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Frédéric Vandenberghe

Simmel and Weber as ideal-typical founders of sociology

Abstract Max Weber and Georg Simmel are considered as ideal-typical founders of sociology. Whereas Simmel pleaded for a large conception of sociology, which would include the epistemological and metaphysical issues as well, Max Weber explicitly excluded philosophical questions from the domain of sociology. A philosophical reading of Max Weber's sociology, which uncovers his philosophy in the margins of his sociological texts, shows, however, that his sociology is predicated on a disenchanted *Weltanschauung*, a decisionistic ideology and a nominalist epistemology.

Key words critical theory · decisionism · disenchantment · epistemology · foundations · nominalism · philosophy · realism · Simmel · sociology · value-freedom · Weber

The real spiritual battles, the only ones that are meaningful in our time, are the ones that take place between a humanity that has already collapsed and one that is still standing upright, but that is fighting to maintain or to further this position.¹

What is the vocation of sociology? Can sociology be a rigorous, autonomous and value-free science, differentiated from ethics, politics and philosophy? Or is it destined to pursue the old and eternal questions about the 'good', the 'beautiful' and the 'truth', and the way we can know it, by other means? Or does it have to exclude those questions for the sake of scientificity? And if so, how can the disciplinary exclusion of those questions be scientifically justified? Those are some of the questions I want to ask in this paper, and insofar as these questions are fundamental and transcend sociology, narrowly conceived as an autonomous and rigorous science of social life, the answer is already implicit in the questioning. Sociology has thus to transcend itself and become social theory.

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Social theory is reflexive sociology. It tries to uncover reflexively the hidden epistemological, ontological and ideological presuppositions of sociology and to reconstruct them in a systematic way. Arguing with Simmel against Weber, I would like to plead in this paper for a large conception of sociology, which does not exclude but explicitly includes the more philosophical issues that any sociology implicitly presupposes. The scientific attempt to exclude those philosophical issues from sociology is self-defeating in my opinion. Every attempt to found sociology as an autonomous and self-referentially closed discipline will sooner or later run into a 'performative contradiction', because the act of founding is itself necessarily laden with philosophical and political implications. Of course, one can always try to defend a narrow conception of sociology and plead for the disciplinary exclusion of meta-sociological issues, but if one does so, one has to go all the way and exclude Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Simmel from the sociological canon as well. Thus, we arrive at a paradoxical conclusion: a sociology that wants to found itself as an autonomous scientific discipline can no longer rely on its founding fathers. It thus loses the ground it is standing on.

In this paper, Max Weber and Georg Simmel will be considered as two 'ideal-typical' founders of sociology. If Simmel explicitly recognizes the legitimacy of epistemic and metaphysical questions in sociology, Weber explicitly denies it. However, insofar as the act of founding a discipline is essentially a philosophical act with political implications (or vice versa), it is possible to expose the latent ontological, epistemological and ideological presuppositions which such an act implies. In the case of Max Weber, such an attempt may seem paradoxical at first sight, but a philosophical reading of his sociology, which uncovers his philosophy in the margins of his text, is nevertheless possible. As we will see, Weber's 'marginal philosophy' is essentially nominalist. His nominalist *Weltanschauung* is expressed both in his political metaphysics of the modern world and in his epistemology of the social sciences. The point, however, is not only to uncover hidden metaphysics, but also to explore critically their political and epistemic implications.

1 Normal science with an existentialist tinge

One cannot engage oneself in a social field or a social game without 'paradoxical illusion', without investing in it, without thinking that the game is worth one's while.² And yet, in the field of sociology, as in any other social field of organized activity, we can distinguish those who live 'of' sociology and those who live 'for' sociology.³ Those are ideal-types, however, and as conceptual utopias they can, by definition, not be found in reality. In real life, we always find a mixture of both, and

yet for an observing participant with a keen eye for 'distinction', it is not that difficult to sift sociologists and distinguish between the 'true scholar' who is pushed and pulled by a real calling, and the careerist who is bee-busy accumulating intellectual capital to sell himself or herself on the academic market-place. Love of knowledge, literally *philosophia* or *logophilia* that is what distinguishes the mere professional sociologist from the (wo)man of knowledge who is affected by Platonic 'mania'.

Max Weber himself was a passionate man, clearly driven by what Freud called the 'epistemophilic drive' (*Wißtrieb*). And yet, in his famous lecture 'Science as a Vocation', which he delivered a year before his death to students in Munich, the type of scientific work he advocates appears a bit bloodless – 'too much a matter of "grey theory"', as Rickert has aptly commented.⁴ Indeed, for Weber, the ever advancing Americanization of academic life, the progressive specialization of a fatally bureaucratized science and the concomitant fragmentation of knowledge have become impossible to eradicate. In order to attain any goal in the domain of science, one has to be a specialist nowadays, a *Fachmensch*, in possession of extremely precise and specific esoteric factual knowledge, however dry and insignificant these detailed facts may be. It is true that Weber mentions that productive science demands not only systematic work but also chance, inspiration and passionate questioning, but he makes it nevertheless clear that in the era of 'big science' the Renaissance ideal of the encyclopaedic man has been dissolved for good and replaced by the new ethos of 'matter-of-factness' (*Sachlichkeit*). Those who cannot put on their blinkers and devote themselves solely to the task at hand should stay away from science. Weber says as much: 'Renunciation of the Faustian universality of man . . . is a condition of valuable work in the modern world.'⁵

From this perspective of heroic renunciation, the Puritan actor of the *Protestant Ethic* appears as the ideal prototype for Weber's Scientific Man.⁶ Like the Calvinist entrepreneur, the scientist is to be a model of rational self-discipline, not only in a scrupulously his or her values and biases, and in suppressing the special modern vice, a fondness for 'self-expression'. The scientist has to accumulate; only his or her activity takes the form of specialized, esoteric knowledge, which will hopefully be taken up in the future by others who will advance the work. This cumulative production of knowledge may theoretically continue *ad infinitum*. Scientific knowledge is always in the process of being superseded and anyone who has achieved anything in science knows that his or her work will be out of date in 100 years' time – or even in 10.

Although the Protestant scientist pursues his or her work *sine ira ac studio*, without enthusiasm and existential anguish, the inbuilt

obsolescence of science nevertheless raises the question of the meaning of science as a vocation. But on this point modern science remains mute according to Weber. The ancient Greeks conceived of science as a pathway to 'true Being' and, above all, to the 'good life'. The pioneering scientists of the Renaissance and the Protestant naturalists believed that science was a 'pathway to God'. But who, apart from Hans Jonas and a few 'big children in university chairs', can still believe that today? Science has undermined the credibility of religious, moral and metaphysical systems which had previously endowed the world and, by extension, vocations with meaningfulness. According to Weber, science is the 'irreligious power' *par excellence*, which eradicates all infamous superstitions at their root. Modern science is highly autonomous and secular. Differentiated from ethics, religion, politics, and so on, it rests upon a set of values that it cannot justify by its own means. The proposition that 'scientific knowledge is worthy to be known' cannot be demonstrated scientifically. From a scientific standpoint, values are really senseless – 'whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must remain silent'.

