunction of religious and economic components’ is perhaps the key for Hennis’s reading of Weber’s work. The components Weber had in mind were, Hennis argues, ‘life orders’; they were essentially different socio-economic modes of organising and influencing conduct (Hennis 2000: 65). The aim of Weber’s sociology was not to study these phenomena as a subject in their own right – these were the orders that figures such as Sombart had already studied. The aim, rather,

was to study these life orders as they conflicted with one another in historical developments, such as the decline of Protestantism and rise of capitalism, insofar as this conflict produced a particular type of life-conduct and ‘personality’ (Hennis 2000: 99).

The development of Weber’s central theme – the clash of life orders and the shaping of personality – is, according to Hennis, best understood within the conjunction of German academic traditions during the nineteenth century; the decline of political thought on the one hand and the emergence of alternatives on the other hand (Hennis 2000: 107). The emergence of an alternative to political thought is not, however, the emergence of a theory of society. It is the emergence of ‘cosmopolitical’ thought (Hennis 2000: 117). The discipline that Weber became involved with – the political economy of the historical school – developed particular objections to the cosmopolitanism of Adam Smith and David Ricardo for its a-historical application of general laws and concepts, and its ignorance of the historical peculiarities of time and context (Hennis 2000: 118). Weber provided a methodological solution to this clash between political and cosmopolitical economics through his use of ideal types, which he said incorporate – a ‘mathematical ideal model’ as a means of conceptualising life orders for the purpose of understanding their effect on the human condition (Hennis 2000: 121). Ultimately, it was not Weber’s intention to develop a science of cosmopolitical society or a theory of society but rather it was his intention to use these concepts as aids to his political economy, which served the purpose of

clarifying the particular problems of his day – problems that centred upon the ‘personality’ of modern man and his ‘life-conduct’.

In portraying Weber as a political economist concerned with the influence of life orders on personality and conduct, Hennis works hard with the theme developed by Mommsen – the influence of ideas on economic conduct – to reveal its method and methodological context. However, where Mommsen has concluded that power in the work of Weber was an economic-individual phenomenon, Hennis stops short of making any such conclusions, instead limiting himself to connections between Weber’s project of personality and its role as a clarifier of problems contemporary to Weber.

Unlike the theoretical readings, the contextual readings are multisided. They have replaced the theories of modern society with political agendas and economic characterisations of personality and life-conduct. In doing so, they have provided a clarification of the meaning of Weber’s concepts and their hierarchical framework. For instance, power in an economic sense seems to be a central theme, according to Mommsen, which may offer us a better appreciation of the role of *Herrschaft* in Weber’s sociological work. If we follow Mommsen’s advice, we might start to read Weber’s concept of domination in economic rather than social terms. This at least brings us one step closer to Weber’s political-economic reasoning. Further, following Hennis, if we appreciate that cosmopolitical theory is a sham for Weber then we might also begin to understand

the importance of life-orders – those social and economic ideas that shape life-conduct – as opposed to social structures. There is a common element, then, to both the theoretical and contextual readings, which is the role of ideas rather than social structures in the shaping of action and life-conduct, but the contextual readings prevail in the sense that they offer more historically accurate disciplinary reconstructions of Weber's work and resist temptations to formulate Weber's pragmatic concepts into a theory of modern society. Nevertheless, they do not work hard enough to deliver an appreciation of Weber's political logic in its own right for they either stress the economic role of power (as does Mommsen) or, in making Weber relevant to the individual, focus on the role of science in illuminating the problems peculiar to modern man (as does Hennis).

The next section outlines the third alternative offered by what this thesis calls the emancipative readings, which define Weber's work according to its supposed emancipative aims. Like the contextual readings, these works are also forced to contend with the legacy of theory and in many instances they exploit this legacy to emphasise the social aspects of Weber's solution to the problem of rationalisation.

### **The emancipative uses of Weber**

The first emancipative reading introduced in this section is that of *Between Literature and Science: the Rise of Sociology* (1988) by Wolf Lepenies, which was first published in German in 1985. Through a wide-ranging interpretation of



intellectual history and context, Lepenies emphasises Weber's relation to the philosophers, sociologists, poets and writers of his time, to conclude that sociology for Weber was nothing more than a pedagogy of modern life, protecting the intuitive and aesthetic psyche of modern man against natural-science's rationalisation of life-conduct. The second emancipative reading discussed in this section is Harvey Goldman's *Politics, Death and the Devil: Self and Power in Max Weber and Thomas Mann* (1992). In this work, Goldman emphasises the affinities between Weber and the German tradition of *Bildung* or self-cultivation, particularly as it manifested in the work of Thomas Mann and his struggle to come to terms with an aesthetic for politics. The third emancipative reading summarised in this section is Sung Ho Kim's *Max Weber's Politics of Civil Society* (2004). Kim emphasises the emancipative-pedagogical aspects of Weber's comparative studies of voluntary associational life, particularly the studies of North American church sects and their divergence from German religious life and its implication for the conduct of social and political life. This section also discusses the theme of individual autonomy as it has emerged in a number of articles, most of which have been published in Sam Whimster and David Chalcraft's journal, *Max Weber Studies* (see Jenkins 2000; Nafissi 2000; Palonen 1999 and 2004, and; Schroeder 2001).

For Lepenies, the history of sociology in Germany is analogous to the industrialisation of German society and economy (Lepenies 1988: 234). The late shift from agrarian to industrial society in the mid-nineteenth century was

accompanied by a fierce competition between early market players and, similarly, the general intellectual history was marked by a competition between history and sociology to provide a much needed 'science of society'. Figures such as Treitschke perceived 'a drifting apart of state and society' (Lepenies 1988: 235). Sociology, however, did not hold much appeal for the Germans. Its 'Anglo-French' roots meant that it tended to treat society from a bourgeois perspective and therefore had little to offer them by way of insight into the peculiar new German problems of state and society. The downfall of Western social science, according to Dilthey, was its premature attempts at theoretical generalisation. In their hastiness to create a systematic science of society, Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill overstepped the mark, which resulted in nothing but 'metaphysical mist' (Lepenies 1988: 236). This formal theory worked well in England and France where bureaucratic administrators were substituted for political rulers and society was gradually subsuming the state. In Germany, however, religious organisations began to provide solutions to the problems of state and society where science could find none, and the threat of another Thirty Years War loomed large (Lepenies 1988: 237). Another German criticism of sociology, coming from Nietzsche, was that the very idea of revealing the social was itself a sign of decay and, further, that sociology was nothing but a product of the 'herd-instincts' of the bourgeoisie; 'an obstruction to culture' (Lepenies 1988: 238). In many ways, Georg Simmel used his sociology to reflect these German political and intellectual problems. He claimed sociology to be concerned with neither the individual nor 'monolithic structures' such as the state but rather to be concerned with the effects

of interaction between individuals and, further, that sociology was not concerned with society as an object but rather with society as an ongoing process constituted by the effects of interaction (Lepenies 1988: 239-40).

According to Lepenies, Weber was not so much concerned with the separation of state and society as he was with 'the reverse and debit side of the process of civilization' (Lepenies 1988: 244). It was not that society was encroaching on the state but more that science and technology – the harbingers of industrialisation – had instigated the irreversible process of 'rationalization and bureaucratization' that would inevitably encroach on the ascetic elements of life (Lepenies 1988: 245). Like Simmel, who mirrored the contradictions of the social process through disjointed and fragmentary prose in his *Philosophy of Money*, Weber parodied the inner tension of science – the conflict between objectivity and values – in the rigid prose of his scientific works (Lepenies 1988: 246). In Lepenies's eyes, sociology was, for Weber, a means of protecting the aesthetic spheres of life against the encroaching scientific worldview and its rationalisation of everything (1988: 247). In this sense, it was positioned somewhere 'between literature and science', as the title of Lepenies work implies, instructing modern individuals on how to conduct their lives in an increasingly disenchanted, rationalised world.

Lepenies's work provides compelling evidence for reading Weber as an emancipative thinker, but it repeats the sometimes-deliberate mistakes of the theoretical readings by neglecting the political debates that provide the context of

Weber's sociological analysis of rationalisation and its effect on power. Where it does consider the political concepts in Weber's work, such as charisma, it restricts its contextual analysis to literary figures such as the poet Stefan George (1868-1933) and therefore circumnavigates the contexts of debates about constitutional theory, democracy and plebiscitary leadership highlighted by Mommsen (1984). Once again, we are left with another vague reading of Weber, this time as sociological protector of asceticism as a way of life.

