

Classical Sociology

Bryan S. Turner



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Preface: The Sociological Classics

There is in contemporary social theory a degree of hostility to the study of the sociological classics. It is sometimes argued that the world we live in is so manifestly different from the social context within which the classics of sociology were written that the view of social life of early sociologists can have little relevance to us. For example, the computer on which this manuscript was written would have been unimaginable to Max Weber whose cramped but energetic handwriting has given translators so much difficulty. It is also claimed that the canon which constitutes classical sociology represents a unified view of sociology which can no longer be sustained in our academic world which is fragmented, diverse and contested. Canonical works in literature have been challenged by a process of decolonization which has rejected the hegemony of western literature. Critics also feel uncomfortable with the sociological canon of 'founding fathers'. We know that women in sociology have found it difficult to find a voice and the idea of a definite founding event in the construction of a separate discipline of sociology is controversial. Finally, the construction of a tradition within the discipline of sociology must be somewhat artificial given the fact that most of the principal contributions came from people who would not have self-consciously regarded themselves as sociologists. Despite these difficulties, a hasty and ill-considered rejection of classical sociology is to be avoided for reasons which I try to establish in this study of early sociological theory.

In part, I support existing defences of the classics which suggest that the nature of dispute and development in sociological theory is very different from the pattern of intellectual development in the natural sciences. Analytical difficulties and debates in sociology are not easily resolved, because the issues themselves remain essentially contested. Because there is no obvious theory cumulation or resolution of disputes, one can still learn from and value the classical accounts of sociological theory. The epistemological, theoretical and methodological difficulties which were identified and debated by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim have not been and cannot be easily resolved. In contemporary sociology, we may have a better understanding of the implications of these debates and may have more sophisticated technologies for approaching certain problems in

sociology but in essence the arguments for and against the use of ideal types, for example, are largely unchanged. In this respect, sociological theory is no different from political theory. One can enjoy and benefit from reading Thomas Hobbes on sovereignty as one can enjoy reading Weber on bureaucracy. Reading the classics is simply a useful aspect of the intellectual education of a social scientist.

The study of classical sociology is therefore a worthwhile exercise provided the following conditions are recognized: the canon remains open to revision; it is not reified into an exclusionary justification of professional membership of sociology departments; it is accepted as in part a retrospective summary of intellectual endeavour and thus remains always a somewhat arbitrary collection of texts; defending the classics cannot be an excuse for neglecting contemporary social theory, and finally it does not stand in the way of contemporary intellectual activity and development. A healthy scepticism should not be a legitimization of or an excuse for ignorance.

While these general principles are useful, it is possible to offer a more robust defence of the sociological canon. My principal argument is that, although rupture and diversity are very obvious features of sociological theory, there are also some hidden points of continuity, and the contemporary student of sociology cannot understand the discipline without such an historical awareness. Let us take an issue which plays a significant part in my understanding of the sociology of Weber. In his approach to power and culture, Weber was heavily influenced by the work of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Nietzsche had argued that we can only know the world from some vantage point or perspective, in the current situation these perspectives are in a state of constant conflict, and finally therefore reason has very specific limitations. The authority of these perspectives lies not necessarily in its inherent analytical or moral value, but on the political powers which underpin intellectual authority.

Weber's uncertainty about the ability of sociology ever to know the world unambiguously followed from this lesson of Nietzsche's epistemology and hence his various analyses of sociological method (ideal types, the principles of hermeneutic understanding, the fact-value distinction and so forth) were thoroughly grounded in Nietzsche. In addition, Weber followed Nietzsche in believing that many of our ethical approaches are expressions of psychoanalytical conflicts in the individual and are ultimately expressions of the presence or absence of real power. In this respect, Nietzsche's criticisms of Christianity are well known and they also once more influenced Weber's sociology of religion.

What we can define as Nietzsche's perspectivism also had a profound impact on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and through Heidegger's critique of the 'metaphysics of being' Nietzsche's philosophy has fundamentally shaped the modern debate about modernism and post-modernism. For example, the most frequently quoted definition of post-modernism comes from J.-F. Lyotard who claimed that postmodernism is

simply a scepticism about grand narratives. In short, perspectivism makes certain large-scale world views untenable. Similarly, Richard Rorty has argued, from the standpoint of what he calls liberal or bourgeois postmodernism, that postmodernism is the realization that there are no 'final vocabularies', that is there is no way of being finally certain that our view of reality is true. In fact as a pragmatist, Rorty argues that it is more profitable to ask whether a philosophy is useful or adequate to certain problems rather than whether it is true.

If we try to put this contemporary debate about postmodernism in its larger historical framework, we can see that the problem about perspectivism has gone through three phases. In the nineteenth century, philosophers and theologians debated the problems of historicism. In the world of Christian belief, the Bible came to be regarded as a somewhat arbitrary collection of the texts and these biblical texts were seen to be an expression of different historical context. How was it possible then to derive some universalistic message from the Christian faith which could be true for all people in their various historical settings? Historicism thus relativized the Christian message by arguing that the prophetic message of Jesus was historically specific. Ernest Renan's comparative philology developed a critique of the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions by demonstrating the local Semitic quality of their respective sacred languages. His *Vie de Jesus* transformed Christ into a Jewish prophet of a particular time and place. In the first part of the twentieth century, cultural relativism was profoundly shaped by the discoveries of social anthropologists whose work on 'primitive religions' began to provide some interesting comparisons with the 'world religions', especially Christianity. Protestant theologians like William Robertson Smith began to develop an early sociology of religion which translated these specific ethnographic studies into a more coherent and far-reaching sociology of the sacred. But the consequences of their intellectual inquiry were to raise critical responses from ecclesiastical authorities who recognized the corrosive impact of their ideas. This debate about local cultures in relation to world religions and globalization continues today. The final stage of this historical development of relativism is in fact the postmodern debate, which has, along with subaltern studies, feminism and postcolonial theory, brought into question large, universalistic claims about the authority of final vocabularies.