The modern world is disenchanted. 'God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed Him.'⁷ As a result of this second crucifixion of the Lord, 'the ultimate, most sublime values have withdrawn from public life'.⁸ And with God, the objective or substantial content of Reason has vanished as well. Weber thinks that without a religious foundation, ethical values have become arbitrary. The possibility of a secular foundation of ethics is thus denied. If we follow Weber, we are led to believe that it is an a priori of the modern times that the ultimate ends and values cannot be determined by Reason. Reason has become subjective and formal, a functional organon of the will of power.⁹ Like science, it cannot determine the ends, but, assuming that the ends are hypothetically given, it can accurately determine the necessary means, predict the unintended consequences that the use of the means could drag along, clarify the meaning of the ends and demonstrate their internal contradictions. In one phrase: 'An empirical science can teach no one what he should do but only what he can do – and under certain circumstances, what he wants to do.'¹⁰ Consequently, the modern scientist finds himself or herself, according to Weber, in a predicament comparable with the Calvinist's: like the knowledge of secret election by God, the knowledge of objective values is inaccessible.

The problem of modern humankind is not so much that the daily activities have no meaning. The disenchantment of the world affects above all, as Ricoeur has finely noted, the 'sense of sense', the reflexive and not the direct meaning of one's activities.¹¹ The loss of meaning is a loss of moral certainty, and what we lose in certainty, we gain in freedom according to Weber. For Weber, ends and values are a matter of

faith, a matter of choice, not of science. It is true that as an advocate of the ethics of responsibility, he advocates that one should clarify one's ultimate values and discuss with lucidity the possible consequences that adherence to those values implies, but, at the end of the day, if science can help in this task of analytical clarification, it cannot, in principle, determine choice, and thus the scientist is forced to choose, in making a heroic commitment to the irrational value of rational science.¹² This is how things are in the modern world. Fate is a fact – with existential implications. 'God died: now we want – that the overman lives.'¹³ And to the person who cannot bear the fate of the modern disenchanting times, Weber has only one piece of timely advice to give: withdraw to a hermitage or some sanctuary of idealism.

All this sounds a bit like Kuhn's famous description of 'normal science' as 'puzzle-solving' – but with an existentialist and decisionistic tinge.¹⁴ And indeed, if we follow Weber's hardened categorical disjunction of the specialized sciences and philosophy, we are led to believe that, unlike humanity, the sciences set themselves only the problems that they can solve. Other problems, and above all the foundational ones, the ontological and epistemological problems, but also those that really matter, the socially and morally relevant existential problems that are not reducible to the puzzle form, are scornfully rejected as metaphysical, as the concern of another discipline, or left over to prophets, visionaries and other ideologues. 'Anyone who wants visions should go to the cinema, and anyone who wants sermons should go to the chapel.'¹⁵

Against Weber, we should, however, note that the axiom of axiological neutrality is itself highly irrational and transscientific. Axiological neutrality cannot ground itself. Weber, the 'non-specialist specialist', knows all too well that the ascetic 'ethos of the workbench' (Veblen) he is advocating is itself the result of a specific position in the domain of ethics. It may or may not be true that objective values exist – personally I believe they do – but value-freedom does not hinge on it. Science is value-free because and to the extent that it voluntarily disregards all values in order to concentrate on the world of pure things and to constitute it as a theoretically closed object-domain. The theoretical attitude of the naturalist is not the 'natural attitude', it presupposes, as Husserl says, an 'axiological epochè' that strips the objects of its value-predicates.¹⁶ As an accustomed reader of Kant's *Critiques*, Weber must know it. He is aware of the fact that his 'polytheism of values' represents a quasi-religious *Weltanschauung*, and this awareness may explain the tortured nature of his prose. Like Faust, we see him fighting with his double nature. We feel the frustration of a consciousness that knows that its deepest values are owed to religion but that its vocational commitments are to the devil.

2 The cab of reflexivity

Weber's attempt to carve out a space for an autonomous sociological scientism that owes nothing to philosophy and that is rigorously separated from it can only fail. The repressed can and will necessarily return. This is the case because sociology has never been, is not, and probably will never be a paradigmatic science, based on solid, indubitable foundations. With his characteristic dry humour, Luhmann has diagnosed the state of actual sociology as one of 'multiple paradigmatisis'.¹⁷ The crisis that is exceptional in the hard sciences is normal and, so to speak, institutionalized in the soft ones. Sociology is more than a simple discourse and less than a science. It picks up, prolongs, clarifies and systematizes the discourses that take place in the public sphere, but systematization and clarification can no more transform *doxa* into *episteme* than alchemy can transform bronze into gold. Facts are, as one philosopher has neatly put it, 'theory-laden'. Kepler, for instance, observed many of the same facts as Tycho Brahé, but because he viewed them differently, he saw different things.¹⁸ The same might be said of Marx, Weber, Durkheim or any contemporary social theorist. In the case of social theory, to scratch the surface of the text is enough to show that its author has tacitly taken a stand on unresolved metatheoretical issues, and that the stand significantly forms and informs the theories. Methodological, epistemological, ontological, ethical, ideological and other kindred issues, which are swept under the textual carpet, keep creeping up in the margins of their texts.¹⁹ The attempt to break with a supposedly 'pre-scientific' tradition of social and political philosophy has to be rejected, for it is apparent that there is a fundamental continuity with the topics of traditional theory, however much the vocabulary in which it is expressed is transformed.²⁰ Whether one wants it or not, sociology is the heir of political and moral philosophy. Donald Levine's (Straussian) assumption that sociology is a sublimated effort to deal with problems generated by the secularization of moral thought can be confirmed: sociology pursues the ends of the classic tradition by other means.²¹

In the next section, I will present Max Weber as a 'marginal philosopher' – that is, a philosopher who refuses an explicit philosophy but who recognizes its existence in the margins of his work. However, in order to clear the ground, in order to gain some leeway for the treatment of philosophical issues in Max Weber's thought, we will first consider Georg Simmel's explicit recognition that philosophy cannot be replaced by science but only displaced.