In the 'Preface' to *Politics, Death and the Devil: Self and Power in Max Weber and Thomas Mann* (1992), Goldman states his central thesis on Weber and Mann. He states that they shared a primary interest in 'the issues of "calling" and "personality"', and they 'sought an antidote to personal and cultural weakness through practices for generating strength, mastery, and power' (Goldman 1992: ix). Their concern with strengthening the personality of the individual was, according to Goldman, in part a reflection of the Nietzschean will to power and also with the century old German tradition of '*Bildung*, or self-cultivation through scholarship' (Goldman 1992: 1-3). *Bildung* developed during the late eighteenth century as an inner-ascetic – an inward cultivation of the self and retreat from the world – but both Weber and Mann saw the tradition of *Bildung* as having failed in its attempt to create meaning for the individual because of its inability to cope with the increasing demands of the technological economy of capitalism (Goldman 1992: 4, 25-27). Weber was particularly wary of *Bildung* because of its likeness to the ideals of Pietism, which prevented the bourgeoisie from

developing the capacity for leadership. Mann, on the other hand, was initially supportive of the tradition, but after World War I he began to perceive the need for a more active involvement in politics.

*Bildung* is central to Goldman's reading of the oeuvres of Weber and Mann. Wilhelm von Humboldt, one of the leading exponents of early *Bildung* in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, promoted the reform of university education to provide two types of knowledge and training: the traditional, pre-*Bildung* form of technical and professional training, and the new formation of personality – the complete ethical perfection required for 'self-becoming' (Goldman 1992: 25-27). Whilst Kant saw *Bildung* as ethical perfection according to universal 'moral laws', Humboldt saw it as ethical perfection according to the individual's inner sense of personality (Goldman 1992: 27-29). The sense of personality that Humboldt speaks of is separate from the social or moral world and can only be perfected through complete inward reflection on the self. There was, however, a social and political context and consequence to Humboldt's *Bildung*. He was mindful of the weakening influence that increasing educational and vocational 'specialization' had on culture and personality (Goldman 1992: 29). He believed that the individual who could develop personality through self-mastery would influence other individuals, not through any intentionality but through leading by example.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the ideas of *Bildung* engendered a significant change in the culture of class identity, as the merits of an individual were no longer judged by class, that is, by aristocratic status, but were becoming more frequently assessed according to ‘intellectual and artistic efforts and creative attainments’ (Goldman 1992: 30-31). The ongoing debate within *Bildung*, between Humboldt, Kant, Goethe and the Romantics, revolved to some degree around the positions maintained by Humboldt and Kant. Goethe, for instance, was ambivalent about the possibility of attaining community benefit from the perfection of individual personality, whilst the Romantics, ‘Schlegel and Schleiermacher’ promoted total individualism in opposition to the Enlightenment’s moral laws (Goldman, 1992: 33). The influence of *Bildung* began to wane during the middle of the nineteenth century as a result of the failed bourgeois revolution of 1848 and the establishment of the German Empire in 1871 (Goldman 1992: 36, 40). The establishment of the Empire coincided with the development of the ‘*völkisch* movement’, which sought to meld nationalism with the self-mastery of personality as a means of promoting the ideal of the state (Hinton Thomas in Goldman 1992: 36).

In Goldman’s view, the general position of Weber on *Bildung* revolved around his typology of education. The goal of the first type of education is to shape the opinions of individuals to support and promote particular ‘political, ethical, artistic, cultural or other conviction[s]’ and the goal of the second type is to provide specialised training for specialised vocations (Weber in Goldman, 1992:

53). Weber's preference, according to Goldman, was towards the second type of specialised training because this type provided little room for influencing students' worldviews. Seen in terms of the history of *Bildung*, Weber's famous postulate of value freedom is an attempt to preserve or empower the individual's capacity for self-mastery against the rationalisation of modern science. In Weber's view, the increasing rationalisation of the world meant that man could no longer believe in one God or in ethical standards for a particular process of unification. For Weber, the explanation of the world in scientific terms makes the idea of metaphysics and of religious belief impossible. So, without these principles and beliefs, the only place man could gain enough power to master the rationalised world was from within (Goldman, 1992: 54).

Goldman works very hard indeed to both reveal Weber's so-called 'antidote to personal and cultural weakness through practices for generating strength, mastery, and power' and to remove the economic, social and political aspects to Weber's analysis of power. What we are left with is a purely individualistic notion of power in the work of Weber and an impression that Weber was, after all, a philosopher in the existential sense.

Following the general emancipative theme, Kim draws heavily on Weber's essay "*Churches and Sects in North America* (1985) to construct a liberal-democratic reading of the ethics of conviction and responsibility. The essay, according to Kim, outlines the sociological contrast between the separations of

church and state in Germany on the one hand and in North America on the other (Kim 2004: 70-72). In early modern Germany, Pufendorf, following Hobbes, promoted the separation of church and state as a solution to the ‘national crises’ of the Thirty Years War. The Thirty Years War produced some of the worst pre-state violence in the name of religious confessions that Europe had ever witnessed. This violence in the name of religion left the German people with a deep suspicion towards the ability of religious groups to promote social integration, and it is in this light that the ‘absolutist vision’ of Hobbes and Pufendorf was considered. Their absolutism ushered in a type of German Lutheranism, which promoted complete subservience to the state through total ethical indifference to politics. During Weber’s time, the *Kulturkampf* – the struggle for the return to a religious state – re-awoke this deep-felt suspicion among the German people. In North America, however, the ‘Calvinist doctrine and Puritan sects gave birth to the modern doctrine of separation of church and state’, providing a ‘Janus-like face’ of ‘apathy’ towards ‘mundane politics’ on the one hand, and, on the other, ‘fanatic zeal’ during ‘crucial moments’ when political challenges were presented to the basic human right of ‘freedom of consciousness’ (Kim 2004: 72). In terms of rules for the conduct of life, the Puritan sects continued to exert influence over the ethics of the American people, despite the separation of church and state, because the voluntary nature of its associations was in no way compromised; ‘Puritan sectarianism’ was not ‘suspected as being a disintegrating force’ (Kim 2004: 74). On the contrary, as sect-like associations developed outside the church, such as business associations, the main criteria used



by these associations to judge an individual was his ‘*ethical* quality’, determined by his ‘religious affiliation’ (Kim 2004: 75).

Kim draws a number of conclusions from Weber’s comparative sociology. First, he argues that for Weber the sect-like ethic of life-conduct was the ‘cornerstone of sociability’ in North America that preserved the individual’s freedom of conscience and therefore liberal democracy itself. Turning to Weber’s *Politics as a Vocation* essay, Kim suggests that it presented the combined ethics of conviction and responsibility as a solution to the general modern problem of the conflict between value pluralism and the iron cage of bureaucracy; the two ethics, according to Kim, produced a “total personality” that had the ability to ‘(re)empower our agency’ – our freedom of conscience – in the face of the increasing rationalisation and calculability of the modern western world (2004: 176-8). From this assessment, Kim concludes that Weber’s ethics of conviction and responsibility promoted the North American voluntary types of sect-like association as universal ‘soulcraft’ for modern times (Kim 2004: 189).

Whilst Kim’s reading of Weber’s comparative historical-sociological analysis of churches and sects in North-America and Germany may be accurate, his use of Weber’s *Politics as a Vocation* to inject an ideological element into the essays on churches and sects is not consistent with Weber’s intentions for the essay. In a different reading, Lawrence Scaff argues that Weber presented *Politics as a*

*Vocation* to educate politicians in the art of responsible leadership (Scaff 1973). Chapter one (of this thesis) expands on this argument.

The promotion of individual autonomy is also a recurring theme in a number of recent articles, most of which were published in Sam Whimster and David Chalcraft's journal, *Max Weber Studies*. In *Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium* (2000), Richard Jenkins stresses that 'When Max Weber borrowed the expression "the disenchantment of the world" from Schiller, he was offering a sociological – perhaps even an ethical or moral – provocation' to preserve the 'expressive dimensions of human social life' (Jenkins 2000: 11-13). In *On the Foundations of Athenian Democracy: Marx's Paradox and Weber's Solution* (2000), Mohammad Nafissi stresses that Weber's ideal interest referred 'to individual autonomy and creativity which he feared was caged by bureaucratic rationalization' (Nafissi 2000: 57). Nafissi argues that Weber studied ancient civilisations to learn something about maintaining individual autonomy in the face of increasing bureaucratisation: 'What sustained Weber's interest in the ancient world was the contrasting roles and fates of bureaucratic kingdoms and the non-bureaucratic city-states in ancient developments and the evidence they provided for advancing the struggle against the rising tide of statism and socialism' (Nafissi 2000: 57).

In *Max Weber's Reconceptualisation of Freedom* (1999), Kari Palonen argues that Weber was a promoter of a 'modern concept of liberty' (Palonen 1999:523).

