

THE SUBVERSIVE WEBER: SUBJECTIVATION AND WORLD-CONFRONTATION IN MAX WEBER'S TEACHING

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ABSTRACT: That there is a subversive Max Weber may go unrecognized even by Marxist scholars otherwise appreciative, if critically, of Weber, to say nothing of mainstream Weber scholarship. That the subversive side of Weber's thought and teaching lies in his figure of subjectivation or stance towards the world, is likely to be met with incredulity, even with a smug smile. Yet, it is precisely this claim what this article seeks to probe by bringing out that stance so as to delineate its pure form and disclose the subject carrying it, an operation which will in addition allow us to see how Weber's social science is both summoned by that subject and specifically suited to study it. Seeking to grasp Weber's thought and teaching from the standpoint of his stance involves a perspective which is consistent with the subjective disposition that Weber demands from himself and his addressees.

This is a new approach to Weber's thought which, by prioritising its subjective determinations, is able to demonstrate its fundamental unity, which is not thematic, its consistency, as well as the way in which Weber's theoretical developments and educational efforts spring from his stance and unfold it. Weber's thought is shown to be grounded on an unparalleled disjunctive figure of subjectivation whose two components, held together in pure subjectivity in the mode of tension, are deployed at several crucial levels of Weber's oeuvre. By giving subjectivation its due both structurally and historically vis-à-vis rationalization, the article makes clear that Weber's social and cultural science is not just a science 'of Man', i.e. a humanist science, still less a posthumanist science of human and nonhuman entities in a flattened world, but a science of 'daemonized' humans and rationalized daemons. Is not that social and cultural science, or a variant thereof, what we necessitate today?

KEYWORDS: Desire-bearing conviction; Ethics of responsibility; Subjectivation; Existential points; rationalization; Passion for the real; Value-freedom

‘like a bow that distress only serves to draw tauter’,
and firm against all ‘attempts to unbend the bow’ (Nietzsche)

Wilhelm Hennis’s judgement that Weber failed as a teacher and educator may well be a provocative statement with a didactic intent. For Weber’s failure, just as the failures of other thinkers who were largely misunderstood or dismissed by their contemporaries but have since been debated and studied, might well be related to the subversive side of his teaching. That there is a subversive Max Weber may go unrecognized even by Marxist scholars otherwise appreciative, if critically, of Weber, to say nothing of mainstream Weber scholarship. This is not because mainstream Weber scholars try to conceal that subversive side, but rather because they entertain no desire whatsoever to see it. That the subversive side of Weber’s thought and teaching lies in his figure of subjectivation or stance towards the world, is likely to be met with incredulity, even with a smug smile. Yet, it is precisely this claim what this article seeks to probe by bringing out that stance so as to delineate its pure form and disclose the subject carrying it, an operation which will in addition allow us to see how Weber’s social science is both summoned by that subject and specifically suited to study it.

The method that I am to follow, ‘method’ in the broad sense of approach-method, is meant to be consistent with the subjective disposition that Weber demands from himself and his addressees. This method has thus two tightly intertwined traits: it involves an immanent reading and it prioritizes the subjective determinations of a thinker’s thought – a method, let me insist on this point, that is particularly appropriate in the case of Weber, who made very clear and distinct subjective demands on himself and those he addressed, demands which are authentic subjective prescriptions.

Two of these prescriptions stand out and are well-known, for Weber made them at crucial moments in some of his most renowned interventions. However, he never put them together in a consistent figure; nor did he explain how they are related to one another. The first prescription enjoins us to look ‘the fate of the age in its stern face’ (Weber 1994, p. 17; 2008, p. 45) or, in Machiavelli’s equally apposite if agiler expression, *il male in viso* (evil in its face). Another formulation of this prescription enjoins us to ‘ruthlessly scrutinize the realities of life’ (1994: 86;

1994b, p. 367).¹ Let us call this the confrontation prescription: it is an injunction to confront the world without narcotics of any kind, whether religious, social conventional or political ones, including nationalism, the narcotic to which Weber was heavily addicted, as is well-known.

The second prescription is the famous one involving the daemon. It is a question, as Weber put it in the very last sentence of *Science as a Vocation*, of ‘finding and obeying the daemon who holds the threads’ of one’s life (1994, p. 23; 2008, p. 52). This is another foremost Weberian prescription issued not by any science, but from a definite stance; and given that it concerns both the idea of the calling and the question of personality, which for Weber is nothing but – as we shall see shortly – the permanence in the calling, it seems fitting to name it the subjectivation prescription.

We thus have the two fundamental Weberian prescriptions: the subjectivation prescription and the confrontation prescription. The former is an injunction to become the faithful carriers of an inner conviction or, in contemporary theory’s parlance, to become subjects; the latter is an injunction to confront the world as the world is, not as we would like it to be. Both inseparably constitute the Weberian figure of subjectivation or stance whose full shape we can already glimpse. Although they are two worlds apart, in truth so heterogeneous that they form a disjunctive couple, yet the disjunction is not total but joined together at the level of pure subjectivity; its absolute singularity lies precisely in that the relationship between both components is not conceptual nor based on any definite knowledge, theory or science, but constitutes a figure of antagonism held together only subjectively in the mode of tension.

These extremely demanding injunctions and the attitude they imply are forever in tension, and not infrequently in open conflict, with the untroubled

¹ Authorless references are to Weber. All emphases original unless otherwise indicated. Translations are the author’s; however, to help readers in English who would like to go beyond the quoted passages, I provide two references whenever possible, the first one to the original German text and the second one to the English translation which seems to me more adequate, when there is more than one. I have greatly benefited from Jean-Pierre Grossein’s translations of some of Weber’s major works into French. I want to express here my gratitude to Isabelle Darmon, whose help with the translations has been absolutely decisive for me to be able to put forward satisfactory renderings of Weber’s German. Isabelle has also been a critical and devoted reader and discussant of this paper since its very conception, which has obviously helped me to fine-tune and sharpen its arguments.

paths of adaptation to the world people are as a rule constrained to follow, an attitude that makes it practically impossible to accept such merciless gaze and its diagnoses. Nor is it very likely that people feel directly addressed by the Weberian injunctions – or, if they do, they may bump into the scholastic canon and henceforth seriously risk having their intellectual curiosity stifled and their desire appeased. Such canonical structure is prominent in mainstream Weber scholarship; as other forms of canonisation, that of Weber consists in erecting made-to-measure figures such as founding father and ‘domestic idol’ (Hennis 2000, p. 4) which tame his thought and police what can be said about it. This is how Weber continues to fail as a teacher and educator.

Weber’s teaching summons us to confront the world and do so from the strength of our own stance; it also summons a science at the service of that endeavour, a science which, as I will seek to show later on, consists of two major strands, one devoted to attest to the presence, consistency and strength of the daemon (or, more generally, of what people ultimately strive for), and the other to the ruthless scrutiny of the world.