Reading Weber's attempts to come to terms with the legacy of Nietzsche is not only a useful preparation for understanding postmodernism, it is in fact an essential foundation for such an approach. The ironic aspect of postmodernism of course is that it often denies there can be any history of any idea or institution. For postmodernism, history is merely one type of narrative which can be offered for an institution or individual. It is part of the postmodern agenda to undermine historical narratives, including historical accounts of postmodernism itself. Such a closure of history provides postmodernism, however, with some protection from its own relativity.

A grounding in Weber's confrontation with Nietzschean perspectivism is helpful in putting postmodernism in its (historical) place. There is thus a strange parallel between the reconstruction of social consciousness in the 1890s and the postmodernization of social thought in the 1990s.

How does Karl Marx fit into this picture? One argument is that Marx, Nietzsche and Weber produced similar responses to the problem of human existence in industrial society, where the traditional world of the ecclesiastical institutions, agricultural economies, political conventions, traditional moral codes and conventional values was breaking down. Marx's theory of the alienation of human beings from themselves and their social world, Nietzsche's sense of the separation of human beings from their own consciousness by the neurotic character of Prussian Germany and Weber's view of the world as disenchanted (as an iron cage) exhibit certain similarities. In order to illustrate that argument, I have in this collection of writing on classical sociology included an introduction to Karl Löwith's study of *Max Weber and Karl Marx*. Löwith was a student of Heidegger and read Weber and Marx from the perspective of Heideggerian theology. Both Weber and Marx in their respective writing on rationalization and alienation provided an analysis of the human condition which is closely related to Heidegger's sense that modern people have lost their way in the world. Heidegger's classical study of *Being and Time* constantly refers to the importance of discovering a way in the forest, of clearing a space for man to dwell in harmony with Being. By studying Löwith's extended essay on Weber and Marx, we can begin to see this close connection between Nietzsche, Weber and Heidegger, and also appreciate how Marx's philosophical anthropology of human estrangement foreshadowed a profound philosophical and sociological critique of technological civilization and its negative consequences. The sociological classics within this framework become living documents to a tradition of critical reflection and research on the dilemmas of human existence in an industrial and technological civilization.

This book falls into two parts. The first part looks at key thinkers in the growth of early sociology (Karl Marx, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Emile Durkheim, Karl Mannheim and Talcott Parsons). The second part explores the key institutions which dominated sociological and anthropological inquiry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Together these two parts provide the student with a systematic introduction to classical sociology and its development in the twentieth century. The guiding theme of this study is the idea of alienation as an account of human existence in a social world which has been transformed by a process of rationalization.

Thus in Part I, I explore the influence of the legacy of Marx and Marxism on early sociology, and trace the evolution of that Marxist influence through Weber, Simmel, Mannheim and Durkheim. The discussion concludes with the work of Parsons who is recognized as, in many respects, the conclusion of the classical tradition. Part I starts with an essay comparing and contrasting Marx and Weber (from the Heideggerian perspective

of the work of Löwith), which sets the scene by comparing the themes of human alienation and social rationalization. The second chapter looks at Weber's sociology as a major sociological response to the legacy of Marx. The following chapters explore Mannheim's work on ideology and culture as responses to Marxist theories of ideology. The chapter on Durkheim considers his analysis of civil society, the state and 'intermediary groups' which demonstrates that the claim that he had no political sociology is a serious misreading. Durkheim, like Marx, was aware of the negative impact of economic individualism on mental life and social harmony. Against the utilitarian view of society, Durkheim developed a theory of the role of the state as a moral agent, which anticipated some features of the contemporary debate about citizenship. The chapter on Simmel examines his philosophy of money as an alternative to Marxist economic sociology. Part I concludes with a study of Parsons as a critic of utilitarian economic thought and treats Parsonian sociology as the end point of the first wave of sociology.

In Part II, I examine key institutions in the development of the sociological imagination and the theme of Marxism and its critique is continued into the area of institutional analysis. To some extent, the question of the role of religion in the development of capitalist society preoccupied both Marxism and early sociology. In a comparison of Marxist and Weberian approaches to class analysis, I also explore the debate about social class and consider the emergence of social stratification theory in North American sociology. Other chapters look at the contributions of both Marxists and sociologists to the study of the family in industrial capitalism. The growth of the sociology of the city also illustrates the contested views of the importance of urban social relations in debates about alienation, marginalization and ethnic conflicts. Part II also includes an examination of the sociology of generations which elaborates Mannheim's criticisms of Marxist class analysis and concludes with a chapter exploring the contribution of T.H. Marshall to political sociology. In Marshall's sociology, citizenship is an institution which contributes to the reform of capitalism and mitigates the impact of class conflict through a redistribution of resources.

These essays provide therefore one possible defence of the importance of the legacy of classical sociology for an understanding of the modern world. Early sociology engaged with a range of social issues to do with inequality and power, which remain relevant to contemporary society. More importantly, classical sociology addressed a series of moral questions through the themes of alienation, anomie and rationalization which are useful tools by which to probe the ethical dilemmas of the next century.

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PART I

CLASSICAL THEORY

CHAPTER I

THE CENTRAL THEMES OF SOCIOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

The Marx–Weber Debate

Although the relationship between Marx and Weber has been the topic of considerable debate and research (Antonio and Glassman, 1985), we need to distinguish carefully between three somewhat separate issues: Weber's relationship to the social theories of Marx, his relation to Marxism as an intellectual tradition and his relation to communism as a revolutionary movement. It is clear that, while Weber was impressed by Marx as a social analyst, he did not know about the entire corpus of Marx's work, he did not fully understand Marx and finally Marx did not make a systematic impact on Weber. There is no simple way in which Weber was involved in a debate with 'the ghost of Marx' (Salomon, 1935). Both supporters and critics of Weber of course welcomed *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as a possible refutation of Marx's analysis of industrial capitalism. In the 1960s and 1970s, in a similar fashion academic sociologists treated Weber's *Economy and Society* as the principal alternative to Marx's *Capital*.