Instead of opposing individual freedom and politics, Weber upheld an intimate relationship between them. Weber's analysis of the 'operative of contingency' was, Palonen stresses, an analysis of chance and freedom (Palonen 1999: 524). Like Goldman (see above), Palonen equates Weber's analysis of contingency and individual choices with the contingency and exceptional choices of political action: 'For Weber, the chances of individual life and the control of these chances... refers... to the political character of... individual choices' (Palonen 1999: 525). In *Max Weber, Parliamentarianism and the Rhetorical Culture of Politics* (published in *Max Weber Studies*, 2004), Palonen pursues the theme of individual freedom in Weber's arguments for parliamentarism, arguing that Weber idealised the parliamentary process of arguing 'for and against' as a model for pursuing individual meaning in both political and scientific endeavours (Palonen 2004: 274-80).

The last of the emancipative readings considered in this chapter is Ralph Schroeder's *Weber, Pynchon and the American Prospect* (2001). Schroeder argues that American democracy, for Weber, provided a political solution to the social problem of the 'atomization' of individuals because 'American "civil society" ordered political interests by means of its associationalism' (Schroeder 2001: 165). This argument alone is not problematic for those wishing to understand Weber's unique ideas about the political sphere of life, but Schroeder has also suggested that there was a 'more general problem in Weber's social thought' – the problem of "personality" or how to preserve "individuality" in' an

‘ossifying modern culture’. This problem, Schroeder states, was one ‘for which Weber sought to enhance the role of charisma and inner distance’. Thus, following the other emancipative uses, Schroeder portrays Weber’s concept of charisma as providing a political solution to the social problem of how to preserve individuality in modernity. But this reading does not fit with Weber’s own ideal interests for the concept of charisma. As Baehr argues, in his sociology Weber used the political ideas of Caesarism as a ‘sub-type’ of his ‘master concept of charisma’ (Baehr 2008: 90). In Weber’s sociology, charisma could function as both a tool of political power and as a tool of social order. But, as Baehr suggests, Weber’s own ideal interests for using charisma were always political and, where he did speak of the social role of charisma – in discussions of prophets and sages – he always did so in terms of ancient cultures and not in terms of present ideologies (Baehr 2008: 89-94).

These emancipative readings all share a degree of consent that individual autonomy was one of Weber’s central interests. But these readings tend to draw upon an inadequate understanding of Weber’s political thought; these readings tend to use Weber’s economic and sociological logic, sometimes twisted into a social theory, to explain the logic of his political thought. Sometimes, as is the case with Goldman (1992), the political work of Weber is purified of all economic, social and political elements until it is simply an existentialist philosophy masquerading as an education reform policy.

## **Summary**

This chapter has categorised some uses of Weber. This categorisation is by no means exhaustive. It serves the purpose, however, of providing a basic typology through which the Weber scholarship can be understood. Of course other categories might have been employed, such as the category of methodological readings, but these readings are found in such plentiful supply within the theoretical, contextual and emancipative categories that any consideration of a category on this basis alone seems ambiguous. In any event, as mentioned above, Eliaeson has already completed sufficient work in this area.

This chapter has argued that the contextual readings provide much needed corrections to oversights within the theoretical uses, but, for all their improvements, the contextual readings, through sometimes overzealous application of the contextual method, force themselves down paths that allow subsequent authors, with vested interests, to use Weber for ideological purposes. This argument contains three main thrusts: firstly, the theoretical uses portray Weber as a social theorist and thus neglect important nuanced arguments within his political writings. A prime example of this is Talcott Parsons's theoretical use of Weber. Parsons argues that Weber's early-career interest in empirical research eventually gave way to a theoretical interest in the modern economic order, its social-structural ordering and its influence on human behaviour. Parsons, unfortunately, does not account for the role of politics in Weber's later scientific writings and thus is forced to reconstruct Weber's structural hierarchy from the

pieces of social theorising that he could find in Weber's conceptual-sociological work. Secondly, the contextual uses of Weber set a precedent for Weber scholarship. They promote the contextual method of reading Weber's arguments, concepts, idioms and quotes in relation to particular debates and political developments that Weber was involved in. For example, Wilhelm Hennis masterfully situates Weber's work within contemporary scholarly disputes to highlight Weber's concern with the influence of spheres of life on the life-conduct of individuals. By setting this precedent, Hennis, and others, do much to prevent Weber-scholars from masking their own interests behind new readings of the work of Weber. Hennis, for instance, stops short of drawing conclusions about Weber's vision for an ideal, liberal democratic Germany. Thirdly, this chapter has argued that whilst the contextual method is now standard in Weber scholarship, the readings it provides have led to debates about specific concepts and arguments that have, at times, masked the ideal interests of participating authors. For instance, Kari Palonen pursues the theme of voluntarism and the pluralism of different spheres of life in the work of Weber, concluding that Weber was ultimately concerned with maintaining individual liberty and the freedom to act meaningfully. In doing so, Palonen nudges the theme of spheres of life and individual life-conduct in the work of Weber – a theme developed in the contextual readings – one step further, forming it into the main ideological pursuit of Weber's political writings.

This chapter concludes that none of these readings bring us any closer to an adequate understanding of Weber's concepts of the political sphere of life and political life-conduct. This is largely due to the legacy of the theoretical uses of Weber. These uses bequeath Weber scholarship the eternal struggle to emerge from social theory and form a non-social understanding of Weber's political logic. Until Weber scholars rid themselves of the theoretical-individualist Weber portrayed by the theoretical uses – a job that perhaps only Hennis has contributed to, albeit marginally – then Weber's political logic may remain the topic of endless debate and provide for endless appropriations depending on the flavour of the moment.

## **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**

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The establishment of the Second Reich in 1871 marked the development of significant nation-wide economic and political changes in Germany, including ‘the triumph of the constitutional nation-state’ (Mommsen 1995: 58); the immigration of large numbers of Polish agricultural workers (Tribe 1989: 92-93); a period of rapid industrialisation during the 1880s (Mommsen 1995: 57); and some major periods of economic downturn during the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s (Lestition 2000: 289). In academic debates, especially within the discipline of political economy, these developments became increasingly expressed in terms of ‘social problems’ (Holborn 1969: 289). The *Verein für Sozialpolitik* (Association for Social Policy), established in 1872, became the leading forum for the discussion and political lobbying of social issues (Demm 1987: 88). ‘The social question’ became the bastion of the working classes and scholarly interests moved towards the role of social legislation, social welfare and social policy, in ameliorating the poor living standards of agricultural and industrial workers (Krüger 1987: 71; Demm 1987: 88). Max Weber contributed to these public and academic debates on social problems through a number of scholarly writings, including: the published section of his dissertation on commercial law and medieval trading companies; his survey of rural labourers; his study of stock and commodity exchanges; his writings on religious and economic ethics; his writings on churches and sects; and his two-part speech at the German Sociological



Society (GSS). He also contributed to the promotion of the ongoing relevance of the social question when he established the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* (Archive of Social Science and Social Policy) with Edgar Jaffé (1866-1921) and Werner Sombart (1863-1941) in 1904 (Factor 1988: 1-9).

It is not difficult to determine a general standpoint on the social question for contemporaries of Weber. Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936) and Otto von Guericke (1841-1921) perceived the social question as the emergence of, or battle for, new sources of political authority. Tönnies, for instance, argued that during the nineteenth century the era of traditional patriarchal life had transformed into that of capitalist association, which would, in the future, progress into a more ideal period of community (Krüger 1987: 76). Similarly, through a history of legal conceptions of societies and associations, Guericke argued that states and private associations must become equal in the eyes of the law to reflect the natural status of the German people (Runciman 1997: 47). These two scholars were explicit about their theoretical ideology and they argued that giving greater political and legal authority to communities and associations would solve many of the social issues. Weber, by contrast, was reluctant to discuss his standpoint. This creates difficulties for those who wish to understand his portrayal of the social as a topic of scholarly enquiry, which further creates difficulties for those wanting to understand his solution to the problem of political authority – just one of the many problems raised by the social question. The more theoretical readings that have emphasised Weber's individualist method of studying social action, and drawn

connections between this method and his political views, have tended to portray Weber as a progressive liberal; these readings have suggested that the modern state was, for Weber, subservient to society (see for instance, Gerth and Mills 1948: 18, 33, 40; Shils 1987: 549). On the other hand, the more contextual readings have tended to suggest that society was, for Weber, always subservient to national politics (see Mommsen 1984: 63-63; Hennis 2000: 206-207).