Unlike Weber, who ironically professed that he 'knew nothing about philosophy', Simmel was a philosopher by profession. He has not only written important monographs on Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, but I would even go as far as to say that his sociology can be properly

understood only against the background of his vitalist metaphysics, as presented in his 'philosophical testament'.²² Apart from their respective professional backgrounds, Simmel and Weber differ above all in their style. The Simmelian spirit is the '*esprit de finesse*', the spirit of subtlety, refinement, tact, delicacy and perceptivity. It contrasts rather agreeably with Weber's '*esprit de sérieux*', his stern and rigorous scientific 'spirit of geometry'. Reminding one of the prescientific amateur who looks for variety and variegation rather than systematic variation among the observed phenomena, Simmel's mind freely wanders from one object to the other and in the same way as Husserl could take any intentional object – the blossoming apple tree in the garden, the ink-stand on his desk – as a 'transcendental guide' for the analysis of the noematic-noetic structures of consciousness,²³ so Simmel could, as it were, weave his whole philosophy of life out of the perception of a simple chair or the handle of a pot.²⁴ For Simmel nothing is too trivial. Everything is linked to the essential, and even a single detail can reveal the global meaning of life. What is apparently considered *sub specie momenti* is in fact interpreted *sub specie aeternitatis*. Not a bit hampered by the contiguity of disciplinary boundaries, he passes easily from philosophy to sociology, from sociology to aesthetics, from aesthetics to ethics, from ethics to psychology, and from psychology to history. In a passage which should, or at any rate could, be printed on the first page of any textbook on social theory, he openly declares that it is completely vain to ask whether his investigations belong to the realm of sociology or to philosophy:

The question whether those investigations . . . belong to social philosophy or whether they somehow already belong to sociology is rather superfluous. Even if they form a border-region of both methods – the certainty of the sociological problem and its delimitation with regard to the mode of philosophical questioning does not suffer more from that than the determinacy of the concepts of the day and the night suffer from the fact that there's a twilight, or than the concepts of the human being and the animal suffer from the fact that maybe one can find intermediary stages which unify the characteristics of both in such a fashion that we cannot separate them conceptually from one another.²⁵

Like Weber and Durkheim, Simmel wanted to 'found' sociology as a relatively autonomous discipline. To found a discipline entails an act of demarcation that indicates the subject-matter peculiar to the science, the kind of methods and procedures that are appropriate and the norms that are to be invoked in judging its results. These demarcations then become presuppositions of subsequent practice. In 'The Field of Sociology', which constitutes the opening chapter of his *Grundfragen der Soziologie*, the so-called 'small sociology' Simmel was engaged in founding. In order to delimit the nature of sociology he starts off with some general ontological and epistemological considerations on the nature of

society, and concludes, first, that society is not a concrete substance but a process of association, that is, an ongoing process of spiritual interaction between individuals that binds them together, and, second, that to form its object, sociology, like any other science, relies on a method, that is, on processes of abstraction and synthesis. 'The following insight: that man in his whole nature and in all his expressions is determined by the fact that he lives in interaction with other men is bound to lead to a new way of consideration in all that are called the human sciences.'²⁶ From this very general insight that all domains of life find their origin and their foundation in the interactions between individuals, Simmel proceeds to a distinction between three basic problem areas of and for sociology. The first problem area is 'general sociology': it studies the whole of historical life insofar as this is formed socially. The second problem area is 'pure or formal sociology': it investigates the forms of association that themselves make society by structuring the interactions between individuals. As examples of such forms, which may be exhibited by the most diverse groups, he mentions superiority and subordination, competition, imitation, the division of labour, and the formation of parties. All this is a bit vague and woolly, and clearly insufficient to found the two special sciences: general sociology, which is demarcated by its object, and formal sociology, which is specified by its method.²⁷ All the same, more important for our considerations is the delimitation of a third problem area: philosophical sociology. Indeed, unlike Weber, Simmel recognizes and acknowledges that the sociological problem-constellation transcends itself in the direction of philosophical reflection. Reflexivity cannot be used as a convenient cab that one can send home once one has arrived.²⁸ Consequently, one has to broaden one's concept of sociology to include in it the philosophical questions that are, so to speak, connected to the lower and the upper boundaries of sociology in the narrower sense. One boundary marks the domain of the cognitive preconditions of the discipline, its epistemic foundations. The other marks the domain of the presentation (*Darstellung*) of research (*Forschung*), where the necessarily fragmentary contents of positive knowledge become augmented into a world-picture and related to the totality of life. Here is what Simmel says about the two domains:

Like every other science which aims at the immediate understanding of the given, social science too is surrounded by two philosophical domains: One of these covers the conditions, fundamental concepts, and presuppositions of the specific research, which cannot be taken care of by research itself, since it is based on them. In the other field, this research is specific research is brought to completions and connections, and related to questions and concepts that have no place in experience and in immediate objective knowledge. The first field is the epistemology of the particular discipline, the second field is their metaphysics.²⁹

Armed with this enrichment of the field of sociology, legitimated by the legitimacy of philosophical questioning in sociology, we can now proceed to an analysis of Weber's philosophical nominalism, as it is expressed both in his political metaphysics of the disenchanting world and in his constructivist epistemology. In the first case, nominalism takes the form of a denial of the existence of objective values; in the second case, it appears in the form of a reduction of social reality to a set of analytical constructions which the sociologist arbitrarily imposes on this reality.

3 Marginal philosophy

1 The ontological politics of the disenchanting world

Taking up a suggestion by Sheldon Wolin, we can locate Weber within the tradition of 'epical theorizing'. This form of theorizing is distinct both from that of the 'empirical theorist', who wishes for theory to correspond with the world, and from that of the analytical philosopher, who wishes theory to be an elucidation of concepts. In Wolin's words, in epical theory 'concepts, symbols and language are fused into a great political gesture towards the world, a thought-deed inspired by the hope that now or some day action will be joined to theory and become the means for making a great theoretical statement in the world'.³⁰ And furthermore, theorists within this tradition work on the assumption that the impetus to theorizing comes from the problematic or crisis-ridden nature of the political world rather than from the state of crisis in theories about the world. 'The epical theorist has been preoccupied with a particular magnitude of problems created by actual events or states of affairs in the world rather than with problems related to deficiencies in theoretical knowledge.'³¹ In brief: epical theorists do not merely want to interpret the world in different ways, they want to change it – by giving it a different interpretation.

The problem, however, with the characterization of Weber as an epical theorist is that his own methodological strictures lead to a refusal to make, and even to admit, the necessity for a coherent and explicit political theory, with the result that it is expelled to the margins of his work. The strange and paradoxical quality of Weber's thought can, however, be understood once we realize that what we are presented with is the construction of an 'epical denial of the possibility of an epical theory for the modern age'.³² Indeed, Weber's account of the process of disenchantment of the world, as we can find it, for instance, in his famous *Zwischenbetrachtung*,³³ is not just a historical reconstruction of the process of relative autonomization of the value-spheres and of