In fact, there is relatively little overt discussion of the work of Marx in Weber's sociology. As many commentators have noted, Weber would not have had access to such crucial texts of Marx as *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, *Theses on Feuerbach* or *Grundrisse*. For Weber, Marx's work represented a mono-causal explanation of history in terms of economic conditions and therefore Weber believed that Marxist sociology had not adequately confronted the problems raised by neo-Kantianism and in particular by the methodological theories of Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert and Wilhelm Windelband (Sahay, 1971). To some extent, it was left to Austro-Marxism to undertake this confrontation with neo-Kantian epistemology (Bottomore and Goode, 1978).

Although in the formulation of his sociology Weber was not systematically influenced by Marx, this empirical observation does not imply that there was no relationship. For example, it is important for the central argument of this book to note that there is a significant similarity and connection between Marx's concept of alienation and Weber's concept of rationalization (Löwith, 1993). It is also true that Marx and Weber shared similar ambiguities towards an understanding of bureaucracy, markets and science as crucial components of capitalist society and as forces of modernization (Sayer, 1991). However, we cannot argue that during his

lifetime an engagement with the work of Marx was constitutive of Weber's sociological arguments. Weber was by contrast very much concerned with the issue of the impact of Marxism as a social ideology on the German working class through the Social Democratic movement. Although Marx developed a revolutionary politics of capitalism, by the 1890s it was obvious that German capitalism would not collapse as a consequence of revolution. If anything, the real incomes and the standard of living of the working class had risen. There had been as a result no polarization or pauperization of society. Weber was critical of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) which attempted to combine a reformist approach to electoral politics with a faith in the final triumph of socialism. Under the leadership of intellectuals like Eduard Bernstein, the SPD had adopted political reformism, namely the theory that there would be a gradual transformation of capitalism through the electoral participation of the working class. Bernstein and his followers abandoned any commitment to practical revolutionary strategies and tactics, such as the general strike. Weber tended therefore either to despise reformism, because it combined political conservatism with a revolutionary rhetoric, or to regard it as no longer a significant dimension of German politics, and yet paradoxically he was often in agreement with Bernstein who rejected, for example, Marx's doctrine of economic determinism (Breuilly, 1987).

While Weber was interested in the fortunes of the SPD, he was fearful of any further destabilization of the German state, especially after the political defeat of 1918–19. Weber was closely involved with other scholars in political disputes about Germany after the War and, in the debates in 1917 at Lauenstein Castle about the constitutional future, radical students, including Georg Lukács, had anticipated that Weber would announce a new political order (Kadarkay, 1991: 187). Instead Weber welcomed the fact that Russian interference in Germany had been averted, and recognized the inevitability of American hegemony in the emerging world system. Weber's lack of engagement with the radical politics of the student movement was also a function of the fact that he remained consistently anxious about the 'Russian danger'. As a nationalist, Weber was concerned to protect the cohesion of Germany as a strong nation-state. In his essays on the Russian revolutions (Weber, 1995), he attempted to analyse the failures of liberal-bourgeois democracy. The constitutional reforms had been frustrated by the failure of local and provincial governments to gain autonomy, the social and political weakness of the bourgeoisie as a class and the permanent authoritarianism of the Tsarist regime. Weber remained fearful over the persistent threat of eastern authoritarianism, and therefore rejected the views of the radical youth of Munich who sought an end to war through a Russian-style revolution.

Weber, influenced by the work of Robert Michels on 'the iron law of oligarchy', believed that a revolution could not succeed without a loyal bureaucratic staff, but bureaucratization would also limit the scope of

revolution (Mommsen, 1989). It was over these issues that he, for example, departed company with Lukács whose views he treated as romantic and utopian. In an important but incomplete passage on revolution in *Economy and Society*, Weber argued that the German bureaucracy had survived the War and thereby demonstrated the durability of modern bureaucracies. He also attributed some of the success of the Russian Revolution to the fact that workers and soldiers were able to take up bureaucratic tasks successfully. He concluded that 'every revolution which has been attempted under modern conditions has failed completely because of the indispensability of trained officials and of the lack of its own organized staff' (Weber, 1978: 266). Lukács and other radicals who regarded revolution as a spiritual transformation of society found it difficult to accept Weber's realism when it came to the assessment of political conditions.

After Weber's death, there was little discussion of his sociology in the English-speaking world and obviously intellectual exchange between Germany and the Allies was very limited. However, from the 1950s until the end of the 1970s, there was a steady stream of translations of Weber's major works, which illustrated the scope of Weber's intellectual achievement. Weber's reception into North American sociology was, however, through the interpretation and perspective of Talcott Parsons, who did not pay much attention to Weber's economic and political sociology. Parsons was primarily concerned with Weber's relationship to the voluntaristic theory of action and to the sociology of religion (Holton and Turner, 1986). Against this perspective, a number of sociologists emphasized the importance of so-called 'conflict sociology' and interpreted Weber as a social theorist whose major contribution had been to the analysis of material interests, group struggle and social conflict (Rex, 1961).

During the cold war period, there was also a huge expansion of undergraduate sociology in European universities. In this context, there emerged a considerable ideological battle around the works of Marx and Weber. With the growth in popularity of so-called structural Marxism, Weber was increasingly defined as a 'bourgeois sociologist', whose commitment to methodological individualism and political liberalism confirmed his membership of the bourgeois class. There were a number of important translations of Marxist works into English which fuelled the debate such as *For Marx* (Althusser, 1969) and *Political Power and Social Classes* (Poulantzas, 1973). In England, sociology became polarized around those who supported Poulantzas's criticisms of individualistic and 'unscientific' sociology and those who by contrast supported the view of Marxism as a scientific theory of social formations.

In both America and continental Europe, these Marxist debates had less impact on the curriculum of sociology in the universities. The May events of 1968 passed without any permanent damage to the governments of western Europe. In the United States, despite the Vietnam War, Marxism made little serious progress and debates about social theory were more

likely to be organized around pro-Parsons and anti-Parsons factions (Alexander, 1987), while actual empirical research was quantitative in the tradition of P.F. Lazarsfeld. Radical and critical appraisals of Parsons drew upon both Marx and Weber, because in the American context Weber often appeared as a radical social theorist (Gouldner, 1970; Mills, 1959). We therefore have the paradox that in the communist bloc social theorists took Weber very seriously, but regarded him as a bourgeois sociologist. In western sociology, Weber was often neglected in favour of structural Marxism or neglected because he appeared to be a Machiavellian theorist of power politics.