Through a contextual summary of Weber's writings that contribute to the 'social question', this chapter aims to provide a better appreciation of Weber's portrayal of the social as a topic of scholarly enquiry. This chapter argues that Weber saw the social question as a discussion of the limitations of society. Weber stressed these limitations in a number of ways: first, he limited his own concept of the social to set himself apart from contemporary academics; second, he was always particular to limit his analysis of the social to specific intentions, ideal interests or moral ideas; third, he restricted the concept of, and the real possibilities for, civil society – a democratic society united by the general will of the people and governed by a state that was subordinate to the general will – to North America and England. Both civil society and liberal-democracy were alien to Weber's analysis of the social in Germany; and fourth, Weber's initial limitation of the social re-emerged in his later proposal to study the press. In this proposal, Weber argued that there were certain ideal interests controlling the newspaper media in Germany and these interests were promoting certain ideas about society and influencing public opinion. It was, according to Weber, the duty of social

scientists to reveal these interests and expose the manner in which they exercised this influence because their ability to influence public opinion had consequences for political authority. By acknowledging Weber's intentional delimitation, and his exclusion of any possibilities of civil society and substantive democracy in Germany, and his proposal to reveal the particular interests behind public opinion, we can begin to acknowledge the unique logic of the political in Weber's arguments about political authority.

### **Studying the social using legal and economic concepts**

Very much in line with the contextual readings of Weber – outlined in chapter three of this thesis – Martin Riesebrodt's *From Patriarchalism to Capitalism: The Theoretical Context of Max Weber's Agrarian Studies (1892-93)* (1989) points out the dangers of pursuing a central theme in the work of Weber (Riesebrodt 1989: 134). Riesebrodt states that the reduction of Weber's work to one theme has proven problematic when particular works were seen to deviate from that theme; that is, works that have been seen as problematic have also often been forced to fit so-called central themes. As an alternative to these readings, Riesebrodt proposes that we identify the scholarly debates of Weber's contemporaries and focus on the individual textual level for our interpretation of Weber's reformulation and usage of the methods, concepts and historical understandings of those debates. In this respect, each text could then be situated within a particular debate.

It is, then, no surprise to find that in line with Riesebrodt's argument for thematic restriction to the individual textual level, the concepts and historical developments Weber used in his survey of rural labourers east of the Elbe from 1894 differed significantly from the concepts and theories he employed in his outlines of the stock and commodity exchanges from 1894 and 1896. For instance, in the study of rural labour Weber used 'seigneurial structure (*Herrschaftsstruktur*)', 'patriarchally organized cooperative (*Gennosenschaft*)' and 'the struggle between landed capital and labour' to delineate the shift from patriarchy to capitalism (in Riesebrodt, 1989: 136, 139), whereas, in the study of stock exchanges, he used the concepts of '*Gemeinschaft*' (community), '*alten Gemeinschaften*' (old communities) and '*Austauschgemeinschaft*' (community of exchange) to conceptualise the shift from household to commercial economies (Weber 1924a: 261-262). It is difficult to find fault with Riesebrodt's argument when talking at the specific conceptual level about ideal types such as seigneurial rule. For this reason there is perhaps no need to go beyond Weber's contemporary context. But if we want to understand Weber's use of more abstract concepts, such as society and his portrayal of the social, Riesebrodt's approach has its limitations.

The translator of Weber's *Stock and Commodity Exchanges* (2000), Steven Lestition, offers an introduction to the political and social context of the works. Lestition points to various debates between agrarian and capitalist interest groups about the social effects of Germany's rapid industrialisation and entrance into the world economy. During the period 1873-1879, following an initial economic

boom, Germany suffered a major economic downturn (Lestition 2000: 289). After two more major slumps – 1882-86 and 1890-94 – conservative and socialist voices began pointing the finger at Bismarck, the stock and commodity exchanges, and the developing world economy. In 1892, two years after Bismarck's expulsion, the government commissioned a report into the operation of the stock market. This report concluded with the assessment that trading speculation was contributing to the social problems of the working classes (Lestition 2000: 290). Subsequently, between 1893 and 1894, the government implemented the recommendations of the commission through legislation to support and compensate agrarian landowners against the economic effects of the stock and commodity exchanges (Lestition 2000: 291). Weber was appointed to work on the 'Exchange Commission' in the 1890s, which had the express purpose of reporting directly to the Chancellor, but he wrote his two articles on the stock and commodity markets for Friedrich Naumann's 'Worker's Library', as Lestition has suggested, to provide the wider public with an objective overview of the exchanges and a balanced introduction to the contemporary debate (Lestition 2000: 292-95).

In *Stock and Commodity Exchanges* (2000), Weber begins his analysis with an 'initial orientation' aimed at those readers with little prior knowledge of the markets (Weber 2000: 305). He starts his overview with a description of two major economic patterns within the history of economic endeavour: first, 'the economy of the household' – the form of social existence from the 'earliest ages'

or ‘the oldest economic community’; and second, the modern form of economic ‘trade’ that ‘seeks to expand to include the totality of all civilized peoples’ (Weber 2000: 306-07). The decisive shift occurred, according to Weber, somewhere along the path of ‘historical development’ of the dissolution of the old forms of ‘communities’ and the emergence of the new forms of ‘cities’ (Weber 2000: 307-08). In the German version, *Die Börse* (1924a), he uses the terms ‘*Gemeinschaft*’, ‘*alten Gemeinschaften*’ and ‘*Austauschgemeinschaft*’ to alternate between these two major economic patterns (Weber 1924a: 261-262). Although Lestition translates *Gemeinschaft* as ‘society’ (in Weber 2000: 306-307), it seems odd that Weber would use a term like *Gemeinschaft* to mean society when he was simultaneously using the term *alten Gemeinschaft* to refer to primitive old-community forms of economic association. This chapter argues that, here, in the early stages of his analysis, Weber was careful not to use the term *Gesellschaft* (society), because, given the late industrialisation of Germany and the ongoing debates surrounding agrarian protectionism and capitalism, *Gesellschaft* was a highly contested word. It could also be that, despite the economic terminological suitability, Weber’s preference for the term ‘community of exchange’ (*Austauschgemeinschaft*) was a reflection of his legal training.

In 1889, Weber published a section of his legal-historical dissertation entitled *The History of Commercial Partnerships in the Middle Ages* (2003) (Kaelber 2003: 1). The dissertation itself was written under the guidance of Levin Goldschmidt (1829-1897), the historian and ‘expert on commercial law’ (Kaelber 2003: 6-7). In

a small passage of the published section, Weber argues that whilst the ‘family household community’ appeared to be the same as the ‘community of labour’ or ‘commercial company’, the ‘foundation’ of the family household ‘existed a priori’, whereas the foundation of the ‘community of labour’ had ‘to be intended and created’ (Weber 2003: 93). With this passage, Weber enunciated for the first time a line of thought that occupied his conceptual approach to the social world for the rest of his scholarly life; that there was always an intentional (in this case positive-legal) foundation to mid and large-scale associations (associations larger than the family household community). Riesebrodt, in restricting themes to individual texts, is critical of this type of search for trends in the work of Weber (Riesebrodt 1989: 133). However, the differentiation Weber made between household communities and communities of labour, in the published section of his dissertation, was strikingly similar to the differentiation he made between old-community and community of exchange in his analysis of stock and commodity exchanges. Also, in the studies of rural labour, Weber definitely broadened his conceptual lexicon to encapsulate larger-scale economic and social associational life. As we shall see, this broadening of conceptualisation was a developmental tendency that continued throughout Weber’s work.

### **Delineating the social as a moral idea**

After writing the dissertation and studies of rural labour and stock exchanges, which limited the conceptualisation of the social to intentional communities of exchange, Weber expanded his concept of the social to include society as a moral

idea. He used his new concept of society to offer his perspective on the legal-historical and sociological debate about democratic sources of political authority.

Hennis and Riesebrodt each argue that Weber's move away from purely legal concepts towards economic and social concepts of forms of association was mainly due to the influence of the economists Karl Knies (1821-1898) and Gustav Schmoller (1838-1917) (Hennis 2000a: 118-19; Riesebrodt 1989: 143-44). According to Hennis, Knies encouraged Weber away from the abstract cosmopolitan theories of Smith and Ricardo, which were based upon metaphysical conceptions of economies. In Riesebrodt's view, Schmoller encouraged Weber to focus on the 'psychical and ethical motives for conduct' (Riesebrodt 1989: 143). Riesebrodt is adamant that sociology and the sociological literature of the time, such as Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (originally published in 1887), played no part in Weber's shift towards economic and social concerns (Riesebrodt 1989: 151).