secularization. Disenchantment is much more, and much more radical, than secularization, by which contents of a religious nature are actualized in the profane world while remaining founded in a relation with transcendence. Insofar as disenchantment dissolves any reference to any possible transcendence whatsoever, whether that is God, Being, History, Mankind, or Reason, it is the end of *religio* as such and the beginning of an era of absolute nihilism in which any superior instance of judgment by means of which we could possibly justify our actions, or judge the actions of others, is simply and purely dissolved. What appears as a historical reconstruction of the autonomization of the value-spheres is, in fact, a historical destruction of the unity of Reason and, thus, of metaphysics. The different value-spheres are said to follow their own rigorous and irreducible laws (*Eigengesetzlichkeiten*), thus fracturing the cosmological 'canopy' which somehow assured, if not their unity, at least their possible convergence. The *ens et verum et bonum et pulchrum convertuntur* of the scholastics have been replaced, once and for all, by a universal and mortal struggle among the gods: 'Since Nietzsche, Weber says, we realise that something can be beautiful, not only in spite of the aspect in which it is not good, but rather in that very aspect.'³⁴ From this perspective, Weber's often quoted statement that 'only two ways are open: Hegel or our way of proceeding',³⁵ that is, Hegel or Nietzsche, assumes a particular relevance. It reveals that Weber is engaged in a paradoxical form of 'ontological politics'. This form is paradoxical, because if, following Wolin, we define ontological politics as the kind of politics that is 'preoccupied with gaining access to the highest kind of truth, which is about the ultimate nature of ultimate being',³⁶ then it appears that for Weber the highest kind of truth is that there is no philosophical truth, or, better, that truth is a purely subjective affair, a matter of 'demonic' decisions which are beyond any rational argument. It is true that Weber's ethics of responsibility is an ethics that recognizes ultimate values and that advocates a formally rational discussion of competing values in terms of their coherence and the possibility of perverse consequences, but if such discussions can clarify one's ethical positions and lead to a prudent decision, they cannot properly found the ultimate values. In this sense, ultimate values remain arbitrary. Although rational discussions of the relation between ultimate values and the means to realize them precede decisions, they do not exclude decisions. On the contrary, insofar as rational discussions reveal the plurality and the arbitrariness of ultimate values, they also reveal and imply the necessity of an ultimate decision, which is beyond rational discussion.

Moreover, it should be noted that the Weberian destruction of metaphysics is itself highly philosophical. His Nietzschean attempt to get rid once and for all of Hegelian philosophies of history is itself grounded in a tragic philosophy of history which presents the disenchantment of the

world as the 'fate of our age'. This is the central message of the 'rationalization thesis':

The fate (*Schicksal*) of our age, with its characteristic rationalization and intellectualization and, above all: the disenchantment of the world, is that the ultimate, most sublime values have withdrawn from public life, either into the transcendental realm of mystical life or into the brotherhood of immediate personal relationships between individuals.³⁷

But fate, of course, is not an empirical category: it is a metaphysical one. Fate is a form of 'emplotment' (Ricoeur) which speculatively recollects the chaotic fragments of reality into a closed totality, which reorders the contingent events in an ordered onto-teleological series that retrospectively endows the individual events with meaning. In the case of Weber's metaphysical historicism, it seems, at first sight, as if the category of fate strips the individual events of their objective meaning. A closer look reveals, however, that while fate indeed eliminates objective meaning from the events, it opens at the same time the possibility, if not the necessity, to suffuse them with the common glow of subjective meaning. We see Weber struggling to create a world – his world – without meaning, and without God. And at precisely this point, the anti-prophet once more reveals himself to be a prophet.³⁸ The tortured quality of his thought, the pathos of despair reveals unintentionally that he intends his prophecy of doom to be self-refuting. In this sense, Weber is not a cultural pessimist.³⁹ Unlike a Tönnies or a Horkheimer, he is not sentimentally longing for a return to the 'beautiful totality' (Hegel's *schöne Totalität*) of the ethical world of a closed community. No, he wants the individual to be free to act responsibly, to take the heroic stand of the overman, and to infuse the world with meaning. This is neither a call to nor a task for the 'last men' of 'Zarathustra's Prologue'⁴⁰ – it is an appeal for, and to, the *virtuosi* of politics. That they act with faith against fate, unblock the tracks, go against the grain of history and make it deviate from its road to serfdom: this is the ultimate call of an epic theorist who denies the possibility of epic theory. Once this is understood, we also understand that his defence of value-freedom is itself far from value-free. Value-freedom is not only impossible, but also not desirable; were we to act as if it were a possibility, it would only deepen the disenchanted emptiness of the modern world.

2 The ideological complementarity of value-freedom and decisionism

If we look at Weber's demand for axiological neutrality as itself founded upon a normative judgement, then, following Weber's own argument, we are forced to inquire into its foundation or, maybe more correctly, its

justification. Against Weber, Albert and Popper, Apel and Habermas have pointed out that Weber's statement according to which the value of science cannot be justified leads to some kind of 'performative contradiction'.⁴¹ Science somehow justifies itself. This is the case, because science is always and necessarily a communal enterprise, not a solipsistic endeavour. Science presupposes logic, and logic presupposes an ethics, because the logical validity of an argument cannot be controlled without presupposing, counterfactually, an unlimited communicating community of scientists capable of reaching some intersubjective understanding and the formation of a consensus. The link between science and ethics is thus an analytical one, and, once this is understood, it is not that difficult to show, for instance, that the radical fallibilists (Popper and Albert) presuppose norms of falsification, which cannot be falsified themselves, without performative self-contradiction. *Pace* Popper and Weber, one does not have to decide for science or Reason. Reason is not only a value, it is a fact (Kant's *Faktum der Vernunft*), and science reflexively founds itself insofar as it ultimately, necessarily and transcendently presupposes Reason. Weber's opposition between facts and values is thus a spurious one, due to his premature decision hastily to get out of the cab of reflexivity. This suppression of the naturalist fallacy, according to which one cannot infer values from facts, does not affect, however, the regulative ideal of the objectivity of science. Science aims indeed at objective truth. It is thus not so much the axiological neutrality that is problematic, as the decisionism on which it is founded. Axiological neutrality and transcendental normativity do not exclude one another, but they do include each other, as objective science is ultimately founded in Reason.

We can leave to philosophers the question whether the self-foundation of Reason is transcendental, as Apel claims, or universal, as Habermas claims, or historical, as Castoriadis would claim, and move back to more sociological considerations on the ideological complementarity of value-free objectivism, existential decisionism and anti-democratic technocratism.⁴² We have seen that Weber excluded value-judgements from the realm of science, allegedly because science is only concerned with factual, logical and technical issues (the means) and has, in principle, nothing to say about practical issues (the ends), which are not amenable to truth.⁴³ Values are subjective, they belong to the demonic realm of pure choice. Values are like colours or like tastes: one can no more argue that blue is nicer than red than one can argue that civilization is better than cannibalism.⁴⁴ On this point, one just has to decide, and Carl Schmitt reminds us that decision is the exact opposite of discussion: 'Decision', he pointedly says, 'that means [arbitrarily] cutting off discussions, argumentation.'⁴⁵ But if this is the case, then an artful division of labour between the scientific analysis of the means and