By the time Parsons died in 1979, functionalism was moribund and has remained so, despite attempts to revive it in the shape of neo-functionalism (Alexander, 1985). A decade later organized communism eventually collapsed and there has been throughout the eastern bloc a significant revival of sociology which has ironically often involved a renewal of interest in Weberian sociology. Althusser committed suicide in 1990, by which time structural Marxism had ceased to be influential. During this period, however, there was also a general decline in sociology within western universities and a new interest in cultural studies with the result that the notion of 'culture' has somewhat replaced 'society' as the key topic of sociological discussion. The sociological reasons for these changes are to be sought in the growth of cultural consumerism, global tourism, the aestheticization of everyday life and the postmodernization of culture (Connor, 1996). As one might expect, therefore, the contemporary interest in Weber tends to emphasize the importance of culture in Weber's sociology, to associate Weber with Nietzsche as a cultural critic and to relate Weber's dispute over values to postmodernism as a cultural theory. The relationship between Marx and Weber in western sociology is understated and other relationships (Weber and Nietzsche, Weber and Simmel) are discussed and promoted (Turner, 1992b). The future of Weberian sociology in the post-communist societies remains an issue of fascinating speculation (Weiss, 1986).

The Unintended Consequences of Action

In *For Weber* (Turner, 1981) I made a direct reply to theories of social structure which had been primarily influenced by structural Marxism, particularly by the writings of the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. Althusser's influential reading of Marx, which had been originally published in France in 1965 as *Pour Marx*, appeared in English in 1969. *For Weber* was intended to be a direct challenge to the influence of structural Marxism by arguing that many of the claims of Althusser were inaccurate when applied to the work of Weber and that there was a structuralist reading of Weber which demonstrated at least some similarities with the work of Marx from a particular vantage point of interpretation. Marxist

critics of Weberian sociology often dismissed this legacy as individualistic, subjectivist and unscientific. My study of Weber attempted to show that there was an objective dimension to his sociology which was exhibited in the notion of the unintended consequences of social action, namely consequences which lay outside the consciousness and intention of the social actors involved. The deterministic element in Weber's interpretive sociology was illustrated through a set of historical case studies which showed the fateful consequences of action over which social actors had no significant control, or indeed knowledge. The classical illustration of this fateful view of history was primarily demonstrated in Weber's famous 'Protestant Ethic' thesis (Lehmann and Roth, 1993). The unanticipated consequence of ascetic religious actions had been the creation of a capitalist culture, the secular outcomes of which often denied or undermined their religious callings which had given rise to the capitalist spirit in the seventeenth century. Weber's sociology of religion could be read or interpreted as a series of tragic narratives about the negative and unanticipated consequences of actions directed towards personal salvation. The tragic or fatalistic dimensions of Weber's sociology were in many respects parallel to the narrative structure of the tragic novels of Thomas Mann, particularly in such works as *The Magic Mountain* and *Buddenbrooks* (Marcus, 1987).

Weber's sense of personal tragedy and the fatefulness of western history was in part the cultural product of the transformations of the academic community in Germany where there had been a major decline in the status of the independent scholar and intellectual, a transformation which has been captured by Fritz Ringer in the notion of the decline of the German mandarins (Ringer, 1969). The theme of social tragedy or fate influenced not only the sociology of Weber but also the work of Tönnies, Troeltsch, Simmel and Lukács (Liebersohn, 1988). At a more profound level this *Kulturpessimismus* was a reflection of significant changes in the relationship between culture and social class in the educated middle strata of nineteenth-century Germany. This pessimism about culture was reflected in the debate about *Bildung* and personality which shaped the outlook of the late nineteenth-century educated, middle classes in Germany. This fatalistic view regarded the growth of civilization as a direct challenge to traditional culture and thereby to the status of the intellectual as the guardian of high culture (Elias, 1978; Goldman, 1992). The problems of social change, interpersonal ethics, the self and the demise of traditional rural values shaped the narrative content of the *Bildungsroman* in this period (Moretti, 1987). In a society where the traditional intellectual was being overtaken and bypassed by the technical specialist within an industrial civilization, what was the role of intellectuals in such an environment? Weber's bitter complaint about 'hedonists without a heart and experts without a spirit' (*Genussmenschen ohne Hertz und Fach menschen ohne Geist*) at the conclusion of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was an expression of this sense of the decline of the fully educated and comprehensive personality of the traditional

intellectual. Weber's critique of the bureaucratization of intellectual callings was partly inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's abhorrence at the growing dominance of the soulless state intellectuals within the emergent Prussian bureaucracy. Against these specialists with their calling to serve the state (the new *Berufsmenschentum*) Nietzsche proposed a revolutionary creation, Overman (*Übermensch*). Here again there was an important relationship between the literary treatment of the intellectual in Mann's novels (such as *Death in Venice* and *Doctor Faustus*) and Weber's particular concentration on the notion of intellectual vocations in science and politics (Lassman and Velody, 1989).

Nietzsche and Weber

For Weber was therefore engaged in a debate with Weber's sociology from the point of view of an interest in a tragic vision of history which was worked out within the context of Weber's highly technical sociology of social action. This pessimistic view of history was a consequence of Weber's direct and specific engagement with the legacy of the philosophy of Nietzsche, particularly with Nietzsche's concept of resentment (Stauth and Turner, 1988). Various aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy impinged upon Weber's formulation of a sociology of action. For example, there is in Nietzsche the contrast between Apollo, the God of Form and Reason, and Dionysus, the God of Emotion and Sexuality. Weber's analysis of the 'Protestant Ethic thesis' can be seen as an account of how the Apollo principle dominated over the emotional life through the formation of vocations in the economic sphere. This conflict between sexuality and civilization played a general role in Weber's analysis of the civilizational functions of religious values, but also in Weber's personality as a struggle between family responsibilities and sexual fulfilment (Green, 1974). Weber's personal values were thoroughly ambiguous, he admired the seriousness of the professional calling in science and politics, while also remaining aware of the destructive consequences of this-worldly asceticism. Secondly, the relationship between Weber's concept of charisma and the superman has also been noted in various aspects of the literature on Weber (Eden, 1983). Certainly the problem of leadership in a bureaucratic social environment remained a significant issue in Weber's political sociology. Thirdly, the central importance of power in Weber's sociology as a whole and Weber's interest in German politics in particular (Mayer, 1944; Mommsen, 1984) has often been associated with Nietzsche's concern for the role of the will to power in the shaping of human societies and human culture. Finally, Weber's ambiguous and critical relationship to religion, particularly the ascetic sects of Christianity, has, as a number of commentators have suggested, a direct relationship to Nietzsche's critical attacks on conventional religiosity in the nineteenth century (Schroeder, 1992).