We know that Weber was well acquainted with the work of Tönnies; the pair shared accommodation during the International Congress of Philosophers in 1908, and Tönnies was leader of the German Sociological Society (GSS) from 1909 to 1933 – an institution partly founded by Weber (Weber 1988: 393, 420; Zohn 1988: 393). The parallels between the work of Tönnies and that of Weber were limited to their respective conceptualisations of the long term historical development from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, or from patriarchalism to



capitalism, respectively. Tönnies argued, for example, that ‘Gemeinschaft is old; Gesellschaft is new as a name as well as a phenomenon’ (Tönnies 1963: 34). Also, where Weber talked of a historical development from patriarchalism to capitalism, and from community of labour to community of exchange, Tönnies suggested a ‘development from Gemeinschaft toward Gesellschaft’ (Tönnies 1963: 162). Beyond this superficial level there was only one similarity: both thinkers constructed concepts as true representations of reality and as fictional characterisations. Tönnies, for instance, argued that ‘...the existence of a Gesellschaft... is real at a given time. It is something in the process of becoming, something which should be perceived here as personality of the general will or the general reason, and at the same time (as we know) it is fictitious and nominal’ (Tönnies 1963: 76). Weber also stressed that ‘[g]enetic ideal-types have the logical form of objective possibility-adequate cause accounts, and can be assessed for their intelligibility and factual adequacy accordingly’, but at the same time, ‘Genetic ideal-types are also ideal-types *stricto sensu* – consciously constructed idealizations to which nothing may actually correspond’ (Turner 1986: 200). Both thinkers, then, used concepts to accentuate particular aspects of reality for the purpose of historical-sociological scholarship. However, they drew quite different conclusions about the meaning of their concepts and historical analyses. For instance, Weber did not share Tönnies’s democratic enthusiasm that society was the ‘personality of the general will of the people’ (Tönnies 1963: 76; Krüger 1987: 76). This is not to say that Weber disagreed with moral conceptions of society; Weber, in fact, constructed his own preliminary concept of society as a

moral idea, but he did so only in a direct polemical engagement with the legal and social theory of Otto von Gierke.

With his essay on 'Roscher's Historical Method', originally published in 1903, Weber, in characteristically fierce mood, attacked Gierke for suggesting that 'society' ('Gesellschaft') is a 'superindividual' entity elusive of scientific explanation (Weber 1924b: 35, n; 1975: 231, n. 83). Weber argued that there is nothing to prevent science from explaining the causal development of society because society is, he argued, simply 'a moral idea which dominates the desires and feelings of men' (Weber 1975: 232, n. 83).

In the 'Translator's Introduction' to Gierke's *Political Theories of the Middle Age* (1900), Frederic W. Maitland summarised Gierke's position in the history of legal, political and social thought. Maitland argued that since Friedrich Savigny (1779-1861) and Georg Beseler (1809-1888), there was a struggle between the exponents of Roman and German law to provide the most adequate legal formulation of the relationship between states and corporations (Maitland 1900: xviii). The Roman legislators, including Savigny, sought to incorporate all associations into the state so that they were mere extensions or property thereof (Maitland 1900: xx-xxi). The exponents of Germanic law, such as Beseler, sought to free 'German fellowships' ('Genossenschaften') from the jurisdiction of the state (Maitland 1900: xviii). The emergence of the 'joint-stock company' at the time of Savigny and Beseler presented a conundrum for Roman law (Maitland

1900: xxi-xxii). The 'joint-stock company' presented as an anomaly to Roman law because it defied the Roman law logic of defining private associations as individual personalities capable of being governed under state law. Gierke weighed in on the debate by favouring the concept of *Genossenschaft* over that of *Gesellschaft*. *Genossenschaft* 'is no fiction, no symbol, no piece of the state's machinery, no collective name for individuals, but a living organism and a real person, with body and members and a will of its own' (Maitland 1900: xxvi). In other words, *Genossenschaft*, in Gierke's view, was something susceptible to scientific explanation, something demonstrable, whereas society was beyond explanation.

According to David Runciman, Gierke adopted the Hegelian dialectical approach to the history of associations, whereby 'models of political thought are seen to react upon each other, and these models not only shape but are shaped by the language in which they are expressed' (Runciman 1997: 35). In particular, Gierke concentrated on the struggle between Romanism and Germanism, and between their respective 'conceptions of order' (Runciman 1997: 36). Gierke, in Runciman's reading, quite plainly championed Germanist organic conceptions of order over Romanist ones. However, according to Runciman, Gierke's history of political ideas must be understood not only within the context of the struggle between Romanism and Germanism, but also within the context of the internal struggle of the Germanist models of thought, 'Herrschaft and Gennosenschaft'. Gierke's argument is best understood in terms of his basic distinction between

two types of ‘group unity’: “unity in plurality”, where individuals exist prior to the group and are thus creators of the group; and “plurality in unity”, where the group exists prior to individuals and is thus creator of its individuals (Runciman 1997: 37). A unity in plurality, in Gierke’s view, could not have a real ‘personality’, which is why he favoured the plurality in unity of *Gennosenschaften*.

Gierke argued that Roman law, natural law and public law depended upon juristic and mechanical theories of corporate and individual rights, which limited their conceptualisation of sovereignty to single individuals and rendered them incapable of acknowledging the sovereignty of plurality-in-unity (Runciman 1997: 38-39). Consequently, these legal viewpoints could only formulate the sovereignty of absolute states and were, in Gierke’s view, deficient in providing the legal framework required by modern states, which were built upon plurality in unity.

Gierke was also critical of Hobbes and Rousseau, for whilst they acknowledged the existence of group personality, they conceived of that personality in such a way as to deny its potential plurality (Runciman 1997: 41-43). Both Hobbes and Rousseau, according to Gierke, developed theories of ‘artificial personality’, sharing ‘a mutual antipathy for unregulated group activity’ (Runciman 1997: 43). Publishing some thirty years before Hobbes, Johannes Althusius (1557-1638) embraced the ‘Teutonic idea of the freedom of corporate bodies’ – of unregulated

group activity (Gierke in Runciman 1997: 46). In this account, each group, from the family to the state, was ‘the product of a contractual arrangement among lesser associations’ (Runciman 1997: 44). By Althusius’s theory, the smaller associations produced the state and were marked off from it as distinct pre-existing entities. But Gierke ultimately rejected Althusius’s theory, along with those of Hobbes and Rousseau, for whilst he agreed with the medieval Teutonic conception of unregulated fellowships, Gierke stressed that true plurality in unity must develop from within a source equal to both the state and fellowships (Runciman 1997: 47). According to Runciman, Gierke’s solution came in the form of ‘reciprocity between the personality of the group and the personality of its members’ (Runciman 1997: 52). For this theory, Gierke travelled back in time to recall the earliest forms of Germanic fellowships, much like Tönnies who talked of the cyclical re-emergence of traditional forms of community superseding the inevitable societies of modern capitalism (Runciman 1997: 58). But where Tönnies envisaged a necessary epoch of societies, Gierke championed the immediate return to *Genossenschaften*.

The Romanists and public law theorists only acknowledged the existence of a group entity where a number of individuals were engaged in corporate economic action. In contrast, the organicists and Gierke were ready to acknowledge the existence of groups beyond the legal-economic sphere and were indeed the pedagogues of a moral philosophy designed to instigate or hasten a process of reform to bring about the general legal acknowledgement of plurality in unity.

Enter Weber, with his sober conceptualisation of society and the state as nothing more than a moral idea driving the actions of individuals. At a closer look, Weber was critical of Gierke for making mountains out of molehills when it came to the conceptualisation of the 'essence' of large-scale associations like society and the state:

Consider the claim that in the domain of the social sciences we are in the fortunate position of being able to penetrate the inner structure of the "smallest elements" that constitute society, elements which must run through every thread of social relations... Gierke ...claims that the essence of the total personality of the state is a "mystery." From the point of view of science, he thinks, it must remain "concealed"... It is susceptible to an exclusively *metaphysical* interpretation (through "imagination" and "belief", as Gierke puts it). The fact that Gierke retains the notion of the "supraindividual unity of the life" of the community is not surprising. From a heuristic point of view, the idea has served him – and also science – very well indeed. However, when Gierke is forced to see the content of a moral idea or even... the content of patriotic feelings as entities in order to give credence to the power and importance of these feelings then this is curious indeed... Neither (1) the universe of norms which regulate a community, nor (2) the

(objectively viewed) totality of the relations between the individual members that are regulated by these norms, nor (3) the influences upon the conduct (conceived as a complex of events) of the individuals guided by these norms and relations constitute, in Gierke's sense, a total essence... However, there is nothing at all mysterious about this relation. No mysterious essence stands behind that universe of norms and relations, but rather a moral idea which dominates the desires and feelings of men. It is hard to believe that an idealist like Gierke could seriously conceive the struggle for ideas as a struggle for "empty words" (Weber 1975: 231-32, n. 83).