This article is an attempt to grasp Weber’s *thought* from the standpoint of the foremost figure of subjectivation, namely, the stance towards the world. The article thus proposes a new approach to Weber’s thought by giving priority to its subjective determinations over its objective means and results. Such priority is in my view necessary to grasp Weber’s thought, to demonstrate its unity and to provide the basis for bringing its power to bear on our own time. In the following pages I seek to accomplish those tasks in a number of steps: first of all, given that absolutely everything of significance in Weber’s thought is grounded on and driven by his figure of subjectivation or stance, the article provides a precise characterisation of the disjunctive couple constituting Weber’s stance. This will allow us to expose the foundations of Weber’s social and cultural science and the critical significance of education in his work and life, as well as to account for the nature of that science as a dual science of reality and of subjectivation, and elucidate the kind of teacher Weber is. Second, I show that Weber’s stance is ontologically grounded on a constitutive discord which is methodically treated through existential points or alternatives which enact a permanent, lifelong confrontation with the world, and that it is in treating such points that both branches of Weber’s social and cultural science meet. Third, the article shows

how the two components of Weber's stance, and therefore the constitutive tension anchoring them in bare subjectivity, are deployed at several crucial levels in Weber's work, giving rise to a dual science, a twofold logic underpinning the ideal-typical approach, two modes of distance and a twofold conception of truth. Finally, the article demonstrates the priority, both logical and historical, of subjectivation over rationalization.

It is also important to point out that the theoretical language I will resort to seeks to combine Weber's own language with contemporary theory, above all in what concerns the terms 'subjectivation' and 'subject', which Weber did not use but are central in my approach and are understood in line with the way in which they have been theorised in contemporary philosophy and social theory (see e.g. Badiou 2009 and Žižek 1999). Regarding Weber's own language, e.g. 'daemon', 'ultimate cause or value', 'vocation' or 'calling', 'personality', 'devotion' and 'conduct of life', to name only the most directly relevant notions, I will show that it constitutes a very thorough and consistent understanding of subjectivation which systematically puts the accent on those aspects that definitely *exceed* the human animal, the individual or the self. This way of proceeding, combining what I would call Weber's personalist, bourgeois terminology with contemporary theory, can help us make manifest the untimely timeliness of Weber's thought.

Although following Weber's prescriptions seems imperative, as they stem not from some extrinsic necessity but from the very foundations of his thought, yet to my knowledge no such approach has been attempted before, certainly not in any comprehensive and consistent way. There has been a constant quest for the unity of Weber's work, a problem that has regularly haunted Weber scholarship, from the very aftermath of Weber's death in 1920 to our own days. But what if it is the unity, not of a finished work, nor a thematic unity (e.g. Tenbruck 1980; Hennis 1996), but that of a continuous endeavour consistently evolving according to an immanent logic, the logic provided by Weber's figure of subjectivation or stance?

The article therefore takes Weber's stance with the utmost theoretical and practical seriousness. Yet social scientists have consistently neglected it; actually there are to my knowledge very few studies which take it into account and one way or another consider some of its aspects. One wonders why social scientists and sociologists in particular have refused to consider Weber's stance. Weber's science, the branch on the daemon, is definitely of help here, for it confronts us

with the deep and decisive question of *che vuoi?*, ‘what [do] you yourself really want?’,² and can thereby reveal whether that refusal does not simply signal our aversion to reflect on our own stance and the gods we serve.

A STANCE ANCHORED IN PURE SUBJECTIVITY IN THE MODE OF TENSION

The method I have set out to follow requires that we now characterise more precisely the subjective figure that drives Weber’s thought, starting from the attempt to lay bare its very frame, or its ‘ultimate axioms’ (1988, p. 151; 2012, p. 103), to use a keyword from section I of the ‘Objectivity’ essay – a crucial section which introduces the foundations of that branch of the Weberian science concerned with the ‘desiring human being (*wollenden Menschen*)’ and devoted to undertaking a ‘thoughtful reflection on the ultimate elements of meaningful human action’ (1988, pp. 150, 149; 2012, p. 102). This may well be called an analytics of subjectivation, thus avoiding that flattening operation often referred to as value analysis, since not only is that analysis ‘not ... removed from praxis’ (Schluchter 1979, p. 84), it is at its core. This method is thus consonant with Weber’s own method and movement of thought.

We already know the two prescriptions, authentic ultimate axioms that constitute the Weberian stance: the subjectivation prescription and the confrontation prescription. Although they form a disjunctive couple, yet they are subjectively, in the subjective figure they constitute, orientated to one another in an intrinsic manner and only together do they acquire their full force: on the one hand, the prescription to confront the world makes the desire-bearing inner disposition immediately *worldly*; it is this relationship which makes real and effective the ‘radically this-worldly view’ that Löwith (1993, p. 43) stressed in his important study of the two giants. On the other hand, that prescription acquires meaning, purpose and the very energy it needs only to the extent that there is an inner disposition orientated to project itself in the world and transform it accordingly. Nor does a conformist attitude require any ruthless scrutiny of the world at all; indeed conformism, i.e. the ‘simple, dull acceptance of the world and the profession’ (1994, p. 87; 1994b, p. 368), is as entirely at odds with Weber’s

² Intervention at the Congress of the Verein für Sozialpolitik, Vienna 1909 (1924, p. 419).

stance as is evasion and of course mere or expedient adaptation.

The relationship between the two prescriptions is therefore not one of total or pure disjunction. One wonders whether such relation constitutes a Deleuzian disjunctive synthesis, since there is no convergence, like in the latter, or definite conceptual form resolving the disjunction, but only local and relatively provisional resolutions which never exhaust the possibilities of the disjunctive couple constituting Weber's stance. At stake is an oppositional relation, but we need to determine its precise type or nature. The obvious candidate, considering that the lack of synthesis also discards the dialectical contradiction, is the antinomy. Many authors have considered different aspects of Weber's thought as antinomies, but it is Mommsen who has provided a more systematic analysis of what he calls the 'antinomical structure' of Weber's political thought whose distinctiveness lies in that it is 'not simply methodologically determined [as Lepsius held] but that it actually seems to pervade [Weber's] whole life' (1989, p. 199). However, Mommsen seems to take the category of antinomy for granted, since he never specifies the nature of such antinomian structure; in truth his insights and hesitations are themselves most revealing: at one point he doubts between 'the dialectical contrasts or rather the antinomic structure', which suggests the presence of some partial form of dialectics in the antinomian structure; at another point he sees the existence of 'complementary elements', which implies that the antinomian structure is not pure; and he even refers to Weber being led 'to develop systematically the antinomical potential inherent' in the confrontation of 'democratic postulates' 'with the social reality of advanced industrial society' (1989, pp. 132, 34 and 43), which implies that the antinomian structure is *productive*.

We thus have an antinomian structure which seems to involve elements of the three categories we have considered: disjunctive synthesis, contradiction and antinomy. To be sure, this is a very weird form of antinomy, one that exceeds Jameson's ideal-typical opposition between antinomy and contradiction. At stake in Weber's thought is a form of opposition which, like a contradiction in Jameson's analysis, is 'susceptible of a solution or a resolution' of some kind or in some respects, and thus 'productive', but of which it cannot be said, as is the case in an antinomy, that it posits 'two propositions that are radically, indeed absolutely, incompatible, take it or leave it', and still less that it 'offer[s] nothing in the way

to handle' (Jameson 1994, pp. 1-2), for the Weberian disjunctive couple offers everything to handle. The name of this 'handling' is, first, politics, and then science, Weber's two passions; its time is both the everyday and the extraordinary, and its method cannot resort to any higher perspective, for no such perspective exists, just as there is no labour of the negative in Weber (just as in Nietzsche), which makes clear that, despite the presence of some dialectical aspects, the dynamics involved is not a dialectics. We may call it a tensional antagonistic dynamics, for the disjunctive couple is subjectively an antagonistic opposition which is held together in the form of *tension* anchored in bare subjectivity. This disjunction and the will to sustain the tension between its two components constitute the veritable gravitational field of Weber's thought; they subvert forever all attempts to fix or stabilize Weber's own epistemological and methodological constructions, e.g. in terms of neo-Kantianism.