These conventional commentaries on the relationship between Nietzsche and Weber may however have missed some of the essential features of the legacy of Nietzsche's critical philosophy in Weber's sociology. Nietzsche's philosophy grew out of a cultural critique of late nineteenth-century German society within which a new mentality, the mentality of professional specialists, was beginning to dominate cultural debate and ascetic appreciation. These cultural specialists were in Nietzsche's view closely associated with the dominance of Calvinistic theology and the expansion of the new Prussian state. This dominance of the state specialist was part of a long historical evolution of the relationship between church, state and education in German society. Weber's view of the professionalization of the scientific vocation was part of this Nietzsche critique of state functionaries. Returning to the 'Protestant Ethic' theme, Weber regarded these Calvinistic men of vocations as carriers of an ethic of world mastery which involved the domination of emotions and affectivity as merely irrational passions which stood in the way of rational action. Their social lives were controlled by a commitment to an ethic of mastery which subordinated such sexual emotions in the interests of personal control. Alongside these Protestant figures, Weber also placed the professional men of calling in science and politics, whose social relations were organized by a commitment to a rational plan in the interests of their personal achievement of public status within the new regime. These religious callings, as we know, drove these men beyond what was actually necessary for the satisfaction of their everyday needs and wants. This personal drive was the irrationality of economic rationality. This striving for world mastery did not lead however to a satisfaction with the meaningfulness of everyday life, but rather resulted in a continuing disenchantment with reality which drove out moral significance from everyday life. Weber argued in his sociology of civilizations that the peculiar danger of our period is characterized by expanding rationalization which results ultimately in religious and moral disenchantment. Weber explored various solutions to this dilemma, including for example the ethic of responsibility, the development of new forms of communitarian life, explorations with new patterns of eroticism, a return to the arms of the Church, and a series of vocations in science and politics. This search for a solution to personal disenchantment and meaninglessness provided the central tensions and ambiguities of Weber's sociological perspective. Some aspects of the feminist critique of Weber have dwelt on these issues of ethical heroism and world mastery in Weber's allegedly patriarchal view of power and values (Bologh, 1990).

The core of Nietzsche's social philosophy was an attachment to 'the little things' of everyday life (Stauth and Turner, 1988). Nietzsche thought that the values and practices of everyday life, which were centred on reciprocity and emotion, were being transformed by the rationalistic cultures of a technological civilization driven by industrial needs. For Nietzsche,

religion and abstract philosophy were both misapprehensions and distortions of the values of everyday social life. In the terminology of contemporary critical theory, the life-world was being destroyed and rendered inauthentic by the new rationalist culture of the state as the values and morals of the private world were colonized by the rationalistic culture of the public arena. Nietzsche approached this problem of the inauthenticity of the life-world via a discussion of the demise of Christian authority, or more generally, religious authority in his famous slogan that 'God is dead'. By this shocking slogan, Nietzsche wanted to indicate that in contemporary society it is no longer possible to identify a moral principle that will give a uniform, coherent and unquestioned authority to some general pattern of life or society. Following Richard Rorty's account of irony, we can say Nietzsche's vision of the death of God indicates that no 'final vocabulary' for justifying belief is possible and hence we are all exposed to the contingency of our own moral positions. In this ironist view, 'there is no such thing as a "natural" order of justification for beliefs or desires' (Rorty, 1989: 83). Weber engaged with this debate through a commentary on the polytheistic character of value conflicts in contemporary society. In short, Nietzsche's so-called 'perspectivism' became a part of Weber's basic epistemology of the social sciences. The 'truths' and empirical findings of sociological research are always the result or product of particular frameworks and methodologies. These partial results are always temporary and contingent. Weber's use of the 'ideal type' was based on the assumption that knowledge is always a biased summary of many possible positions and alternatives.

The End of Organized Marxism

In the 1970s the character of sociology, particularly within the European universities, was shaped and driven by the historic relationship between Marxism and Weber's sociology. Weber's sociology was seen to be a specific response to the challenge of Marxism and Marxist sociology. For example, Weber's treatment of social stratification involving an analysis of status, power and economic classes was often interpreted as a more appropriate interpretation of the social structure of capitalist societies (Aron, 1963) than Marx's dichotomous analysis of class. Weber's notion of social closure as a strategy for the monopolistic control of resources was treated as a fundamental approach to class divisions alongside other fissures in society. Weber's concept of social closure provided a systemic bourgeois critique of Marxist class theory (Parkin, 1979). In other areas, it can be argued that Weber's ontology of human beings provided a radical alternative to Marx's post-Feuerbachian account of the nature of human beings as constituted by social practice (Löwith, 1993). Weber's notion of human beings as creators of meaning through practical action in the world provided an interesting comparison with the varieties of Marxist humanism which have emerged

from east European Marxism (Satterwhite, 1992). In addition, one can argue that Weber's comparative historical sociology (Kalberg, 1994), his macro sociological theory (Collins, 1986a) and his sociology of power (Roth, 1987) provide contemporary sociology with a systematic and general view of history and society which is deeper, richer and more systematic than the legacy of Marx's political economy.