With his criticism of Gierke's metaphysical legal history, Weber argued that society was nothing more than a moral idea or a feeling of patriotism. But Weber's criticism of Gierke also betrayed his own idea that despite attempts to construct entities or mask moral ideas or feelings of patriotism behind societies and states, ultimately sovereignty must be reduced to one individual. As Arie Brand has argued, Weber solely studied *Herrschaft* and refused to study *Gennosenschaft*, believing *Herrschaft* to be the only form of association that existed in reality (Brand 1982: 96-97). Attempts to suggest otherwise and transform moral ideas into *Gennosenschaften* were, after all, furtive attempts to mask the interests of *Herrschaft* associations behind society or the state and lead citizens into believing in a false sense of democracy. Ultimately, Weber's analysis

was more than a polemic with the discipline of legal history, for he wished that German science in general would accept the realities of *Herrschaft*.

### **Studying the social comparatively: revealing the false sense of democracy in Germany**

In the period 1904 to 1906, Weber published a number of works on the comparative sociology of religion in Germany, America and England, with particular reference to Lutheranism, Protestantism and their ethical influence on economic life-conduct, economic and associational life, the relationship between church and sect, political leadership, the constitutional separation of church and state, and constitutional democracy. These publications include: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (originally published in two parts between 1904 and 1905); and “*Churches*” and “*Sects*” in *North America: An Ecclesiastical and Socio-political Sketch* (originally published in 1906). These comparative studies reinforced Weber’s view that society was nothing but a moral idea that had, in some instances, led German citizens into a false sense of democracy.

Guenther Roth (1993) explains the context of Weber’s *Protestant Ethic* with relation to the ‘social question’ in Germany. According to Roth, during the years preceding unification, German scholarship developed a preoccupation with, and even idealisation of, English politics (Roth 1993: 87-91). However, after the establishment of the Reich, ‘serious scholarly research on England seems to have declined as national competition and antagonism [between imperial nations]



increased' (Roth 1993: 91). Roth claims that this was due to the widespread perception that 'Archival research about English institutions no longer promised to be of any relevance for the constitution of the Reich.' General scholarly research shifted, 'due to the Spanish-American War of 1898', towards an interest in the United States and its potential role as 'enemy or ally' in the international struggle between imperial powers.

According to Roth, Weber had strong familial ties and ideological connections to the English and the Americans, and *The Protestant Ethic* was a testament to his Anglophilia and Puritanism. With regards *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber claimed that the English and the Americans 'went through the school of hard asceticism', developed sectarian social systems, and 'behead[ed] the traditionalist powers', which enabled them to develop both 'freedom of conscience and the most basic rights of man', as well as superior democratic governance (Weber in Roth 1993: 85-86). Ultimately, by Roth's reading, Weber believed that the English and the Americans had developed a 'kind of political voluntarism' thanks to the continuing influence of sectarianism on economic and political life; Weber's *Protestant Ethic*, as a study of the influence of Puritan voluntarism on economic rationalism, 'reflected his wishful political thinking' that Germany 'had had a Puritan legacy to make them great like the English' (Roth 1993: 121).

In "*Churches*" and "*Sects*" in *North America* (1985), Weber continued to pursue his interest in sectarianism and democratic politics. The context that Roth speaks

of, with relation to the *Protestant Ethic*, is equally pertinent for our understanding of “*Churches*” and “*Sects*” (1985) because, in the latter, Weber contrasted the development of the dynamics between North American associational life, its state, and society, with that of the post-enlightenment German state and its associational life. He presented the dynamics of North American society in a manner analogous to Althusius’s socio-political theory.

Weber argued that American democracy developed out of religious interests and was completely different from German ideals of democracy. The traditional forms of communal life of Puritan sects in North America imparted something of a ‘residuum’ – a spirit – to all modern forms of associational life (Weber 1985: 7-8). This residuum, according to Weber, was best summarised by its process of exclusivity: ‘[m]embership in a “reputable” (in the American sense) church community guarantee[s] not only the social reputableness of the individual but also, and above all, his reputableness in business’ (Weber 1985: 7). According to Weber, this residuum of exclusivity was at the core of North American democracy.

Whilst the rejection of confessionalisation in North America, for Weber, was a product of European ideas about autonomy, the constitutional separation of church and state was a product of ‘religious claims’ for ‘freedom of conscience’ against the state (Weber 1985: 9-10). Due to the enduring spirit of the Puritan sects, ‘genuine American society... was and is permeated with “exclusivities” of

every kind' (Weber 1985: 10). In American democracy, the 'individual seeks to maintain his own position by becoming a member of the social group. Missing is that undifferentiated peasant-vegetative "geneality" without which (as Germans are accustomed to believe) there can be no community' (Weber 1985: 11).

The situation for democracy in Germany, as Weber saw it, could not be made to mimic that of American democracy. His sobriety is evident in the following quote: 'It is and remains the fate of us Germans that, due to numerous historical causes, the religious revolution at that time meant a development that favored not the energy of the individual but the prestige of the "office"' (Weber 1985: 11).

In reading Weber's works from this period, Paul Münch (1993) takes a much broader historical look at the origins of Weber's interests in religious, economic and political life. In seeking to 'reconstruct the prehistory of *The Protestant Ethic*', Münch situates Weber's interest in the influence of Puritanism on economic and political life within a long German tradition of theoretical discourse on religion and economy beginning in early modern times (Münch 1993: 53). Münch distinguishes three major movements within 'the whole early modern discourse on religion and economy': theological; mercantilistic/cameralistic; and enlightened public (Münch 1993: 54).

Within the theological movement, Lutherans, Calvinists and Catholics shared the belief that all economic prosperity was determined by God. However, this

religious ideal did not always translate well into economic practice; the pursuit of wealth as a material sign of God's blessing led to the secularisation of church property and activities, which resulted in divisions between the confessions, as exemplified by the Protestants' stereotype of 'the lazy Catholic' (Münch 1993: 53-54). The power of the churches over states and economic life was diminished most significantly during the early modern period when the latter 'established themselves as autonomous exponents of a new, confessionally neutral discourse' (Münch 1993: 59). Protestant rulers began to appropriate the resources of the churches for the economic profit of their states (Münch 1993: 60). They also began tolerating co-existent religious confessions as a means of attracting 'new subjects', increasing populations, and building the wealth of their states (Münch 1993: 61). As contributors to these developments, the mercantilists and cameralists subordinated the churches to the role of assisting the state in bringing about 'civil order' (Münch 1993: 63). Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717-1771) was a cameralist exponent of the church as both a censor of religious opinions, with respect to maintaining civil order, and a contributor to the state's wealth (Münch 1993: 64). According to Münch, 'Justi calculated that a single holy day in a nation of 8 to 10 million inhabitants caused a monetary loss of over 1 million florins' (Münch 1993: 64). The flourishing of mercantilistic and cameralistic discourse in the eighteenth century contributed to the 'development of national and confessional stereotypes', portraying Protestants as economically 'productive' and Catholics as economically 'retarding' (Münch 1993: 67).

The most serious challenge to confessional toleration since the seventeenth century and the height of cameralism, arose in the form of a public debate in Wilhemine Germany, called the *Kulturkampf*, between Catholics and Protestants. Weber, according to Münch, composed the *Protestant Ethic* with the political intention of supporting the Protestants in this debate (Münch 1993: 71). Münch's argument has significant implications for our understanding of Weber's subsequent comments on the social. In many ways, Weber saw the *Kulturkampf* as a battle of ideas in the social world and he turned his scientific attentions towards studies of the role of the media in promoting public opinion about these ideas and controlling public perceptions of society and the so-called general will.

## **Studying the moral ideas behind society**

In 1910, Weber delivered a two-part speech to the German Sociological Society (GSS) outlining what he saw as its most immediate tasks. The tasks, according to Weber, were twofold: first, it should begin a substantive study into the sociology of the German press; and, second, this study should form a part of a more general research project into the nature of the ‘German public sphere’ of life (Kim 2002: 199). The speech has been fragmentarily translated into English: the first half was translated by Hanno Hardt as *Speech to German Sociological Association* (1979) and the second half was translated by Sung Ho Kim as *Voluntary Associational Life* (2002). Prior to the speech, in a written proposal to the GSS dated April 1909, Weber presented his ideas for a sociological investigation of the press (Hennis 1998: 109).