Indeed sustaining this fundamental tension, mainspring of all other tensions, at every point was imperative for Weber, and those familiar with him know the uncompromising way in which he stood by it. Weber referred explicitly to what that imperative meant subjectively for him: 'I want to see – he said – how much I can endure [*aushalten*]' (Marianne Weber 1988, p. 678). This attitude, first superbly defined by Nietzsche (e.g. *Beyond Good and Evil*, § 39), who also gave it an absolutely decisive place in his philosophical stance, shows the profound similarities between both thinkers not less than the radically different ways in which they embodied it. In Weber this will to endure so as to sustain the tensions plays a constitutive role, for it is what holds together the *tensional disjunction*. Weber felt it as an imperative, but he did not remain there; he also enjoined the youth and in truth anyone to do the same: not only, as we already know, to 'ruthlessly scrutinize the realities of life', but 'to bear' such realities and 'inwardly measure up to them' (1994, p. 86; 1994b, p. 367).

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of that will, since everything decisive is at stake in it. At issue in that will is one's own worth as a human being capable of being a subject and not merely an individual, that is, the worth of one's conviction and the inner strength to deploy it in a continuous confrontation with the world. This confrontation does not take place with the world as a totality, which is an inconsistent idea, or in an open clash, but above all in the form of a conduct of life (*Lebensführung*), that fundamental Weberian

concept which in its subjective sense stands for a life that, as he argues in a crucial paragraph of the value-freedom essay, does not simply ‘slip by’, at the mercy of the pushing and pulling forces of the world, but is ‘consciously conducted (*bewußt geführt*)’ (1988, p. 507; 2012, p. 315) or self-determined. A second aspect of that will is its *affirmative* and *proactive* character. Far from being a passive endurance and the result of a resigned attitude before the unavoidable tensions, it is deliberately oriented to work on them because, as we have seen, the tensions tend to be both irresolvable and still the creative source of possible local resolutions. Finally, the permanent and shattering nature of the tensions, the fact that they can never be resolved or mastered either through reason or any definite conceptual form, makes the Weberian subject the carrier of an excess, and it is ultimately this excess that has to be endured.

WEBER, A TEACHER OF DISILLUSION AND CONFORMISM?

It is at this point that it is necessary to address what continues to be practically a dogma in Weber scholarship, a dogma rarely made explicit but governing mainstream interpretations, namely, that the confrontation prescription has the upper hand and is therefore a call not just to caution or restraint but ultimately to renunciation and resignation. Against this widespread view I sustain that Weber did not in principle concede overall precedence to any of the components of the subjectivation figure, and certainly not to the confrontation prescription, which would have implied a total defeat of the subject and made of Weber a teacher of disillusion and conformism. It is true, however, that Weber’s own tactics and formulations invite such partial readings, as he tends to start his interventions with the external conditions of the problems addressed and to accentuate what may thwart the desire-bearing conviction and disrupt self-indulgent attitudes, the famous ‘uncomfortable facts’ whose recognition is crucial to deploy the conviction in the world.

What is often overlooked is that Weber lived in very passionate times; not only that, but, personally connected as he was with youth movements and with revolutionaries of various sorts (Honigsheim 2000, p. 71; Mommsen 1984, p. 295), he witnessed very closely and with deep preoccupation the mounting of that distinctive subjective mark of the short twentieth century which, in Badiou’s most apt characterisation, was the ‘passion for the real’ (2005). And this is just the kind of thing a proud bourgeois thinker as Weber was – a condition he more than once

proclaimed openly, in private correspondence and publicly, most famously in his academic baptism: 'I am a member of the bourgeois classes and feel myself to be a bourgeois' (1988b, p. 20; 1994b, p. 23) – could not possibly let pass without a dogged and unremitting fight. All the more so considering that the advance of that revolutionary passion was taking place at a critical conjuncture marked in Weber's eyes – he was to abide by this diagnosis, made in his Inaugural address at Freiburg, all his life – by a political crisis of the system of rule-domination, with Junker patriarchal authoritarianism quickly undermined by the unstoppable rise of industrial capitalism and 'the German bourgeoisie', hopelessly lacking '*power instincts*' and '*political maturity*' (1988b, pp. 22 and 23; 1994b, p. 25), unable to do what Weber considered necessary and wished, namely, to head the new form of rule-domination suitable to capital and thus continue the *national* tasks of unification at home and expansion abroad.

The stakes could not be higher for Weber. Not only did he set out to educate his own class, as the impetuous young man vigorously proclaimed in that momentous intervention at Freiburg he was later to judge not mistaken but 'immature' (Baumgarten 1964, 127), but, as the historical record testifies in abundance, including in terms of sustained personal relations with the likes of Robert Michels, Ernst Toller and Georg Lukács, he became more and more engaged with that passion for the real, certainly as a staunch if – of very few can this be said – noble opponent.

Weber could therefore afford to take the conviction, the daemon as a given, and start with the examination of external reality. This method of intervention enabled Weber to tame the daemons, to begin with his own, and then the students', in order to so much the better conjure them up latter on and test their inner strength by setting them face-to-face against 'reality' – a method taken to its climax in his lectures on science and on politics, when he resorted to those phrasings pregnant with typical Weberian pathos. In this respect, the reading of the confrontation prescription as a question of seeing reality without illusions is certainly correct. However, this reading is partial insofar as it is not immediately put into relation with the conviction or the desire; and to the extent that such interpretation is time and again repeated, as mainstream Weber scholarship does almost as a matter of course, it becomes a deeply biased device. One ought to ask here: where is the desire today? If desire cannot be seen either in the publics

Weber scholars address or in the latter's positions, then what they do is simply hammering home an anti-Weberian injunction to conformism.

Some, perhaps many, would be tempted to suggest that what Weber opposed to the passion for the real was the 'passion for reality', i.e. for the constraining forces, for reality as a power of intimidation. That would be insulting to Weber, the man who engaged in a lifelong struggle to spur his own class to affirm itself politically and to provide political education not only to that bourgeois class, but to the youth and indeed to the whole German nation as he imagined it. Crucial in this Weberian endeavour was to quench the revolutionary flames and to avoid reaction, which he feared nearly as much as revolution. Weber's passion was certainly more intricate, in no way reducible to seeing, or making others see, the world without illusions – illusions from which he himself may not have been free, for after all, what kind of thing is a *politically* ruled capitalism without revolution? The answer is patent today, when the idea of revolution is not even imaginable: naked oligarchic power, growing more criminal by the day. At any rate, 'without illusions' doesn't mean without conviction or desire. Weber had already warned against such conformism by stating explicitly that '*lack of conviction and scientific "objectivity"*' have absolutely no inner affinity' (1988, p. 157; 2012, p. 106). Years later, in the famous lectures to the students, he emphasised, in connection with the confrontation prescription, passion, 'for nothing has any value for a human being, as a human being, unless he is *able to* do it with *passion*' (1994, p. 6; 2008, p. 31). But Weber went far beyond the necessity of passion and resorted, as he had already done in the value-freedom essay (1988, p. 514; 2012, p. 318), to the classical metaphor of the good archer: for 'what is possible would never have been achieved if, in this world, people had not repeatedly reached for the impossible' (1994, p. 88; 1994b, p. 369).