the political decision imposes itself in the realm of the *res publica*. The 'erudites without practical intelligence' (Vico) can pronounce themselves on the economy and the efficacy of the necessary means, but they have to leave to the politicians the determination of the ends that are to be reached, so that it is they who decide, in function of their beliefs, their interests, or their personal tastes, which ends should be pursued. Thus, here where value-free objectivism and existential decisionism join hands, we see that an increase in rationality on one side goes together with fundamental irrationalism on the other. Meanwhile, however, the technical rationalization and scientificization of our civilization have progressed to the point where they have got a hold on the ends themselves. Under the Weberian pretence of ethical relativism and the axiological neutrality of the sciences, the decisionists have first subtracted the determination of the ends to scientific discussion, only to find out later that the subordination of the ends to the means has been converted in the simple inversion of the means and the ends. This is the point where the decisionistic model of politics gives way to the technocratic model, where the technical and systemic constraints of the technocrats eliminate every alternative choice and impose themselves to the detriment of the power of decision-making held by the politicians themselves. In this cybernetic nightmare, values and ends are reduced to means, and the relation between science and politics is simply reversed. Scientists decide and politicians follow track, as the nuclear politics of the risk society and the recent British BSE scandal have shown only too clearly.⁴⁶ The flagrant opposition of the decisionistic and the technocratic models should not hide, however, the disdain for the citizens and democracy which they have in common. If the decisionistic model reduces the role of the volatile citizens to the selection of more or less charismatic politicians by acclamation in periodical elections, the technocratic model does, in principle, no longer need the unenlightened citizens as such, unless it is to inform them about the rational decisions which have been taken. Power no longer emanates from the community; in fact, it no longer needs the community. In both cases, *la politique*, as we say in French, that is, politics in the classical sense of the word, understood as the rational determination of the 'good life' by means of public discussion, is reduced to *le politique*, that is, to politics in the contemporary sense of the word, understood as that which happens in the political subsystem of a 'centreless' society.⁴⁷

But let us get back to Weber. Had he lived long enough, he would probably have been one of the staunchest critics of the depoliticizing tendencies of our technocratic age. His advocacy of value-freedom was a double-edged sword. Using Isaiah Berlin's classic distinction between 'positive' and 'negative' freedom, we could say that it aims, on the one hand, to free rational science 'from' irrational value-judgements and, on

the other, to give politicians the freedom 'to' pursue passionately their private values in the public sphere.⁴⁸ As a result of the disenchantment of the world, which Landshut has correctly defined as the 'progressive destruction of any generally binding force in the public sphere',⁴⁹ the values have withdrawn from the public to the private sphere. Playing the Habermasian advocate, we could ask whether one could not consider the possibility that discussions would take place in the private sphere where the values of the one and the other would be submitted to a critical test to see whether either could gain the factual consent of those who are present and, counterfactually, even of those who are absent, leading thus to the re-establishment of values that are presumably objectively valid. Weber, however, explicitly pre-empts such a possibility: 'It is absolutely excluded', he says, 'that in this way, precisely because it goes in the opposite direction, we could arrive at any normative ethics or found the obligatory character of any imperative. Everybody knows that such discussions, to the extent that they apparently give us the impression of "relativism", are an obstacle to this goal.'⁵⁰ We are thus fatally left with demonism in the private sphere and decisionism in the public sphere.

Not incidentally, this decisionism also explains his advocacy of a plebiscitary democracy and his pleadings for the installation of a strong parliament. Liberal democracy no more represents a value in itself for Weber than it does for Schumpeter.⁵¹ If he pleads for parliamentary democracy, which he revealingly classes in *Economy and Society* as a sub-type of charismatic domination, it is not because he wants to safeguard democratic values; no, it is for purely pragmatic reasons.⁵² First, he does so because he thinks that only a strong parliament can control the administration and, secondly and more importantly, because he considers that a parliamentary regime constitutes the best guarantee and the best means to recruit a political charismatic leader (*Führer*), endowed with a strong personality, passion, a sense of proportion, and enough courage to take responsibility for the violent consequences that the use of diabolical power in politics inevitably entails.⁵³ That his attachment to democratic institutions has nothing whatsoever to do with the republican principle of the sovereignty of the people, is clearly and brutally revealed in his confession to Professor Ehrenburg: 'Forms of constitution are for me technical means like any other machinery. I'd be just as happy to take the side of the monarch against parliament, if only he were a *politician* or showed signs of becoming one.'⁵⁴ For Weber, the ideal of participatory democracy has no attraction as such. Invariably, he talks about the electorate of the modern mass democracies in deprecating terms which are much closer to the crowd-psychology of the 19th century than to the sociology of the so-called 'new social movements'. For Weber, the choice of alternatives is not between power exercised by the people and power exercised over the people, but is between power

exercised over the people by a charismatic leader and power exercised over them by a bureaucratic administration without a leader.⁵⁵ Weber was thus not a democrat at heart, but notwithstanding his strong inclination towards 'caesarism' and all his affinities with the proto-fascist decisionism of Carl Schmitt, the queen's counsel of the Third Reich, we should nevertheless be wary of committing the paralogism of the *reductio ad Hitlerum* (Leo Strauss). After all, Weber was a liberal in despair, defending the rule of law against those who wanted to manipulate the law for political ends. However, against Weber, and somehow also against Marx, I think that as sociologists and as responsible citizens we should take democracy seriously and stay tuned to the normative dimension of politics, as envisaged by the classics. Political philosophy mediates between faith and positive science. If a normative politics without sociology is empty, sociology without a normative vision of the 'good life' is equally blind.

3 The antinomies of Weber's nominalist thought

Adjacent to sociology in the narrow sense, Georg Simmel distinguished, as we have seen, two fields of philosophical sociology: namely, on the upper border, social metaphysics and, on the lower one, social epistemology. In Weber's case, the continuity between his ontological politics of the disenchanted world and his epistemology of the social sciences is assured by the nominalist *Weltanschauung* which we not only find in his ethical doctrine but which is also sedimented in his epistemological and his methodological writings.⁵⁶ If nominalism appears in the ethical-political domain in the form of a denial of the existence of objective values, it expresses itself in the epistemological domain as a denial of the objective existence of social facts.

It has often been noted by Weberian scholars that there is a curious tension, if not a 'fundamental incompatibility', between the methodological precepts Weber explicitly advocates in his methodological writings and the ones he implicitly applies in his substantive research.⁵⁷ I think that the root of this antinomy between theory and practice can be found in Weber's profound and debilitating nominalism. It is the result of the incommensurability which exists between the implicit ontology of the reflexive philosopher and the operational one of the working sociologist. Cassirer has noted in this context that 'the conditions of scientific production differ from those of critical reflection'.⁵⁸ And indeed, given that we cannot use our intellectual functions to construct the reality of experience and at the same time submit them to a critical investigation, the nominalism of the philosopher enters into a serious collision with the realism of the working sociologist. Whenever sociologists are doing research or developing a theory, they necessarily make,

whether they want to do so or not, ontological affirmations – in a vaguely Hegelian way they talk about ‘stratification’, ‘revolutions’, ‘political systems’ and so on, assuming that those abstractions correspond to something real out there. Philosophers or, given that philosophers don’t really seem to care about sociology, philosophically inclined sociologists, when they critically discuss and analyse the theories of others, take a Kantian posture in order to debunk them: they often charge that sociologists confound categories of thinking with the things themselves, committing thus the ‘fallacy of the transcendental subreption’.⁵⁹ The solution to this collision of ontological discourses is to adopt, from the very start, the position of transcendental realism and to adapt reflexively its concepts to the epistemological criticism, so as to avoid the fatal error of reification.⁶⁰ Weber, however, stays on the level of reflexive criticism and, thus, it should come as no surprise that he gets caught in a ‘performative contradiction’ – saying one thing and doing another at the same time.