In the written proposal – *Preliminary Report on a Proposed Survey for a Sociology of the Press* (1998) – Weber argued that a sociological study of the press, beginning with a survey of the newspaper business, would provide an insight into ‘the great cultural problems of the present’ (Weber 1998: 111). These great cultural problems included ‘the mode of constitution of the psychic means of suggestion through which modern society continually strives to assimilate and adapt individuals’ and the ‘conditions created by public opinion... for the development, maintenance, undermining, and reforming of artistic, scientific, ethical, religious, political, social and economic cultural components’ (Weber 1998: 111). Weber used the term, ‘mode of constitution of the psychic means of

suggestion', to refer to the organisation, influence on, and distribution of, the press, including factors such as the selection of newsworthy stories, and the distribution of news from 'telegraphic services' to newspapers and from newspapers to news agencies (Weber 1998: 113). All of these factors, in Weber's account, contributed to the 'production of public opinion by the press' (Weber 1998: 118). For Weber, the press contributed to the 'Urbanization of the countryside' by displacing traditional forms of communication. At the linguistic level, the press changed 'forms of thought and expression' by encouraging particular 'reading matter', and contributing, ultimately, to the shaping of 'written and literary language'. Ultimately, Weber argued that the press had an influence on 'the state of feelings and accustomed ways of thinking of modern man, on political, literary and artistic activity, [and] on the constitution and displacement of mass judgments and mass beliefs' (Weber 1998: 119).

This preliminary report offers some insights into Weber's understanding of the social and of society in particular. We have already seen how Weber spoke of society as nothing more than a moral idea guiding the conduct of life. He reiterated this point in his preliminary report when he wrote of 'modern society' as assimilating and adapting individuals through its 'psychic means of suggestion'. In the preliminary report, Weber was very clear to point out that society was a moral idea gripped tightly by the hands of the media. From the shaping of language to the displacement of ideas and determination of newsworthiness, the press was one of the major driving forces behind public

opinion. Thus, in many ways, for Weber the press formed a major constituent of modern society. Or, at the very least, the media presented a significant portion of the objective manifestation of modern society; as he stated: ‘the Press as a component of the *objective* individuality of modern *culture*’ (Weber 1998: 111).

In the first part of his speech reiterating the preliminary report, Weber argued the need for an investigation of the sociology of the press. He used the term ‘sociology’ in reference to the ‘sociological position of the press’ – its ability to influence ‘public opinion’ and shape the conduct of modern man (Weber 1979: 178). For the investigation, he outlined a research program with a number of key questions: what did contemporary publicity look like?; what world views determined the censorship of news?; how has the development of the press as a modern capitalist enterprise determined its influence on public opinion?; whether the press used journalistic anonymity to present an institutional, supra-individual, objective news, or whether it presented its news as representative of the views of particular individual journalists; what were the demographics of the average journalist, where did they come from, what education did they have and what outside prospects did they have, especially in politics?; what effect did the condensed presentation of life, as news, have on modern man and the manner in which he perceived the modern world?; and, finally, how did the press contribute to cultural values and the desires and viewpoints of modern man?



For Weber, an investigation of the sociological role of the press would have potentially been able to reveal its role in regulating social life. More than this, it would have also been able to reveal the particular philosophies guiding the sociological role of the press. There were two philosophies, according to Weber, vying for control of the sociological function of the press: the first was a rejection of the reporting of ‘private affairs’ in favour of the reporting of public events as the constitution of news; and, the second was the emphasis on the role of the press as a ‘censor’ and summariser of those social issues deemed to be outside the reach of the law (Weber 1979: 176).

The influence of the press was a key issue for Weber. Through an investigation of both the character of the contemporary journalist and his extra-journalistic endeavours – including his ability to permeate politics and influence the direction of the state (Weber 1979: 180) – Weber hoped to ascertain whether the press was perceived by the German people as a metaphysical all-knowing force from which all reality was presented in its truthful form and he hoped to determine how this perception had changed the values of the average contemporary German individual. In short, he hoped to determine the moral capacities of the press.

*Voluntary Associational Life* (2002) constituted the second half of Weber’s speech to the GSS in 1910. In this half, he proposed an extension of the research project that he developed in his study of “*Churches*” and “*Sects*” in *North America* (1985) and *Preliminary Report on a Proposed Survey for a Sociology of*

*the Press* (1998). He suggested that the overall task of the GSS should have been ‘a sociology of voluntary associational life’ in Germany (Weber 2002: 200). In Weber’s speech, a voluntary association, such as ‘the bowling club’ or ‘the political party’, had two ideal typical traits reminiscent of ‘the sect’: first, it was ‘a combination (Einigung) of specifically qualified people and not an “institution” (Anstalt)’; and second, ‘its socio-structural principle involve[d] a rejection of those sanctions typical of an authoritarian organization (Zwangverbände) such as the state or the church’ (Weber 2002: 200-201). The second task of the GSS, according to Weber’s speech, was to investigate the manner in which an individual’s participation in a voluntary association influenced his or her general life conduct (Weber 2002: 202). Weber’s interest, here, was with the manner in which an individual might alter his or her ‘personality’ through adopting the sense of ideals and dignity of a particular association in order that he or she might be accepted by the other members of that association.

In his speech, Weber went on to explain why the study of voluntary associations might have also been relevant to the process of leadership selection and the formation of public opinion. He stated that all voluntary associations had a hierarchy of ‘domination by the minority (Minoritätsherrschaft)’. An investigation of the process by which this minority was selected, according to Weber, would have shed light on the general social process of leadership selection and the types of personality that came to dominate (Weber 2002: 203-204). The process of leadership selection and the types of personality that came to dominate voluntary

associations were, for Weber, factors that directly influenced public opinion. In expressing this view, Weber made some salient points about the formation of cultural values. He stated that the dominant personalities of voluntary associations inevitably sought to 'secure loyalty' through 'propagandistically' promoting 'grand ideas about the nature of the world (Weltanschauungsideen)' (Weber 2002: 204). However, because of 'a universal "Tragedy"... that doom[ed] every attempt to realise ideas in reality', these associations became 'objectified and occupied by careerists' (Weber 2002: 204). The result, according to Weber, was an 'unconscious influence' of ideas on the conduct of life; when careerists appropriated voluntary associations, they transformed the ideals of those associations into 'public values (überindividuellen Kulturgüter)', without acknowledging their original intentions (Weber 2002: 205, 207).

Weber was adamant that it was not the role of the sociologist, of the GSS, to praise, condemn, or offer any judgment on the sociological position of the press or any other voluntary association. So what purpose did the study of the media and voluntary associations serve? It could not have been a simple exercise in value-freedom or research for the purpose of satisfying scholarly inquisitiveness. Weber's earlier studies of the conditions of rural labourers and the stock and commodity exchanges – read in this thesis as responses to the social question – served the purposes of determining the influence of agrarian protective legislation and Polish immigration on the development and change of German culture and of determining the effects of futures trading, and arguing against the need for

agrarian protection, respectively. Similarly, his studies of the press and voluntary associational life served to clarify the interests behind certain so-called societies and their solutions to the social question.

## **Summary**

This chapter has argued that Weber limited his concept of the social to intentional, small-scale communities of exchange, associations of *Herrschaft*, voluntary associations and societies as moral ideas. When Weber formulated his concepts of communities of exchange in his early writings on legal-history, stock exchanges and rural labour, he argued that social groups were defined by their intentional nature. Later, consistent with this formulation, in an encounter with the Germanist legal-historian, Otto von Gierke, and under the influence of historical economists, Weber rejected any economic and legal concepts that portrayed society as a personality of the general will or an entity *sui generis*; he favoured a conception of society as an intentional moral idea or *Weltanschauung*. Although he did not publish an explicit solution to the social question, Weber favoured individual sovereignty over democracy and this preference influenced his subsequent studies of the social. In subsequent sociological work, from the period 1904-1910, Weber developed an Althusian approach to the social, becoming increasingly concerned with the manner in which small voluntary associations had the power to shape public opinion and propagate particular moral ideas about what society was or what society should look like. In his later career, Weber became concerned that voluntary associations controlling the press were increasingly determining public

ideas about society and consequently controlling the leadership composition of the government through their ability to shape the so-called general will. He was concerned that these associations were promoting a false sense of democracy in Germany. Political views aside, throughout his career the most consistent aspects of Weber's approach to the social question were his continual call for clarity in the various uses of social terms such as association and society, and his insistence that scholars, politicians and private entrepreneurs be forthcoming about their reasons for using those terms.

## **Conclusion**

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This thesis has discussed three contexts in which the peculiarity of Weber's political logic emerged. The first of these is the public debates about academic freedom and leadership at the end of the Great War. In these debates, Weber put forward a unique view of academic freedom, and unique ethics of leadership and nationalism. Weber's idea of academic freedom and the ability to think clearly was not just a scholarly ethic but also a major component of his ethics of political leadership. Weber stressed that political leaders during his time did not think clearly, which prevented them from grasping the true function of politics and taking responsibility for their political decisions.