Does this not mean that Weber's passion is also a kind of passion for the real or, what amounts to the same, for the impossible? One should not be once again misled in this respect by the oft-quoted idea of Weber as the teller of things as they are: 'I say "what is"', wrote Weber to Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne on 15 July 1909 (quoted in Scaff 1989, p. 113), for 'what is' includes what is desired or striven for, which has, in case we forget, its own science, the branch on the daemon. Weber's passion, to conclude, is a tormented passion, a passion split between the 'impossible-real' (e.g. in the form of a politically controlled capitalism without

revolution) and the ‘only-possible-reality’ (nationalist and colonialist, imperialist capitalism).

If the confrontation prescription is not aimed at stifling the desire-bearing inner disposition, what function, we must ask, does it fulfil? What is the purpose of the ruthless scrutiny of the world so as to see it without illusions? Educating desire, precisely. In this way education, whose importance for Weber is well-known, particularly after Hennis’ studies (see also Scaff 1973), is shown to be not merely a major theme in Weber, but a chief impulse which springs up from the very heart of his stance, where it plays the fundamental role of arousing, fostering and shaping the daemon, the desire, so as to help it to come to terms with the world.

It is therefore true that Weber argued insistently against indulging in one’s desire; it is equally true but often overlooked that he stressed instead, particularly to the youth, the necessity of educating desire by subjecting it to the test of a continuous confrontation with the world. But it is not true that this makes Weber’s stance, or the confrontation prescription in particular, a call for the suppression of desire and thus for resignation. After all, ‘obey the daemon’ cannot mean obey it today and give it up tomorrow. Nor has anybody ever heard or read Weber enjoining anyone to give up on their desire; on the contrary, as Mommsen shows in his fundamental study, he repeatedly expressed admiration for people of genuine conviction and ‘unconditional respect’ for those inwardly alive, including non-literati revolutionaries whose existence was somehow surprising to him (Mommsen 1984, p. 297, quoting a letter from Weber to Mina Tobler, end of November 1918).

ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS AND EXISTENTIAL DEPLOYMENT OF WEBER’S STANCE

Let me suggest, as a starting point, that the affirmative stance of ‘proud this-worldliness (*stolzer Diesseitigkeit*)’ Weber ascribed to Machiavelli (1920, p. 98; 2002, p. 75) could also characterise his own. Beyond the nationalist bent of Weber’s take on Machiavelli, it is the stance of a subject who, like *eros*, is discontent with the world and in conflict with it. Strange as this may sound, *eros* is a fitting figure to characterize Weber and his lifelong attitude to the world. For *eros*, at least Plato’s, is the utter antithesis of prevailing contentment and the fear that repeatedly spoils

it. Endlessly in pursuit and in conflict with the world, eros despises quietness and comfort and is always ready to stand up for what he strives for, for in a way he is nothing but this quest and this contest.

The carriers of this stance unhesitatingly place themselves firmly in the world, a world which is not merely their dwelling, passively accepted as the place to live which has fallen to their lot, but *reality*, to be confronted as it is. ‘Reality’ (or on rare occasions life, or reality of life) is Weber’s name for what *there is* prior to any evaluation. We enter into Weber’s ontology, a topic he was more than reluctant to address. Accordingly he relied on a minimalist ontology of multiplicity with practically one single ontological statement, namely, that what there is or reality is ‘infinite multiplicity’ (1988, p. 171; 2012, p. 114). This is the most one can say about ‘reality’ when what there is is subtracted from any evaluation and thus from the realm of meaning or sense. This means that ‘reality’ is in principle neither meaningful nor meaningless, so that strictly speaking one cannot say that it is a ‘meaningless infinity’ (1988, p. 180; 2012, p. 119). Weber is more consistent when he refers to what there is as ‘inexhaustible (*unausschöpfbar*)’ in both its ‘irrational[ity]’ and ‘its stock of *possible* meanings’ (1988, p. 213; 2012, p. 137), thus implying that any actual meaning or sense is dependent on a specific point of view or a local positioning.

Now ‘*Wirklichkeit*’ (reality) for Weber, rather than a strict ontological category, is a category of existence. What predominates is thus not the ontological idea of being-qua-being, but the existential meaning, i.e. ‘the reality of the life in which we are placed and which surrounds us *in its specificity (in ihrer Eigenart)*’ (1988, p. 170; 2012, p. 114). And it is primarily ‘reality’ in this latter sense, to which the predicate ‘infinite multiplicity’ also applies, that the carrier of the Weberian stance confronts. Indeed, it is in connection with such ‘reality’, which is a realm of *existential choice*, that ‘confrontation’ acquires all its pathos.

‘Reality’ is confronted in the usual twofold process: on the one hand, as per the prescription to ruthlessly examine it, without concessions to the desire-bearing conviction (isn’t this the point of ‘value-freedom?’); *and*, on the other, as per the prescription to obey the daemon, as a testing ground to exert oneself as subject by deploying the desire-bearing conviction. The former is the task of the science of reality as analysis of external conditions, the latter that of the science of the ‘daemon’ as analytics of subjectivation. Although both tasks are brought

together in this operation, the disjunction cannot be resolved by science, but only by what one should call *existential decisions* and at the local or concrete level alone. Science can bring us every time at the very *point* of the decision, a point which – since it compels us to commit ourselves and forbids the striking of any balance – I am tempted to call ‘anti-liberal’, for it is an either/or point, or an instance thereof such as commitment or indifference, permanence in the commitment or renunciation, or, as Weber puts it, yes or no: science ‘can direct the human being to this edge of “yes” or “no”’; however, ‘the “yes” or “no” *itself* is *no longer* a question of science’, but of one’s ‘conscience or subjective taste; at any rate, the answer to it lies in a different intellectual plane’ (1924, p. 420). Such points are not at all chosen, but imposed upon the subject who confronts the world seriously; they thereby constitute as many *tests* of one’s conviction.

Weber is thus very close to Kierkegaard, whose doctrine of radical choice is underpinned by the attempt to develop an unfailing procedure of constraint such that, in forcing the person to the point of decision, compels her to choose and *thereby* make the right choice: ‘As soon as a person can be brought to stand at the crossroads in such a way that there is no way out for him except to choose, he will choose the right thing’ (Kierkegaard 1987, p. 168). And yet, this proximity cannot hide fundamental differences with Kierkegaard: to begin with, Weber’s procedure of constraint puts science at its service; science thus appears both as fulfilling a decisive function, since it can bring us to the existential points of decision, and in all its limitations, having to fall silent at these very moments. By doing that, science provides *clarity*, Weber argues in *Science as a Vocation*; first of all, as he had sustained in his interventions on Academia, clarity about ‘which gods he [the individual] serves’, for science can teach the individual ‘to know what he wants’ (2008, p. 72). This clarity is a necessary condition for there to be existential points at all; and, if there are points, then one will find it difficult, as Weber insists in *Science as a Vocation*, to escape their compelling force: ‘The teacher can’, thanks to science, ‘place before you the necessity of making this choice’ (1994, 19; 2008, p. 47). But, once there, science withdraws discreetly and the choice or decision falls entirely on our naked subjectivity or unaided conscience. As Weber had already stated in the ‘Objectivity’ essay almost fifteen years before, the decision ‘is certainly *not* the task of science, but of the desiring human being’ (1988, 150; 2012, p. 102). Science, in other words, cannot free us from the responsibility of

deciding and choosing, and of having to do so without props, relying only on our ability to endure the irreducible *excesses* and the consequent inescapable tensions. Indeed those who accuse Weber of decisionism do so from a normativism which for Weber was nothing but plain evasion disguised by what one should call the bureaucratisation of the existential points.