After this general discourse on method, let us look now a bit more closely at some of the tensions in Weber’s thought. I will quickly discuss three of them.

The first tension is to be found in his methodological individualism. Weber’s methodological individualism is, in fact, an ontological nominalism, which is obliquely linked to his ethical nominalism. The main tenet of methodological individualism is of a reductionist nature: Society does not exist – only individuals are real. The so-called ‘social structures’ can and should be reduced to the individual actions of which they are the aggregated result. Only thus can one avoid the substantialist trap of the ‘fallacy of misplaced concreteness’ (Whitehead) which consists in attributing existence and causal efficacy to such abstract social entities as ‘the State’, ‘the Church’, etc.⁶¹

This reductive ‘eliminative’ individualism can be linked indirectly to Weber’s disenchanted view of the world. Borrowing Torrance’s provocative formula, we could say that Weber’s methodological individualism represents a highly sublimated version of ‘methodological existentialism’.⁶² Indeed, in the post-cosmological order, objective values have become subjective. And given that meaning is no longer inscribed in the objective structures of the disenchanted universe, the individual is indeed ‘suspended in webs of significance he has himself spun’.⁶³ At the end of the day, the only thing we can understand is the demonic choice by which the individual gives meaning to his or her actions and his or her life as a whole: ‘The fruit of the tree of knowledge, which is distasteful to the complacent but which is, nonetheless, inescapable, consists in the insight that every single important activity and ultimately life as a whole . . . is a series of ultimate decisions through which the soul, as in Plato, chooses his own fate, i.e. the meaning of its activity and existence.’⁶⁴ This

reference to Plato's *Phaedrus* masks in fact a reference to Nietzsche and his manly ideal of 'personality'. The Nietzschean imperative to freely choose 'the demon who holds the strings of your life' is still dimly expressed in the reductionist maxims of Weber's methodological individualism.

In his substantive research, however, and especially in his sociology of domination, Weber deviates seriously from his methodological existentialism and, quite often, we come across deterministic analyses which Marx, and maybe even Althusser, could have subscribed. The individuals no longer appear as if free: their choices seem to be pretty much predetermined by structural constraints of a material nature. Thus, the ontological individualism gives way to some kind of structuralism, and Weber ends up adopting the realist position that he had rejected in his more epistemological moods.

The second tension is linked to the first one and arises in his interpretative sociology. Interpretative sociology aims to recapture the subjectively intended meaning which the acting individual attaches to his or her behaviour – be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Like anyone else, apart, of course, from the subject, the sociologist has no direct access to the mind of others. And given that the sociologist cannot grasp immediately the subjective meaning that the individual attaches to his or her actions, it is necessary to construct an ideal-type of the hypothetical meanings or motivations that would explain the observed course of action. So far so good, but the problem arises when Weber subsequently tends to reduce this understanding of motifs to the understanding of purposively rational action (*zweckrationales Handeln*), sliding thus from a hermeneutically sensitive methodological individualism to the purely utilitarian one which is nowadays advocated and promoted by the world-wide movement of the rational choice theorists. Talcott Parsons' great critique of utilitarianism in his 1937 'Charter' (Camic) for a multidimensional theory of action remains unsurpassed and is more than useful in reminding us that, in that case, there is no real need any more to recapture the meanings which the individual subjectively attaches to his or her action.⁶⁵ If the ends and the values are given, one has only to know the conditions of action and interpolate an algorithm to determine the means. Like Weber's lawyer, the actor is reduced to a machine in which one has to enter the conditions and the calculations at the top, so that the resulting course of purposively rational actions can be spat out at the bottom. Action becomes perfectly rational, and predictable; meanings become largely superfluous, and rhetorical, serving merely as a spiritual supplement for a soulless world.

The third tension between theory and practice arises in Weber's theory of ideal-types. Weber introduced the ideal-types as a device to get a conceptual grasp on the empirical manifold. Reality is ontologically infinite

and cannot be grasped in its totality. The scientist who wants to study reality has to delimit his or her object carefully and can do so on the basis of his or her own knowledge interests (*Erkenntnisinteresse*). Just like the book-fancier who enters a library or a bookshop, he or she has to select, on the basis of personal evaluations, that limited fragment of reality of interest to him or her that will become his or her object of study. Ideal-types are conceptual reconstructions of reality. They do not mirror reality but offer a model of it. They are analytical constructions, which the sociologist uses to order and to get a conceptual grasp on the empirical manifold of the social world. They should in no case be identified with reality. Their function is purely heuristic, not constitutive; and sliding from a regulative use to a constitutive use of the ideal-types can only lead to their conceptual reification, which is to be avoided at all costs.

A closer look at Weber's ideal-types reveals, however, a new tension between his theory and his practice. Once more, he has been led astray by his nominalist presuppositions. Indeed, every page of *Economy and Society* unwillingly bears testimony to the fact that his ideal-types are not just arbitrary constructions of the sociologist. Properly speaking, they are 'reconstructions', which Weber obtained by a process of critical abstraction out of an immense amount of historical and comparative material. Moreover, they are not just the result of Weber's contingent valuations: as such, they already are impregnated by the valuations of his fellows. They are, to use the fashionable language of the radical constructivists, 'social constructions', that is, categorical devices which the actors (the sociologists included, of course) use in their everyday life to orient themselves in the social world.⁶⁶ Or to say the same in more philosophical language, ideal-types are not just the 'analytical constructs' which the transcendental idealist imposes on the chaos of the empirical manifold but are 'synthetic constructs' which have an objective existence, both for the professional and the lay sociologists, who continually, cognitively, normatively and even existentially (insofar as they identify themselves with them), reconstitute them, constituting thereby the social world as a meaningful world.