Clearly the debate between Marx and Weber is controversial and incomplete (Antonio and Glassman, 1985; Weiss, 1986). The unintended consequence of the controversy between Weber and Marx was that it provided an effective and clear method by which the very nature of sociology could be defined. Sociology was an academic discipline which through the intellectual interaction with Marxism produced a distinctive perspective on the structure of industrial capitalist society, generated a clear view of historical development, embraced a sociological approach to ontology and had a philosophy of social science which provided the philosophical framework for empirical social research. Weber's social theory provided contemporary sociology with a systematic approach to the construction of social theory (Albrow, 1990), an all embracing vision of history (Kalberg, 1994), and a significant body of political theory (Mommson, 1989). Finally, Weber's analysis of such notions as value neutrality, value relevance and the fact-value distinction offered sociologists a valuable ethical framework for the conduct of practical research; Weber's account of value neutrality has of course been the topic of much philosophical and political dispute (Runciman, 1972).

The social and intellectual context of the debate between Marx and Weber has of course been radically transformed by two significant social changes in the 1980s and 1990s. The first has been the political collapse of communism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the second is the corrosive effect on modernism of the process of postmodernization. I shall deal with the question of postmodernism towards the end of this introductory chapter and at this stage I am merely concerned to note the collapse of the Marx-Weber debate as a consequence of the institutional catastrophe which hit organized Marxism in the late 1980s. The collapse of organized communism could be taken as some historical validation for Weber's pessimistic view of the iron cage of capitalism, namely that an ethic of socialist solidarity could never triumph over the historical and ineluctable processes of bureaucratization and rationalization. The Soviet Empire was simply another instance of the processes of rationalization in everyday life, which overcame the humanistic values of Marxism as a secular ethic of brotherly love. Weber was fascinated by the social struggles in Russia around 1905 and 1906 as the autocratic government of Tsar Nicholas II tried to reach some compromise with the liberal reform movement. Weber wrote a number of important articles on the provincial and district organizations of local self-government (the *zemstvos*) which were the conduit for demands for civil liberties. Weber believed that the prospects of significant

liberalization in autocratic Russia were socially limited (Weber, 1995) and Weber's scepticism regarding the possibilities of a socialist transformation of capitalism are well known, but the dramatic collapse of communism in the 1980s was not anticipated in academic circles. However, if we accept Weber's critical attitudes towards centralized socialism, we should not forget his equally ambiguous views of the possibilities of liberal democracy within capitalism. Weber was pessimistic about the possibilities of genuine political participation and believed that the needs of leadership in a contemporary political environment required an authoritarian or plebiscitary form of democracy.

The collapse of organized communism has therefore put an end, for the time being, to the historic debate between Marx and Weber. The demise of Marxism has been associated as a result with new lines of interpretation with regard to the significance of Weber's sociology. The erosion of Marxism has been associated with a new emphasis on Weber's relationship to Nietzsche and to the romantic critique of capitalism which had been developed in Germany. Writers like George, Klages and Gundolf specifically adopted a Nietzschean critique of modern rational culture, rejecting the standardization of social and cultural reality. Only a new breed or a new creation of men could overcome this cultural debasement, because the rational intellect threatened to destroy the soul and the body. Weber admired much of the visionary poetry of Stefan George but rejected his romanticism as inadequate for the tasks of contemporary society. These romantic criticisms of industrial capitalism did, however, exercise a covert and indirect influence on the rise and development of early forms of critical theory in Germany.

Before the collapse of organized communism, there had of course been growing disillusionment with and alienation from Marxism as a social movement and with the communist regimes of eastern Europe. Many leading Marxist theorists of the post-war period who attempted to transform Marxist theory subsequently turned to alternative paradigms such as post-modernism. The intellectuals who were associated with the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in France are typical of this situation. For example, J.-F. Lyotard (1988: 63) has complained that behind the facade of the workers' movement 'unions contributed to regulating the exploitation of the labour force; the party served to modulate the alienation of consciousnesses; socialism was a totalitarian regime; and Marxism was no longer anything but a screen of words thrown over real *différends*'. From within sociology, one might argue that the same anxieties about centralized socialism also drove Weber to a clear appreciation of the dangers of Russian socialism.

With the collapse of communism, there has been a theoretical tendency to resurrect the debate about modernization as an alternative to more traditional contrasts between capitalism and socialism. The view of Weber as a major analyst of capitalism, alongside Marx, Veblen, Schumpeter, and Spencer, has given way to an interpretation of Weber as the primary

theorist of rational modernity and modernization. In the 1960s and 1970s Marxist sociologists condemned concepts like modernity and modernization as false concepts within functionalism which really meant westernization. In the 1980s and 1990s there has been a revival of concepts of modernity and modernization. Anthony Giddens (1994: 68–9) has recently moved away from an interpretation of Weber as a theorist of capitalism to a theorist of modernity. Thus he asks rhetorically ‘What is Weber’s discussion of the Protestant Ethic if not an analysis of the obsessional nature of modernity?’ We might note also that Marx has been restored as an interpreter of modern culture by writers like Marshall Berman in his *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (1983). Also Derek Sayer in his *Capitalism and Modernity* (1991) regards both Marx and Weber as developing a theory of modernity within which capitalism is simply a specific instance. Sociological debate therefore has swung away from the analysis of the structures of capitalism to an interpretation of culture in modernization and postmodernism. As a result the concept of culture has replaced much of the original debate about ideology and structure within the sociological canon. Because Weber devoted much of his intellectual endeavour to the analysis of cultural sociology, we may expect that Weberian notions will play a significant part in the contemporary interest in cultural themes.

Reading Weber

This debate between the legacy of Marx and Weber gave rise to a number of more specific, and possibly more interesting, questions about whether it is possible to discover a coherent organizing theme or principle in the work of Weber which would integrate his rather diverse collection of publications into a systematic whole. This search for a principle of thematic unity in Weberian sociology is also associated with the dispute regarding the validity of the view of Weber as the founding father of contemporary sociology. The quest for an organizing theme in Weber has been complicated by the peculiarities with which Weber’s work has actually been published and translated. Weber’s academic career was of course disrupted by his severe illness which, from the winter of 1898, prevented Weber conducting serious research. Various explanations of this crisis have been offered, such as the conflict between the parental values, sexual repression and the failure to achieve a successful political career (Collins, 1986b). Much of Weber’s work subsequently, such as the ‘Protestant Ethic thesis’, was published as separate and discreet essays. As a result, much of Weber’s work was posthumously published by his wife Marianne Weber. For example, the monumental *Economy and Society* (1978) was posthumously published by his wife in an attempt to present Weber’s work as a systemic outline of interpretive sociology. His *General Economic History* (Weber, 1981) was assembled from students’ notes relating to Weber’s final

lectures. Many of his publications such as *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations* (Weber, 1976) were in fact collections of articles which had been published separately. Weber's work is clearly large, complex and diverse (Käsler, 1988). The complexity of the publishing history of Weber's legacy has provided an ideal and fertile breeding ground for a variety of interpretations of Weber's work.