A second fundamental difference with Kierkegaard lies in that Weber's procedure of constraint is aimed not only to test the strength of a daemon, but also – and, given the often-prevailing tendency to indifference, which implies a world divested of tension and therefore without existential points, decisively – to arouse it, which once again shows the absolutely central position of education in Weber's stance and work. Finally, and crucially, there are no hierarchically ordered stages of existence, as in Kierkegaard, whose aesthetic, ethical and religious or rather Christian stages are practically as many ever-higher forms of conscience. Weber's sketch of a theory of points or existential alternatives is the utter antithesis of any such hierarchy, as shown by the 'chain' metaphor he resorts to in what is probably the most Platonic moment of a work critically punctuated with strategic references to Plato: 'life as a whole', declares Weber, to the extent that it is inwardly conducted or subjectivated, is 'a chain (Kette) of ultimate decisions through which the soul, as in Plato, *chooses* its own fate, in the sense of the meaning of what it does and is' (1988, 507-8; 2012, p. 315).

Confronting the world is therefore a lifelong process, and the Weberian subject seeks to measure its worth by being up to that 'reality', which rules out as shameful not only any attempt to dilute it or cut it down to what one can bear, but to give up on one's conviction or on one's being as a subject. It is thus manifest that the tensional disjunction is constitutive or ontological, and not merely historical, as Löwith (1993, p. 82) claims. The ontological situation of the Weberian subject is by no means one of simply being-in-the-world, *à la* Heidegger, but *being-in-discord-with-the-world*. Nothing more opposite to Weber's philosophical thought than this Heidegger, particularly in what concerns 'man's' ontological situation; nothing more contrary to Weber's 'taut [or brittle (*spröden*)] pedagogic eros' (Hennis 1996, p. 111) than Heidegger's simultaneous aloofness and disposition to seduce. Discord, conflict, struggle are of the essence of Weber's stance. It is this position of discord, of being out of joint and homeless while at the same time firmly in the world, which constitutes the basic or ontological

stance – a stance not merely of engagement, as is sometimes claimed, but of conflicting or *discordant* engagement. And then there are the modes of involvement and detachment or distance, which are existential. Tension is there from beginning to end, and the Weberian subject is traversed from top to bottom by a complex and heartbreaking tensional dynamics it cannot master: all one can do is play the tensions, but in thus doing one is also played by them.

There are two fundamental tensional realms which correspond to the subjectivation and the confrontation prescriptions and are therefore interdependent. There is thus the tensional realm that obtains in the relationship with (external and internal) ‘reality’, whose ruthless scrutiny involves Weber’s major theoretical constructions, particularly the ideal-types. It is in this tensional realm where the workings of the modes of involvement and detachment or distance can be seen with greater clarity. Although Weber rarely bothered to provide any sufficiently detailed analysis of this tensional realm, telling glimpses of his view do appear, particularly in connection with politics. The decisive import of this tension lies in that it allows one both to be involved without being entangled in the world and to gain distance without incurring in the epistemological-metaphysical pretension of a pure intellect untouched by the world nor in the ethical-metaphysical delusion of superiority or the pretence of ‘standing on the pedestal of some “aristocratic” contrast between oneself and the “all-too-many”’. Thus Weber manifests his discrepancy with the Nietzschean pathos of distance, for ‘distance is always inauthentic if it needs this inner support today’ (1984, pp. 389-90; 1994b, pp. 122-23).

The second fundamental tensional realm, widely commented in the literature, is deeply intertwined with the first one and obtains between the ultimate values or between the daemons and the life orders over which they rule. These tensions have to be sustained and therefore endured because such values are in deadly conflict and there is no rational way of reconciling them; nor is it possible to rationally ground each value’s possible validity and binding force. This is what defines a modern world which has seen what Nietzsche declared as ‘the greatest recent event – that “God is dead”’ (*The Gay Science*, § 343) and has thereby lost its innocence regarding meaning and ultimate grounds or foundations. Modern humanity, Weber held, is compelled to measure itself up to this deed, to the fact that it ‘has eaten from the tree of knowledge’ (1988, p. 154; 2012, p. 104),

a tempting tree whose ‘fruit’ is as alien to God as ‘disturbing to human complacency’, for it only admits full doses, no middle-ways, and its results are ‘inescapable’ (1988, p. 507; 2012, p. 315). In this situation life, once again, ‘rests on itself’, which means that, so understood, i.e. ‘on its own terms’, life ‘knows only the eternal struggle of the gods with one another’, that is, ‘the irreconcilability (*Unvereinbarkeit*) of the ultimate attitudes toward life that are at all *possible*, and the undecidability (*Unaustragbarkeit*) of the struggle between them’ (1994, p. 20; 2008, p. 48).

Weber’s will to endure the tensions is deliberately addressed against the temptation, seemingly irresistible, to try and get rid of them either by relativization or by totalization. The struggle between the gods is not a mere question, as liberals like to see it, of safe value pluralism or polytheism. For when ‘serv[ing] one god’ also means ‘offend[ing] all others’ (1994, p. 20; 2008, p. 47) the liberal balancing cannot but appear for what it is: a noncommittal game, de facto a wager for adaptation to the world and its powers. Nor is the other way out so frequently sought for, totalization and its necessary correlate, hierarchization, possible, and all attempts to the contrary, e.g. in the form of all-encompassing systems, can only be dogmatic (1988, p. 509; 2012, p. 316). This ‘need for a purely rational “order” and (value) “hierarchy”’, so deeply felt among many of Weber’s contemporaries who longed for new foundations and new value syntheses, Weber considers as ‘a symptom of deep-rooted weakness’ (1998, letter of 12 December 1912 to Count Keyserling) which betrays inability to bear the tensions.

This is Weber’s radical ‘anti-foundationalism’ (Whimster and Lash 1987, p. 12) or, rather, post-foundationalism *avant la lettre*, which certainly has nothing to do with the postmodern lassitude and its celebratory equalization of standpoints. Weber’s post-foundationalism has been neglected, and this in spite of its profoundly modern character, for it involves an obstinate attempt at de-totalization as well as clear glimpses of a conception of the subject not only decentred but, ‘immersed in new tensions and conflicts’ as it is ‘today’ (1910, pp. 194-95; 2002, 260), split and striving to hold on to the tensions and the constant inner relation to ultimate values which define it. It is in my view no exaggeration to argue that this striving in the midst of shattering tensions *de-transcendentalizes* Weber’s idea of subject, that is, decentres it from its ‘transcendental presupposition’ (1988, p. 180; 2012, p. 119) in so far as the latter is essentially the

presupposition of a consciousness, and thus allows to open up Weber's science to Freud's eventual intervention as well as to recent renewals of the concept of subject.