Finally, let me note that the main aim of this critique of Weber's ethical and epistemological nominalism was to draw the attention of the sociologist to the potential implications of hidden philosophical and ideological presuppositions. Starting with the issue of decisionism, one could, of course, shrug the shoulders and claim that this foundational issue is best left to philosophers, but insofar as it can have far-reaching political implications, this strategy of diversion works only if one accepts the radical disjunction between the role of the sociologist and the one of the well-informed citizen. But this disjunction does not hold. Whether he or she wants it or not, his or her sociological positions implicitly are political positions. This does not mean, however, that epistemic

categories can be reduced to ideological ones and that sociology has to become openly political, but is a call for vigilance that is at the same time an invitation to reflect on ethical and political issues and to join the discussions which take place in the public sphere. Moving now to the issue of epistemological nominalism, I would like to stress that my reconstructive criticism of Weber's epistemological nominalism does not aim to correct his practice but rather to deconstruct his false interpretation of a correct practice. Indeed, assuming that sociology is a critical discipline, which pursues the great questions and the tasks of classical theory by other means, I wanted to hint at the possibility and the necessity of developing a critical realist theory of social structures which is phenomenologically and hermeneutically sensitive enough to avoid the error of reification. In my opinion, that is what we need if we want to re-enchant the disenchanting world.

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Notes

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- 1 E. Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, in *Husserliana*, Vol. VI (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), p. 13.
- 2 In order to avoid utilitarian connotations, Bourdieu has recently advanced Huizinga's concept of *illusio* (from *in* and *ludere*) as an alternative to the concept of interest to thematize the libidinal investment which the entrance to any social field presupposes. Cf. P. Bourdieu, *Raisons Pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), pp. 151–3 and *Méditations pascaliennes* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), pp. 22–4.
- 3 For this distinction between 'living of' and 'living for', cf. M. Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, in *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 17 (Tübingen: J. P. Mohr, 1992), pp. 169 ff.
- 4 H. Rickert, 'Max Weber's View of Science', in P. Lassman, I. Velody and H. Martins (eds) *Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation'* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 80.
- 5 M. Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der 'Geist' des Kapitalismus* (Bodenheim: Neue Wissenschaftliche Bibliothek, 1993), p. 153.

- 6 Cf. S. Wolin, 'Max Weber: Legitimation, Method, and the Politics of Theory', *Political Theory* 9(3): 401–24, especially pp. 412 ff.
- 7 F. Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, §125, in *Werke* (Schlechta), Vol. II (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1969), p. 127.
- 8 Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, in *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 17, p. 109.
- 9 This is the main theme of Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), especially pp. 3–57. Explicitly and rightly, he places Weber in the subjectivist tradition: 'Max Weber adhered so definitely to the subjectivistic trend that he did not conceive of any rationality – not even a "substantial" one by which man can discriminate one end from another. If our drives, intentions, and finally our ultimate decisions must a priori be irrational, substantial reason becomes an agency merely of correlation and is therefore itself essentially "functional"' (p. 6, n.).
- 10 M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen: J. B. Mohr, 1985), p. 151.
- 11 P. Ricoeur, 'Préface', in P. Bourretz, *Les promesses du monde. Philosophie de Max Weber* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 12.
- 12 As an adept of an ethics of responsibility, Weber does indeed include the possibility of a discussion of the possible consequences of an act insofar as it enters into conflict with the ultimate values which the actor pursues. The point I want to make, however, is that the ultimate values as such are beyond any rational discussion. From this perspective, Schluchter's admirable attempt to push Weber's ethics of responsibility in the direction of Habermas's discourse ethics appears as an overinterpretation which wilfully underplays the Nietzschean overtones of Weber's decisionism. Cf. W. Schluchter, *Religion und Lebensführung*, Vol. 1, *Studien zu Max Webers Kultur und Werttheorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 200–73, especially pp. 225 ff., and pp. 314ff.
- 13 F. Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, in *Werke*, Vol. II, p. 523.
- 14 T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), Ch. 4.
- 15 M. Weber, 'Vorbemerkung', in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Vol. I (Tübingen: J. B. Mohr, 1988), p. 14.
- 16 E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischer Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, in *Husserliana IV*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952), pp. 1–27.
- 17 N. Luhmann, 'Handlungstheorie und Systemtheorie', in *Soziologische Aufklärung 3* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1991), p. 50.
- 18 See Norman Hanson's wonderful 'philosophical novel': *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 5 ff.
- 19 For a full inventory of metatheoretical issues, see J. C. Alexander, *Theoretical Logic in Sociology*, Vol. 1, *Positivism, Presuppositions, and Current Controversies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
- 20 See W. Hennis, *Politik und praktische Philosophie. Schriften zur politischen Theorie* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1977), pp. 1–130.

- 21 See D. Levine, *Visions of the Sociological Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 101–2.
- 22 Cf. G. Simmel, *Lebensanschauung. Vier metaphysische Kapitel* (Munich: Düncker & Humblot, 1918).
- 23 E. Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, in *Husserliana*, Vol. I (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), §21.
- 24 For ‘simulations’ on the handle of a pot, cf. G. Simmel, ‘Der Henkel. Ein ästhetischer Versuch’, in *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901–1908, Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 7, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 345–50. In a critical comparison with Bloch, who wrote an essay on a jug, Adorno accuses Simmel of superficial projective philosophizing ‘on’ the object instead of dialectically philosophizing ‘in’ the object, as Bloch supposedly did. Cf. T. W. Adorno, ‘Henkel, Krug und frühe Erfahrung’, in *Noten zur Literatur, Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 556–66. The question remains, however, whether Adorno himself was not guilty of projecting his reifying metaphysics of a scarred life onto or into the concrete objects he analysed.
- 25 G. Simmel, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, in *Gesamt-ausgabe*, Vol. II (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 61.
- 26 G. Simmel, *Grundfragen der Soziologie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970), p. 16.
- 27 For a reconstruction of Simmel’s formal sociology, allow me to refer to my book *Une histoire critique de la sociologie allemande. Aliénation et réification*. Vol. 1, *Marx, Simmel, Weber, Lukács* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997), Ch. 3.
- 28 Schopenhauer applied the metaphor of the cab to the law of causality in his polemics with Thomas Browne. Cf. A. Schopenhauer, *Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes von zureichende Gründe*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. III (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 53. Weber picked it up in his *Politics as a Vocation* and applied it both to the ethics of the Gospel and to the Marxist interpretation of history. Cf. Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, pp. 234 and 246. Of late, it has been rediscovered by Beck, who has used it against the postmodernists (‘Modernity is not a cab . . .’). Cf. U. Beck, *Politik in der Risikogesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 193.
- 29 Simmel, *Grundfragen der Soziologie*, p. 30.
- 30 S. Wolin, *Hobbes* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), p. 8.
- 31 S. Wolin, ‘Political Theory as a Vocation’, *American Political Science Review* 63 (1969): 1079.
- 32 P. Lassman and I. Velody, ‘Max Weber on Science, Disenchantment and the Search for Meaning’, in P. Lassman, I. Velody and H. Martins (eds) *Max Weber’s ‘Science as a Vocation’* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 172.
- 33 M. Weber, ‘Zwischenbetrachtung: Theorie der Stufen und Richtungen religiöser Weltablehnung’, in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Vol. I, pp. 536–73.
- 34 Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, p. 99.
- 35 This famous ‘off-the-record’ statement has significantly been placed by a