The thesis has established strong similarities between Weber's ethics of leadership and the ethics of civil philosophy. Civil philosophy developed as a way of separating the moral and civil domains as distinct spheres of life, each requiring its own form of conduct. Seeking a uniquely civil domain and way of life, civil philosophy rejected Aristotelian political philosophy and metaphysics in general for relativising morality and politics, and treating them as equal contributors to the moral project of self-perfection. The civil philosophers – Pufendorf and Thomasius – argued that Aristotelian philosophy and metaphysics did not have the capacity to distinguish between moral and civil spheres and conduct. Forging his own civil sphere, Thomasius in particular used historical evidence to argue the need for a type of secular, amoral, civil conduct, and he used historical awareness and practical experience to instruct students of

jurisprudence in the art of this conduct. Weber's approach to the political, exemplified here in his view of academic freedom and in his ethics of leadership and nationalism, bares an uncanny resemblance to Thomasius's approach to the civil. The main difference is that, where Thomasius only separated the civil from the moral, Weber sought a further separation of the political from the civil and the moral. Weber did not attempt to reintroduce Aristotelian politics, or indeed any other form of Athenian politics. Rather, he employed a logic uncannily like that developed by Thomasius and in true historicist fashion, used it to redefine the political domain according to its own contemporary function and requirements.

The second context for the emergence of Weber's political logic, discussed in chapter two, was his writing on democracy, nationalism and parliament. Weber did not explicitly write of his political logic, but he did portray the peculiar function and requirements of politics as an either-or dichotomy conceptualising difference, opposition and sovereign power. Today, it is easy to view the reduction of politics to either-or dichotomies as a Schmittian phenomenon. For instance, a number of discussions in online forums and think-tank articles of the foreign policies of the Bush-led U.S. administration involve comparisons of these policies with Schmittian ideals (see for instance <http://opiniojuris.org/2008/09/21/carl-schmitt-and-emergencies-a-really-fast-comment/>; [http://www.robertamsterdam.com/2008/09/carl\\_schmitt\\_and\\_the\\_top\\_ten\\_s.htm](http://www.robertamsterdam.com/2008/09/carl_schmitt_and_the_top_ten_s.htm); and <http://www.counterpunch.org/versluis08102006.html>). The likeness of Bush's democratic foreign policy with Schmitt's friend-enemy concept

has the unfortunate effect of tarnishing all either-or dichotomies of politics with the same National Socialist brush. Had Schmitt not associated with National Socialism, and had he not subsequently been associated with Bush, then more Weber scholars may have been willing to read Weber and Schmitt in the same light: as thinkers committed to a distinction of all things political. The comparison of these two political thinkers provided in chapter two has shown that Weber was willing to use the mechanisms of democracy, nationalism and parliament pragmatically, as a means of achieving politics, whereas Schmitt simply rejected these mechanisms altogether. Whilst they had conflicting recommendations about the use of these mechanisms, Weber and Schmitt were as one with their respective acknowledgements that the nation was the best exemplifier of politics because it housed the exceptional power of sovereignty. Schmitt took this view, drawn from historical evidence and contemporary experience, and formulated it into his philosophy of law. He turned Weber's implicit political logic into a political theory whose central focus was the nation and its capacity as the last bastion of political pluralism.

There are a number of reasons why Weber resisted the temptation to turn his own political views into a political theory or philosophy. He rejected the contemporary project of theory and its teleological generalising. This did not, however, prevent him from turning theory into a conceptual model for conducting sociological studies and for drawing conclusions about those studies. Chapter three outlined three uses of Weber: theoretical, contextual and emancipative. The theoretical



uses reduce Weber's sociology and politics to a central concern with a theory of society. The contextual uses reduce it to a science of economic action and personality. The emancipative uses attempt to make them fit a general social movement of liberal freedom and individual autonomy. Chapter three argued that the commonality of these uses is their conflation of the social with the political in the works of Weber. The problem for Weber, and especially for the theoretical and emancipative uses of Weber, was that political reality was simply too historically contingent to justify its conceptual analysis. Indeed, there was a sense of urgency to Weber's political arguments and so politics, in his view, was outside the conceptual realm of his scholarship. Nevertheless, our appreciation of Weber's arguments, as presented in this thesis, is improved by comparing it with the work of specific thinkers who followed similar passions to Weber but were more inclined to conceptualise and theorise their insights. Following this approach, chapter one and chapter two placed Weber somewhere between the civil philosophy of Thomasius and the legal philosophy of Schmitt. These chapters essentially drew upon the two thinkers as ideal-types to compare with the substantial material of Weber's political arguments. By locating Weber somewhere between the historical approach of Thomasius and the political theory of Schmitt, these two chapters explained Weber's political logic without reducing it to a theory or philosophy. In comparing Weber with Schmitt, chapter two posed an important question to the emancipative uses of Weber: was Weber a liberal democrat or a liberal user of democracy? Via historical awareness and experience of the political realities of his time, Weber made a decision to use democracy

pragmatically. As far as he could see, there was no way around this; there was no way, or indeed no desire, to circumvent sovereign power. Weber did not attempt to promote his political ideas by reducing them to general laws or theories. He argued that the citizens of Germany would come to similar conclusions if they were simply given the opportunity to see things clearly.

Weber's abhorrence of consensus is unmistakable. This was not a condemnation that he reserved for the political world. Even in his engagement with the social question in Germany he was scathing of attempts to portray society as embodying particular universal values. But, even though he acknowledged that the social was fraught with both value conflict and the struggle for ideas, Weber did not see it as having the same ordering capacity as politics. Chapter four of the thesis argued that Weber placed restrictions on the social, as a source of political authority, in his substantive studies of the social question in Germany. This is the third context in which the peculiarity of Weber's political logic emerged. Weber began his commitment to portraying the social as a domain of voluntary associations early in his career when he constructed the ideal-type of communities of exchange. With this ideal-type, Weber accentuated the idea that all voluntary associations were groups of individuals who shared similar values and intentions. From this point on, throughout his engagements with the social question, Weber consistently portrayed the social as a domain of values and intentions. When confronted with the macro idea of society, he simply argued that it was nothing more than a facade created by particular associations to promote consensus about their intentions. The

problem for Weber were the two reasons he believed made it impossible to establish a civil society for Germany like the one that had been established in North America and England: first, particular private interests in Germany were promoting a false sense of democracy and manipulating public opinion or general will to benefit their own economic interests; and second, the voluntary associations required for a successful democracy such as that of North America were, in Germany, frequently appropriated by minorities who masked their own interests behind the rhetoric of group personalities and cultural values. In other words, group personalities, the general will and in some instances cultural values, were mere ideologies that masked the private interests of particular minorities. The pursuit of these interests under the rubric of society or even the state had the potential to damage the political interests of the nation. Weber favoured an identifiable sovereign power and he stressed that it was necessary to reveal the intentions of private interests operating behind the scenes of 'the general will' through persistent sociological studies of the media's manipulation of public opinion.

### **The uniqueness of Weber's political logic summarised**

The three contexts described in chapter one, two and four of the thesis each reveal a different aspect of Weber's peculiar political logic. First, the political domain, for Weber, was a practical domain requiring practical knowledge. Calling for practical knowledge, Weber asked political leaders to treat the political as a distinct domain requiring its own form of conduct, which could only be learnt

through experience and historical awareness. This was an argument similar to that of Christian Thomasius some two hundred years earlier in his successful attempt to separate the civil domain from the moral domain. Weber's separation of the political from the civil and the moral suggests that the political functioned in a way that was alien to rational administration and universal morality. The second aspect of Weber's political logic revealed in this thesis is the specific peculiarity of his political domain. Chapter two argued that the specific peculiarity of Weber's political is its contingency upon difference and opposition, which is an exceptional phenomenon not only in the legal sense but also in the sense that it is extra-civil and extra-moral. For Weber, sovereign power was the guarantor of difference and opposition and the nation, as the vehicle of sovereign power, was the primary sphere of politics. The third aspect of Weber's political logic revealed in this thesis is the manner in which he restricted the social as a source of political authority. Weber argued that the social was unable to deliver sovereign power because it too frequently masked unidentifiable interests; the social, in other words, was incapable of providing politics.

Weber's political logic is thus summarised as a treatment of the political domain on its own terms through the practical-experiential understanding of the requirements of difference and opposition. These requirements, for Weber, included nationalism, sovereign power, pragmatic use of social mechanisms and restriction of the social as a source of authority. Weber's political world was after

all relentlessly changing and it comprised the original human endeavour of conflict to which all other endeavours would succumb.

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