At the heart of that attitude there is thus a relentless will to measure oneself up to the world which translates theoretically into the 'need for the greatest possible conceptual sharpness' (1976, p. 1; 1978, p. 3), even at the expense of the richness of experience. While this excludes categories of lived experience (*Erlebnis*), Weber does not reject experience; he is aware that such concepts will be 'necessarily poor in content' (1988, p. 460; 2012, p.), but this he considers a very small price to pay for the sake of attaining 'enhanced conceptual *clarity*' (1976, p. 10; 1978, p. 20). The best suited conceptual constructions to attain that purpose, Weber argues, are ideal-typical ones which grasp the structuring principles or the logic of selected facets of reality and push their internal consistency beyond their actual weight, even to their accomplished rationality, but do so without losing contact with a reality which, far from an empiricist rest, is the guarantee of the play of tensions. Indeed the ideal-typical approach, in perfect consonance with Weber's stance, has to cope with two logics: that of conceptual formalisation, without it being pure formalisation, and that of confronting and experiencing 'reality', without it being shallow empiricism. Here lies its singularity and what makes Weber's science such a distinctive form of social enquiry. The decisive tensions to be sustained in this process are those engaged in trying to secure the ideal-types' relation of *adequacy* (not of correspondence or reproduction) to 'reality', a process determined by playing the tensions at ever higher conceptual levels between what is no longer experience and not yet concept.

Weber thus emphatically signals the absolute priority he gives to '*order[ing] it [reality] in thought*' over dwelling on lived experience or on phenomenological and empirical descriptions (1988, p. 213; 2012, p. 137). But such labour of conceptual ordering is a permanent endeavour which can never be brought to completion. Indeed its most elaborate form, the 'social science we want to pursue' as a '*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft* (science of reality)' (1988, p. 170; 2012, p. 114), is itself conceived of as a theoretically guided activity of enquiry and by no means as a system which would put an end to the play of tensions. Thus, rather than seeking to construct an all-encompassing system, indeed in total opposition to any such attempt, but without in the least renouncing the theoretical drive to order 'reality'

conceptually, Weber largely takes problems as they come and what he develops is a conduct and an ethics of enquiry.

THE PLAY OF TENSIONS IN THE MODE OF DISTANCE: RESPONSIBILITY AND VALUE-FREEDOM

We enter here into a very problematic and indeed controversial aspect of Weber's thought. While distance is always distance from one's inner conviction or ultimate value, there are two fundamental modes which correspond to the two sides of the tensional disjunction: responsibility is the name for distance in relation to the deployment of that conviction in the world; value-freedom (*Wertfreiheit*) is the specific Weberian name for distance in relation to the examination of the world. Responsibility involves a mode of distance we can call *ethical*, since it primarily concerns action, and thus distinguish it from the *epistemic* distance involved in value-freedom, which essentially concerns the quest for and the evaluation of knowledge.

The problem with the question of responsibility is that Weber tended to conceive of it and did use it, undoubtedly as a consequence of his dread of the rising power of communism and revolutionary Marxism, as an external regulator, as if responsibility were an autonomous value or norm, to be brought to bear as a separate and full-fledged ethics against the ethics of principled conviction. However, responsibility is only meaningful in connection with causes or values; it is for the latter's sake, i.e. 'in the form of service to a "cause"' and thus as '*responsibility* for that cause' (1994, p. 74; 1994b, p. 353), that responsibility is called for. Detached from such causes or values, responsibility is simply the diktat of the *status quo* which, whether willingly followed or not, discloses the fact that in the decisive situation one ultimately adheres to what there is. In this sense the ethics of responsibility is not only a warning against any attempt to change the established order, but a regular teaching to discourage belief in the capacity of women and men to transform their world. But divested of this deeply conservative, *added-on* articulation, responsibility is the way of relating, in an immanent way and in the mode of distance, to the ultimate values. This is consistent with Weber's thought and stance. The fact that Weber seemingly resorted to responsibility as one of those words which, as he argues in *Science as a Profession and Vocation*, are used as 'swords against the adversary: weapons in the

struggle' as often as 'ploughshares to lighten the soil of contemplative thought' (1994, pp. 14-15; 2008, p. 42), is certainly of great significance, all the more so considering that at the end of *Politics as a Profession and Vocation* he stated clearly that both ethics 'are mutually complementary, and only in combination do they constitute the genuine human being who is *capable* of having a "vocation for politics"' (1994, p. 87; 1994b, p. 368). In other words: the capacity of being a subject entails responsibility as an immanent disposition and, as such, subordinated to the vocation, the cause or the conviction.

If responsibility is a hallmark of Weber's politics, *Wertfreiheit* is the hallmark of his science. Often variously considered as an impossible demand, an inconsistent postulate and a misnomer, perhaps the first thing to say, while acknowledging some truth in those views, is that *Wertfreiheit* is a tension-ridden notion whose consequences extend far beyond the realms of knowledge and science. Contrary to its canonical interpretation, still influential, as a methodological requirement aimed to adopt a positivist attitude of supposed neutrality in scientific enquiry, *Wertfreiheit* is best seen as a practical injunction inseparable from the Weberian stance as a whole. This has been noticed by some perceptive observers who knew Weber such as Jaspers, who states that 'at issue' in *Wertfreiheit* is 'a demand that could not be met' which 'has to do not just with methodology but with the scholar's whole orientation to life' (Letter to Arendt, 16 November 1966; Arendt and Jaspers, 1992, p. 661), or Honigsheim, for whom it is 'truly the most personal of [Weber's] theories and can be understood only by understanding his character and life' (2000, p. 254). More recently, Hennis has very aptly argued that 'in Weber's effort regarding *Wertfreiheit* there lies something like the kernel of his attitude to the world in which he found himself' (1996, p. 154).

Wertfreiheit lies indeed at the core of Weber's stance: it grounds its epistemic mode of detachment. In this respect, the fundamental one in my view, *Wertfreiheit* is Weber's philosophical and political rupture with contemporary opinion as well as with the accumulated dust of tradition and routine conventions in social enquiry. As Jameson has argued in a very bright interpretation totally neglected in mainstream Weber scholarship, *Wertfreiheit* is undoubtedly 'an active and polemic weapon', 'a mode of self-affirmation and of intellectual conquest' (Jameson 1988, p. 9). It requires an extraordinary discipline in order not to fall prey to premature evaluations. *Wertfreiheit* is thus Weber's ceaseless attempt to

reset the gaze and redefine the mediations with the world, both conceptually and by sharpening judgement and other mediating abilities. *Wertfreiheit* enjoins us to rebel against the tendency to make things easy for ourselves, e.g. by getting rid of ‘the reassuring certainties of tradition or the optimism of modern ideas’ (Hennis 1996, p. 154), and to refuse to accept as a given ‘certain practical stances, however widely held’, so as to be able to carry out ‘the specific function of science’, namely: ‘to transform what is conventionally given into a *problem*’ (1988, p. 502; 2012, p. 312) or, à la Foucault, to problematize what is taken for granted.