Much of the debate was centred around the notion of rationalization in Weber's sociology. By rationalization, Weber referred to a set of inter-related social processes by which the modern world had been systematically transformed. In this perspective, the rise of capitalist society can be taken as simply an illustration of this general pattern of rationalization. As a social process rationalization includes the systematic application of scientific reason to the everyday world and the intellectualization of routine activities through the application of systematic knowledge to practice. Rationalization in everyday life was also associated with the disenchantment of reality, that is the secularization of values and attitudes. In institutional terms, this process involved the decline of the authority of the Church and the erosion of the status of the clergy. In religious terms rationalization involved the development of an intellectual stratum of theologians who produced religious thought as a systematic statement about reality. In legal terms, rationalization involved the decline and erosion of *ad hoc* legal decision making based upon arbitrary processes and the creation of a deductive legal system following universalistic laws. Within the political sphere, rationalization was associated with the decline and disappearance of traditional norms of legitimization, such as the dependence upon charismatic leadership. In social terms generally, rationalization was constituted by the spread of bureaucratic control, the establishment of modern systems of surveillance, the dependence on the nation state as a controlling agency and the rise of new forms of administration. Rationalization as a master theme in Weber's sociology has therefore often been compared with the theme of alienation and reification in the work of Marx (Löwith, 1993). The rationalization theme has dominated much contemporary Weberian scholarship (Scaff, 1989; Sica, 1988; Whimster and Lash, 1987). However the argument that rationalization is the key to Max Weber's sociology is most closely associated with the work of Frederick Tenbruck (1975; 1980). It is the debate with Tenbruck which has established the contours of recent Weber scholarship.

Tenbruck's famous essay on 'The problem of thematic unity in the works of Max Weber' has two principal dimensions. The first is to question Marianne Weber's description of *Economy and Society* as Weber's principal work (*Hauptwerk*) and secondly to identify and express the underlying anthropological dimension of Weber's sociology, namely his account of humans as 'cultural beings'. For Tenbruck, there is no particular key to the interpretation of *Economy and Society*, precisely because that text is a conglomerate of disparate elements which do not constitute a recognizable

major work. Tenbruck by contrast draws our attention to the central role of the Economic Ethic of World Religions, namely Weber's interest in the sociology of religion with respect to the rationalization process. For Tenbruck, the essays on the Economic Ethic of World Religions are the principal consolidation and elaboration of the arguments begun first in the essays on the 'Protestant Ethic thesis'. The 'Protestant Ethic' was merely a component therefore of the central analysis of religion and economics which occupied the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religions soziologie* (Weber, 1921). In addition, Tenbruck draws our attention to the special importance of the 'Author's introduction' (*Vorbemerkung*) to the sociology of religion as a whole which was included by Parsons in his translation of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber also wrote an additional introduction in 1913 which was published in 1915 with the title 'Intermediate reflections' (*Zwischenbetrachtung*) which was conceived after the 'Author's introduction' was already in print. The *Zwischenbetrachtung* was translated by Gerth and Mills in *From Max Weber* (Gerth and Mills, 1961: 323–62) as 'religious rejections of the world and their directions'. Tenbruck's argument is therefore that the analysis of the Economic Ethic of World Religions dominated Weber's intellectual activities from around 1904 to 1920. Because his publications on religion occupied this creative period of Weber's life, we should regard these texts on religion and economics as his principal work rather than *Economy and Society*.

Tenbruck then argues that the thematic unity of these sociology of religion texts is the way in which religious orientations towards the world did or did not lead to an ethic of world mastery, that is to a process of rationalization. In the principal essays of his sociology of religion, that is in the 'Introduction', the 'Intermediate reflections' and the 'Author's introduction', Weber came to a universalistic and historical conceptualization of these rationalization processes. It was these dominant world religious views which generated different patterns of rationalism and rationalization in the modern world. This development is completely compatible with Weber's interpretative sociology because it was these meaning systems within religion that generated specific world views that acted as the motivations for action. In particular, it was the problem of theodicy which generated this drive towards world mastery. This interpretation also falls in line with the idea of fatefulness of world images because it was the irrational quest for salvation which generated a rational solution to being in the world. This question of religion and salvation also produced Weber's anthropology of the rules which govern the practical conduct of life (*Lebensführung*). In this anthropology of conduct, Weber distinguished between a theodicy of good fortune (*Glück*) and a theodicy of suffering (*Leid*). In coming to terms with fortune and suffering, human beings extend their conception of their personal experience beyond the everyday material world. It is these experiences of fortune and suffering which destroy the rational or purposive categories of pragmatic orientation to reality.

However it was only within the monotheistic salvational religions that the rationalization of the question of theodicy reached its ultimate fruition. The development of the concept of a universalistic God who organized reality around a quest for personal salvation developed into an intellectual theodicy of reality as such. In short it was the legacy of the Judaeo-Christian world, which included the notions of ethical prophecy and monotheism, which was crucial to the development of a radical solution to the question of theodicy in forms of intellectualized soteriology. For example, the intellectual rationalism of the Protestant churches was critical in pushing European civilization towards a pattern of personal salvation or life regulation.