- French philosopher as an epigraph to a comparative analysis of Hegel's and Weber's political philosophy. Cf. C. Colliot-Thélène, *Le désenchantement de l'Etat. De Hegel à Max Weber* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1992).
- 36 Wolin, 'Max Weber: Legitimation, Method, and the Politics of Theory', p. 403.
- 37 Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, pp. 109–10.
- 38 On Weber's self-identification with the prophet Jeremiah, see A. Szakolczai, *Max Weber and Michel Foucault. Parallel Life-Works* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 13–19.
- 39 Cf. S. Seidman, 'Modernity, Meaning and Cultural Pessimism in Max Weber', in P. Hamilton (ed.) *Max Weber: Critical Assessments 1*, Vol. 4 (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 153–65.
- 40 Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, p. 284.
- 41 Cf. K. O. Apel, 'Das a priori der Kommunikationsgesellschaft und die Grundlagen der Ethik. Zum Problem einer rationalen Begründung der Ethik im Zeitalter der Wissenschaft', in *Transformation der Philosophie*, Vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), pp. 358–435 and J. Habermas, 'Gegen einen positivistischen halbierten Rationalismus', in T. W. Adorno et al., *Der Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand, 1972), pp. 235–66. For a discussion of the debate between Habermas, Apel, Popper and Albert, cf. the second part of S. Mesure and A. Renaut, *La guerre des dieux. Essai sur la querelle des valeurs* (Paris: Grasset, 1996).
- 42 The ensuing discussion is based on the following articles of J. Habermas, 'Dogmatismus, Vernunft und Entscheidung – Zu Theorie und Praxis in der verwissenschaftliche Zivilisation', in *Theorie und Praxis. Sozialphilosophische Studien* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963), pp. 307–35; and 'Verwissenschaftlichte Politik und öffentliche Meinung', in *Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie'* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 120–45.
- 43 The basic tenet of 'ethical cognitivism' is precisely the opposite: practical questions are amenable to truth. Cf. J. Habermas, *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), pp. 140 ff. ('Die Wahrheitsfähigkeit praktischer Fragen').
- 44 'Let us popularly define nihilism as the inability to take a stand for civilisation against cannibalism': cf. L. Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 9.
- 45 Cf. J. Schickel, *Gespräche mit Carl Schmitt* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1993), p. 71.
- 46 On nuclear politics in the scientific age, cf. U. Beck, *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), Ch. 2.
- 47 For the distinction between *la politique* and *le politique*, see C. Lefort, *Essais sur le politique (XIXe.–XXe. siècles)* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), pp. 7–14 and *passim*.
- 48 I. Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in *Four Essays on Liberties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 118–34.
- 49 S. Landshut, 'Max Webers Geistesgeschichtliche Bedeutung', in *Kritik der*

- Soziologie und andere Schriften zur Politik* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1969), p. 120.
- 50 Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 503–4.
- 51 See his classic ‘realist’ account of democracy in J. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976), Chs. 21–3.
- 52 Cf. M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehende Soziologie*, (Tübingen: J. B. Mohr, 1972), pp. 661 ff.
- 53 That politics entails power and that the true politician has to take the unethical consequences of power-politics into account, in other words that he has to act according to the maxims of the ‘ethics of responsibility’: that is really the hub of his famous lecture on *Politics as a Vocation*.
- 54 Letter to Professor Ehrenburg, quoted in D. Beetham, *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), p. 102.
- 55 ‘There’s only the choice between leadership democracy (*Führerdemokratie*) with a “machine” and leaderless democracy, namely, the domination of professional politicians without a calling, without the inner charismatic qualities that make a leader’: cf. Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 224.
- 56 This continuity has been forcefully pointed out by the ‘arch-realist’ Max Scheler. Cf. M. Scheler, ‘Max Webers Ausschaltung der Philosophie (Zur Psychologie und Soziologie der nominalistischen Denkart)’, in *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft. Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 8 (Bern: Franck Verlag, 1980), pp. 430–8.
- 57 B. Turner, *For Weber. Essays on the Sociology of Fate* (London: Sage, 1996), p. 9. See also M. Fullbrook, ‘Max Weber’s Interpretative Sociology: a Comparison of Conception and Practice’, *British Journal of Sociology* 29(1) (1978): 71–82.
- 58 E. Cassirer, *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), p. 279.
- 59 I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in *Werke*, Vol. 4 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956), A 643.
- 60 This is the position which has been systematically worked out in Britain by Roy Bhaskar and the faithful followers of what is known as the ‘Realist Movement’. Cf. R. Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Hemel Hempstead, Herts: Harvester Press, 1978) and *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Hemel Hempstead, Herts: Harvester Press, 1989). For a brilliant but somewhat cumbersome application of realism in sociology, cf. M. Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Drawing on Bhaskar’s work, I have tried to develop the metacritical conditions of a theory that is critical both in the Marxist and the Kantian sense of the word. Cf. F. Vandenberghe, *Une histoire critique de la sociologie allemande. Aliénation et réification*, Vol. 2, *La théorie critique, de Horkheimer à Habermas* (Paris: Editions de la Découverte, 1998).
- 61 Weber himself talked about ‘false conceptual realism’ (*falscher Begriffsrealismus*) – see Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 7 – but since the label did not stick, sociologists, like Parsons for instance, have had recourse to Whitehead’s successful formula of the ‘fallacy of misplaced concreteness’ to denounce the hypostasis of concepts.

- 62 Cf. J. Torrance, 'Max Weber: Methods and the Man', in Hamilton (ed.) *Max Weber. Critical Assessments 1*, Vol. 1, p. 221.
- 63 C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5. This famous metaphor had already appeared in von Humboldt's *Introduction to the Kawi-work*: 'In order to incorporate into himself and to work upon the world of objects, man surrounds himself by a world of signs. By the same act, thanks to which man spins language out of himself, he spins himself into language'; quoted by E. Cassirer, *Wesen und Wirkung des Symbolbegriffs* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956), p. 176.
- 64 Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, pp. 507–8.
- 65 Cf. T. Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1937/1949), Ch. 2.
- 66 This point has also been made by Günther Dux, who proposes to substitute for Weber's neo-Kantian constructivist approach, a process-logic of rational reconstruction. Cf. G. Dux, 'Subjekt und Gegenstand im Erkenntnisprozeß historischen Verstehens. Von der Begründungs- zur prozeßlogischen Wissenschaftslehre', in G. Wagner and H. Zippian (eds) *Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 662–77. For a critical reconstruction of Weber's idealtypes, I would rather draw on Harvey Sack's early studies on MCDs (Membership Categorization Devices; cf. H. Sacks, *Lectures on Conversation* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1992]) and on the contemporary studies of the Wittgensteinian wing of ethnomethodology on categorization work (in Britain and Canada, work by Hester, Edglin, Jayyusi and Watson; in France, by Quéré and Pharo).