WEBER’S SOCIAL SCIENCE AS A DUAL SCIENCE OF REALITY AND OF SUBJECTIVATION

Weber’s *Wissenschaft* (science) cannot be divested of its subjective side, nor severed from his stance. This was felt by interpreters such as Löwith (1993, p. 46), who argued that ‘what ultimately shaped the scientific work of both [i.e. Marx and Weber] arose out of an impulse which entirely transcended science as such’; or Honigsheim (2000, p. 257), for whom Weber’s science is ‘a means for a higher purpose’, purpose provided by the stance. As we have seen before, it is the latter that can truly make *Wissenschaft*, by putting it at its service in confronting the world and bringing us to the resultant existential alternatives, ‘a force in the conduct of life’ (Hennis 1996, p. 170).

Now Weber’s social and cultural science is a science of reality (*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*) in the twofold sense of external and internal reality; hence its two fundamental branches, corresponding to the two components of the figure of subjectivation: a branch focused on external reality and another one on subjectivation. The science of external ‘reality’ is devoted to educate the gaze and, in conjunction with the other branch, desire. Its ultimate purpose is therefore not so much to accumulate knowledge of ‘reality’ as to heighten our capacity to see ‘reality’; this is a seeing deep which, as befits a subject confronting the world with a view to act in it, must exercise *Augenmaß* (judgement, sense of proportion), the quality needed to gauge ‘reality’ traditionally associated to action and politics (see Hennis, 2000, pp. 197-204) whose importance for Weber cannot be emphasised enough.

The other branch of Weber’s science is built on a presupposition utterly antithetical to resignation, namely, that humans are capable of being subjects. In

Weber's terms: 'The transcendental presupposition of every *science of culture* is ... that we *are* cultural *beings*, endowed with the capacity and the will to deliberately take a *stance* toward the world and lend it *meaning*' (1988, p. 180; 2012, p. 119). Weber certainly doesn't have a *concept* of subject with its corresponding term; yet he has 'a concept of "personality", which finds its "essence" in the constancy of its inner relation to specific ultimate "values" and life "significations"' (1988, p. 132; 2012, p. 85). That's Weber subject: if the signifier 'personality' is eminently bourgeois, the concept exceeds that signifier in a most useful direction for social science. None of the studies which treat 'personality' as central in Weber as far as I can tell, including Henrich's, approach this notion to that of subject. Thus Hennis (2000, p. 87) just wonders whether 'an "idea" of the human subject' underlies Weber's perspective, while more recently, in an otherwise important study, Farris (2013) tends to equate personality to a self. And yet I cannot think of a more adequate definition of subject for a science grounded on the idea of the human capacity for subjectivation and concerned in a fundamental way, as Hennis has shown, with the human type, i.e. with the '*quality of the human beings* (*Qualität der Menschen*)' (Weber 1988b, p. 13; 1994b, p. 15).

Now a science built on the tensional connection between two sciences must surely be grounded on an equally twofold conception of truth. Truth for Weber is indeed perfectly consistent with his science and stance: first of all, truth is *faithfulness to oneself as subject*, that is, being true or faithful to one's ultimate conviction or cause, and consistent in deploying its implications. Intellectual honesty concerns the latter and faithfulness cannot be reduced to it, as is often done, thus neglecting subjectivation. This idea of truth, referred to in various places in Weber's work but particularly in his lecture on science as 'remain[ing] true to yourself' or 'ourselves' (1994, p. 20; 2008, p. 47), concerns the subjectivation prescription. Second, the truth concerning the confrontation prescription, the examination of (external and internal) 'reality', which Weber names *adequacy*; it is a relationship of adequacy in its twofold sense of subjective adequacy, or 'adequacy at the level of meaning', and 'causal adequacy' (1976, p. 5; 1978, p. 12), which shows that the true hallmark of Weber's theory of social action lies in the tensional way it combines hermeneutics and determinism, sense and causality. Weber's view of scientific truth as 'only that which *claims* validity for all who *want* the truth' (1988, p. 184; 2012, p. 121), i.e. who are seized by it or

have the inner disposition to accept it, reveals the priority of the truth of subjectivation; for truth, to put it Nietzscheanly, only accepts suitors, not forced marriages.

SUBJECTIVATION IS PRIMARY; THEN COMES RATIONALIZATION

Subjectivation is absolutely crucial; but to that very extent, so is ‘reality’. Weberian social science investigates the complex dynamics between those two poles: that of the ‘subject’, understood in terms of personality and life conduct, and that of ‘reality’, understood in terms of life orders and powers, which we cannot address here (for an excellent treatment see Hennis, 2000, chapter 2). Their meeting point is the human type, which constitutes the measure of ‘every order of social relations’, whether broad societal orders or specific life orders, since such orders should be ‘ultimately examined also with respect to *the human type (menschlichen Typus)*’ they foster and shape (1988, p. 517; 2012, pp. 320-21). The task of investigation thus set for social scientists, eminently Platonic and empirical all at once, consists in identifying the types of human being specially favoured *and* hindered by any given life order and investigating how the former are shaped *and* the latter prevented from developing. That would be a most apt programme of inquiry to investigate and evaluate the life orders and powers that define our times. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that this will ever happen, for it is the fate of Weber’s social science to be endlessly talked about but rarely practiced.

Crucial in that kind of investigation is the study of the possibilities for the development of subjectivation. Here lies the crux of the much-disputed transcendental presupposition. In no way can that presupposition be understood as a mere ‘acting in relation to values’ or, what amounts to the same, ‘having preferences’, as some have claimed, for in that case Weber’s science would not be a science at all, but, as much of sociology today, a set of techniques of counting and measurement of consumers’ tastes, identities and life styles, supplemented by life experiences, not to mention the current proliferation of happiness studies, wellbeing and similar topics which not only are antithetical to Weber’s fundamental concern with how human beings *are* rather than how they *feel* or *enjoy* (1988b, p. 12; 1994b, p. 15), but strongly suggests that our time is truly the time of the Nietzschean last men in its Weberian variant, that is – as depicted at the very end of *The Protestant Ethic* – of the conjunctive synthesis of ‘specialist without spirit’, with the ‘mechanised petrification’ of the orders of life they sustain,

and ‘hedonists without heart’, with their sterile agitation of subjectivist values. It is this conjunctive synthesis that constitutes both the foremost subjective figure of nihilism of capitalist modernity and the objective figure Weber called, in Peter Baehr’s apt rendering, ‘shell as hard as steel’ (1920, pp. 203-04; 2002, pp. 121f) but became known as iron cage: a capitalist (not only bureaucratic, as is often claimed) figure of totalitarian surveillance and violent management of absolutely every aspect of existence whose contemporary version is of course a digital ‘assemblage’.

Most interpretations of the transcendental presupposition neglect subjectivation, the daemon. This is the case of neo-Kantian understandings such as Henrich’s, which tend to loosen drastically Weber’s thought. Henrich (1952, pp. 101 and 111) sustains that Weber’s methodology relies ‘on the presupposition that meaning-related consistency is the specific possibility of the human being’, and insists that ‘to act as a personality means to act consistently’, thus neglecting that such consistency, which is the work of reason, requires something on which to work, and this is the desire-bearing conviction. Weber makes this clear and explicit in his work, e.g. at the beginning of the *Intermediate Reflection*: ‘the command (*Gewalt*) over men’ that ‘the rational (*das Rationale*) in the sense of logical or teleological “consistency” has’ is only effectual if there is a ‘stance (*Stellungnahme*)’ (1991, p. 209). Or in relation to charisma, which, as Weber argues in *Economy and Society*, implies ‘a transformation from within’, while “ratio” works either from without ... or through intellectualisation’ (1976, p. 142; 1978, p. 1116). Hence the necessity of posing axiomatic prescriptions, since otherwise, without an initial positing of what is beyond question, the power of reason finds no grip.