Tenbruck has provided a radical reinterpretation of Weber's legacy, in particular by raising the problem of 'the world' as a concept in sociology to its proper place (Turner, 1992a). Secondly, he has demonstrated the importance of the concept of theodicy to Weber's cultural sociology generally. Thirdly, Tenbruck has identified the anthropological underpinnings of Weber's sociology. Many of these issues have been taken up and further elaborated by Wilhelm Hennis in his important study of Weber in his essays in reconstruction (1988). For Hennis the central question in Weber's sociology is to do with the issues of personality and life-orders. Hennis rejects the idea of rationalism and rationalization as central questions for Weber and argues instead that it was the development of *Menschenheit* which was the central question of Weber's sociology, namely how certain cultural developments produced a particular type of personality and a particular rational conduct of life (*Lebenführung*) particularly in the idea of 'calling' as part of the constitutive question of modern culture. In more precise terms, Weber's sociology is concerned with the historical origins of life regulation as a rational conduct of life in the development of modern vocations in the social world. Weber's analysis of the Protestant ascetic organization of life is therefore simply one dimension of this analysis of *Lebenführung* or the study of the characterological effects of particular kinds of piety. The rationalization theme to which Weber draws attention in the 'Protestant Ethic thesis' was a particular transformation of patterns of discipline and methodology relevant to particular forms of economic life regulation. In this context we can understand the world religions as systems of life regulation producing different personality types and different life-orders. Weber's concern with capitalism was not so much to understand its economic structure and functions but to understand how a capitalist civilization would influence and transform personality, namely what sort of people would a capitalist regulation of life produce. By 'personality' Weber did not have in mind what we would understand within an empirical social psychology, but rather what kind of ontological reality would be produced by different life-orders, that is, Weber asks the question from the standpoint of German cultural values.

Weber and Classical Sociology

Part of the motivation behind the work of Tenbruck, Hennis and Tribe (Tribe, 1989) is to re-establish Weber as a figure in the tradition of classical political philosophy who was concerned to understand the political order of society as the foundation of ethics and ontology. These issues, particularly as they impinge upon questions of liberalism and democracy, have dominated much of the philosophical debate about the implications of Weber's work in contemporary Germany (Gneuss and Kocka, 1988). The cultural and political context of this debate has often been generated by a critical rejection of American sociology and the American reception of Weber. This critical view of American sociology has been specifically directed against Talcott Parsons's interpretation of Weber as one of the founding fathers of the sociology of action. Hennis has been fairly explicit in his view of Weber as contributing to a German tradition of political and philosophical enquiry. First of all 'Weber was a German thinker, from the land of "Dr Faustus"' (Hennis, 1988: 195). It is in the novels of Thomas Mann that we are able to understand the intellectual world of Weber. Secondly, the misunderstanding of the 'Weber thesis' which is so common among followers of Parsons, 'no longer happens among German scholars' (Hennis, 1988: 26). For Hennis, Weber's central question was about the ethical character of human existence and therefore sociologists like Gordon Marshall (1982) are mistaken in continuing to debate the origins of capitalism as the central issue of Weber's sociology. These remarks seem less than generous to Parsons, since it was Parsons in *The Structure of Social Action* (Parsons, 1937) who did much to introduce the work of Weber to an American audience, and it was Parsons who was responsible for translating *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 1930) and who drew attention to the importance of the sociology of religion in his introductory essay to Weber's *The Sociology of Religion* (Weber, 1966). Parsons was, given his own interest in religion and ethics, perfectly aware of the central importance of the concept of theodicy in Weber's historical sociology.

One might also question the originality of Tenbruck and Hennis in recent approaches to Weber's anthropology. Much of the recent debate about Weber in fact reproduces the Heideggerian interpretation of Weber by Karl Löwith whose article on Weber and Marx first appeared in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* in 1932, and was subsequently translated into English in 1982 as *Max Weber and Karl Marx* (Löwith, 1993). Löwith sought to demonstrate that, regardless of the very important differences between Marx and Weber, their sociological perspectives were joined by a common philosophical anthropology. That is, they shared a basic interest in the ontological problem of human beings in bourgeois capitalism. From the perspective of this ontology, both Weber and Marx saw capitalism as a destructive economic system, but one which also opened up new possibilities through the transformation of traditional systems.

Weber's sociology was driven by a concern for 'human dignity', but Weber was basically pessimistic about the outcome of capitalism which was fateful in the sense of producing an iron cage within which human beings were trapped. Löwith's interpretation of Weber developed from a philosophical indebtedness to the work of Martin Heidegger (1962). Since human beings live in a condition of existential homelessness (*Heimatlosigkeit*), Heidegger (1977) developed a profound critique of the technological conditions of capitalist society, which result in profound alienation. Löwith was also able to appreciate the importance of Nietzsche's critique of conventional metaphysics as the background to Heidegger's approach to everyday reality. Nietzsche's rejection of traditional religion as a viable orientation to the lifeworld was the background to Heidegger's critique of metaphysics. Weber's anxieties about the problem of cultural slavery in the modern bureaucratic machine were partly generated by Nietzsche's analysis of the problem of modern existence in terms of the death of God.

Löwith's social philosophy was grounded in the view that the decisive characteristic of western culture is to be located in the divorce between the classical view of the world in which there was no real history but merely the harmonious repetition of the same and the Christian world-view in which the birth of Christ created a revolutionary teleological framework for reality. History was now meaningful in terms of the revelation of grace through the advent of Christ, the lives of the saints, and the creation of the Church leading towards a Second Coming (Löwith, 1966; 1970). In a similar fashion, Weber recognized that the problem of theodicy in Christian theology drove the Protestant Reformers to a new perception of history as catastrophic. These philosophical views about the meaning of history within a Christian framework have been replaced in a secular epoch by the idea that history has no meaning and that we are living in a post-historical period (Niethammer, 1992).

We can see in the recent interpretation of Weber's sociology a common theme, namely the profoundly ethical character of Weber's social theory and its underpinning in a particular anthropology of personality and life-orders. Both Tenbruck and Löwith share this interest in the religious theme within Weber's life and work, particularly the focus on questions relating to theodicy. Hennis (1988: 24) is wrong, in my view, to suggest that Löwith, because of the analysis of the relationship of Weber to Marx, was fascinated by the problem of rationality and thereby missed the underlying significance of this question in Weber's sociology. On the contrary, Löwith recognized that the rationalization theme was a product of the existential question of meaning in Weber's sociological framework.

Weber and Postmodernity

We have noted that in the last twenty years there has been a continuing and growing fascination with the sociological work of Weber. How might we