We can define subjectivation as the joining together of a ‘daemon’ or an ultimate conviction (or, more formally, an axiomatic prescription and the desire making it alive) and the power of reason to consistently unfold it in confrontation with the world. Is it not precisely a particular historical figure of subjectivation the specific research object Weber investigates in *The Protestant Ethic*? As the starting point of Weber’s studies of Protestant asceticism, which as is well-known include the Protestant sects and churches, *The Protestant Ethic* ‘quite deliberately’, states Weber, studies ‘the effects that the *subjective* appropriation (*subjektive Aneignung*) of ascetic religiosity’ (the daemon?) ‘on the part of *individuals* were able to produce on the conduct of life’ (1920, p. 161; 2002, p. 152). It is a pointed and

fine effort to define the contours of subjectivation and isolate its effects independently of objective institutions and external regulations. Weber thus ‘deliberately (*absichtlich*)’, as he repeats in his first ‘*Antikritik*’ to *Rachfahl*, approaches the problem ‘from the angle *most difficult* to grasp and “prove”, that which concerns the inner habitus’ (1910, pp. 199-200; 2002, p. 277). There is nothing particularly strange in Weber’s determination to undertake such precision investigation, for subjectivation is what brings about novelty and creates the revolutionary possibility of disrupting the everyday. Hence Weber’s chief interest in the subjective side and in studying it independently from external regulations and discipline, as the latter can thwart and effectively ‘paralyse the subjective impulses toward a methodical conduct of life’ (1920, p. 162; 2002, p. 153).

And then, among the revolutionary forms of subjectivation, there is charisma, the most powerful of them all for Weber, who was gripped by it. I cannot dwell here on this enthralling subject, which will be addressed in a different study focused on Weber’s politics. Suffice it to quote from two crucial pages of *Economy and Society*: the charismatic belief or idea ‘revolutionizes men “from the inside out” (*von innen heraus*)’; it involves ‘not merely a subjective “feeling” or “experience”’, but ‘being seized (*Ergriffenwerden*)’ by the idea, which ‘enforces the inner subjection (*innere Unterwerfung*)’ to it. It is in this sense that ‘charisma is indeed the specifically “creative” revolutionary power of history’. But the processes of rationalization that often ensue charismatic moments can also be revolutionary; the decisive difference is that rationalization, perhaps the most prominent theme in Weber scholarship, revolutionizes ‘in principle “from without (*von außen*)”’ (1976, pp. 657-58; 1978, pp. 1116-17).

The neglect of subjectivation is in my view the main weakness of much of Weber scholarship – a neglect redolent of liberalism, a very deceptive path to understand Weber which still has not come to grips with basics such as that ‘the empirical grasping of human “conviction”’, in Hennis’ weird but revealing formulation (1996, section 1.3), is a fundamental aspect of Weber’s social science. The resulting flattening of Weber’s thought should perhaps surprise no one; certainly not Nietzsche, who diagnosed among ‘We scholars’ a deep-rooted penchant ‘to break every taut bow or – even better! – to unbend it’ (*Beyond Good and Evil*, § 206).

It thus seems appropriate to conclude by stressing that, if we hold on to the

standpoint that truly matters, i.e. that of keeping the bow drawn with a view to striking the arrow so as to produce some meaningful effect in the world, subjectivation, far from being presupposed, is the critical problem to investigate, and Weber's social and cultural science is the science devoted to its study: a science not simply 'of Man', as Hennis had it, that is, not simply a humanist science, still less a posthumanist science of human and nonhuman entities in a flattened world which will deny, as new materialist and posthumanist approaches do, subjectivation, but – in consonance with this fundamental inhuman aspect of Weber's thought that exceeds the human animal within the human element itself – a science of 'daemonized' humans and rationalized daemons.

Weber insisted on enduring the tensions with the utmost gravity and seriousness, as if he were 'unmusical' to play them in another order of reality, that of irony and comedy, which enable not only distance but an inner ductility especially suitable to bear the tensions without in the least unbending the bow – an unmusicality surely related to that severity of countenance which makes Weber resemble the ancient prophets. And yet he was not fully at home in the fateful and pessimist side of life either. Weber's strained confrontation of that side is expressed in the despairing finale of *Politics as a Profession and Vocation* through the famous ““nevertheless (*dennoch!*)” which signals the refusal to bend when faced with the worst setbacks.

It is a tension-ridden moment engaging intertwined temporalities, and Weber is intent on interpellating the most militant section of the revolutionary youth. At stake is the inner strength of their conviction and therewith their subjective destiny; but lurking powerfully in the background is Weber's own. A real present is the focus of a heightened sense of temporality, a present defined by Germany's defeat and the Spartacist revolution, now in its death throes (28th January 1919 is the date of Weber's lecture), with reaction gaining the upper hand. For Weber that present is haunted by the immediate past, the outbreak of the revolution, and the bleak future he envisages. The revolution had ruined the last possibility to which Weber had clung, 'a final, desperate national uprising as a card in the game of negotiations' (Mommsen, 1984, p. 296), and thus compelled him to say '*dennoch*' and continue seeking *national* salvation. In this situation, and despite his fierce opposition to the revolution, Weber doesn't summon the youth to give up on their conviction, which would have implied a total betrayal of his own stance, but to

put that conviction to a very harsh trial. If, forced to undergo the prolonged and terrible age Weber anticipates, they stick to their conviction and therefore refuse to accommodate to the *normalcy* of that age, a normalcy made up of all the trodden paths of subjective defeat, including conformism, evasion, cynicism and renegacy, then they will have been ‘inwardly a match’ for their times and their everyday existence.

Here it is perhaps necessary to correct a frequent misinformation or rather distortion concerning the very last moments of the relation between Weber and Lukács, about which one every so often hears some Weber scholars very keenly stating that Weber refused to sign the public appeal ‘Save Georg Lukács’ (12th November 2019) subscribed by very prominent German intellectuals, which is true, but forgetting to mention the reasons for that refusal and thereby suggesting that the fact that Weber and Lukács had become miles apart due to their radically different politics weighted more than acting in solidarity with a friend who obeyed his daemon. But nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, in a letter to Lukács dated ‘[March ?] 1920’, Weber asks Lukács to let him ‘know *how* one *can* be of help to you’ and adds in brackets: ‘I did not sign the recent public “appeal” because I had written earlier to the Ministry of Justice in Budapest on your behalf and noted there that I would *not* join any public action’. Weber explains this after having addressed Lukács as ‘Most esteemed friend’ and referred to ‘*your* [Lukács] “calling”’ (for revolutionary politics), about which he states: ‘Understandably, you claim sole right to decide about that’ (Lukács 1986, pp. 281-82, original emphases).

Weber’s stance thus prevailed, which shows its primacy in Weber’s thought and teaching, even amidst very strained and distressing situations, and, more importantly, its universal significance, which lies in everyone’s capacity to remain faithful to truths or ultimate value-ideas without losing a perceptive connection with the situation of the world. The terrain is thus set for us to revisit Weber’s political sociology and indeed his politics, but that will be the task of a future study.

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