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OBJECTIVITY, POLITICAL ORDER, AND RESPONSIBILITY IN MAX WEBER'S THOUGHT

ABSTRACT: *Weber's conception of politics has long been interpreted in relativistic and "agonistic" terms. Such interpretations neglect Weber's notion of "objectivity" as well as the complex links between politics as "community," on the one hand, and as "value sphere," on the other. Seen against this backdrop,* Berufpolitik *becomes a balancing act in which the pursuit of subjective values is objectively constrained not only by the ethic of responsibility, but more generally by the political imperative to safeguard the preconditions for communal order and, in late modernity, of liberal freedoms. Without them, neither the objective "clarity" generated by science nor the subjective political commitments based on "clear vision" would be possible.*

Keywords: *historical sciences; Max Weber; political community; political sphere; political responsibility.*

The relationship between science and politics is one of the key hubs of Weber's thought. It is key, first of all, at the theoretical level. Weber constantly strives to characterize the different internal logics of the two spheres, exploring their mutual ties and tensions. But Weber's focus on this topic also reflects ethical and practical concerns. Science has disenchanted the world, constraining the search for meaning. Together with bureaucratization, scientific rationalization inexorably tends to harness

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politics, causing it to accept the reality of the world as it is or to drift toward either irresponsible radicalism or extra-worldly withdrawal. In the wake of these trends, the fate of modernity appears to Weber as suspended between a paralyzing petrification and an inconclusive "agitation" whose cost is freedom.

It is not surprising, then, that the science-politics nexus was a central theme in the debates about Weber that developed from the 1950s onwards (Turner 2001). The dominant interpretations tended to accentuate the separation of the two spheres, the strict division between facts and values, characterizing Weber as a defender of a radical form of relativism (Strauss 1953; Lukàcs [1956] 1981; Mommsen 1956 and 1983; Oppenheim 1968; Aron 1970; Bendix and Roth 1971). The non-cognitivist and subjective elements that characterize Weber's discussion of politics as a vocation led many authors to underestimate the ordering role played in political action by scientific-theoretical rationality and communal/associative relations, and to focus instead (or even amplify) the disenchantment thesis and its destabilizing effect on axiology and normativity (Turner and Factor 1984). Science does provide man with objective knowledge, according to this view of Weber, but it has nothing to say about the fundamental questions of politics, which concern values. Within science itself, the choice of questions and the attribution of meaning is ultimately subjective. There cannot be a rational way to differentiate among "good" or "bad" values or even among alternative scientific explanations. Thus, according to Leo Strauss (1953, 67), Weber's conception of politics (and partly also of science) "leads by necessity to nihilism, i.e., the idea that any preference ... has the same legitimacy entitlement as any other." In the wake of Strauss, the early debates thus outlined a "Nietzschean image" of Weber (Eden 1984) characterized by "tragic" pluralism—a "desperate" liberalism, a form of political (and even epistemological) "decisionism."[1]

The echo of this image is still clearly visible (e.g., Vahland 2001; Behneghar 2003; Heinrich 2006). Starting in the late 1980s there was, however, a gradual change of perspective (Warren 1988; Boudon 2001; Swedberg 2003). The positive links between the scientific and the political spheres began to be appreciated and a more nuanced interpretation elaborated—especially regarding Weber's "ethic of responsibility"—which acknowledged the role played by history, culture, and science in restricting and orienting value-choices (Lassman and Velody 1989; D'Andrea 2005). In this new interpretation, moreover, axiology and normativity

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"necessarily leads to nihilism or to the view that every preference, however evil, base, or insane,

has to be judged before the tribunal of reason to be as legitimate as any other preference."

can find in Weber's conception of politics a rational foundation, resting on reflexivity and "thoughtfulness" (Satkunandan 2014). This newer perspective mainly resulted from a more accurate reading of the two Munich lectures, with only selective reference to other texts. In this article, I will take a broader view and argue for a stronger and more articulated interpretation of the link between scientific reason and political choices, an interpretation that goes beyond Weber's discussion of the ethic of responsibility. Considering and connecting a wider set of Weber's writings on basic sociological concepts, on political and legal sociology, on German politics, as well as his *Wissenschaftslehre*, I will systematically reconstruct those arguments that support the existence of a virtuous link between science and politics, truth and values. I will show that for Weber there is an intrinsic connection between value-free science and value-assertive politics, a connection that significantly constrains and grounds his alleged "decisionism."

~~As indicated by the title~~ my reconstruction will emphasize a particular (but crucial) aspect of Weber's vision of "the political," namely the establishment of a durable and predictable system of domination within a territorial *community*. The reading of Weber's political thought in terms of tragic pluralism has emphasized the agonistic dimension of the political sphere and has not paid adequate consideration, in my opinion, to the second (and broader) constitutive dimension of the "political": the creation and maintenance of a community of individuals who are mutually "bound" (a *Verband*, in fact) within an order of domination (*Herrschaftliche Ordnung*) supported by a monopoly of *legitimate* violence. The values that enter into the political arena may well be conceived as warring gods (or demons) fighting against one another. But such a war presupposes the prior existence of a recognizable and ordered battlefield where meaningful interaction may take place. The vocation politician not only has a duty vis-à-vis his chosen "cause," but also a "meta-duty" to keep his community together as a cohesive and internally integrated group, and to guard the boundaries and co-existence of the various value-spheres that comprise the community. Subjective as it may seem, the scope of one's value commitment in the political arena cannot exceed the limits imposed by this "absolute" mandate.

As we shall see, it is mainly through this aspect that politics (and especially liberal-democratic politics) is forced to deal with the scientific sphere. The vocation politician will not obtain from the latter sphere a "rational demonstration" of the validity of his cause, but will find in it a

wealth of epistemic resources that are particularly precious for carrying out his absolute mandate. Weber's conception of science, then, is much more than a methodological doctrine about how to do academic research. It is a broad and unique philosophical perspective on the nature and logic of social and historical knowledge, a perspective that has clear and underappreciated implications for the purposes and practice of politics. Such implications derive essentially from the elective affinity between objectivity and responsibility, the search for truth and the safeguard of a free institutional order, in which freedom of thought and political liberties are guaranteed and any form of "surplus violence" is carefully avoided (Wolin 1981; Villa 1999).

The rest of the article is divided into five sections. The first will briefly sketch the fundamental traits of Weber's anthropology and social ontology, which provide an indispensable backdrop for his view of science and politics. The next two sections will reconstruct the internal logic of the scientific and the political spheres, highlighting the sequence of choices (their objects and their possible motivations) facing individuals acting in each of them. The fourth section contains my central argument and will discuss the connection between truth, responsibility, and a liberal-democratic order, the mechanisms that feed it, and, more generally, the positive reinforcement that science and (liberal-democratic) politics can provide to each other. The final section will summarize the paper's reconstructive trajectory and its non-subjectivist, cognitivist, and coherentist reinterpretation of Weber's political theory.[2]

I. WEBER'S SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY

Weber's work was largely inspired by the neo-Kantian criticism of the so-called Baden School. This philosophical movement developed in southern German universities in the second half of the nineteenth century as a reaction against Hegelian idealism, Marxian materialism, and the radical naturalism of early positivism. The main goal of the Baden scholars was to revive the Kantian tradition, which saw philosophy as a critical reflection on knowledge—in particular, on the conditions that can ground the validity of science.

The founder of the Baden school, Wilhelm Windelband, introduced the separation between nomothetic and idiographic sciences. The objects of the former are natural phenomena; their goal is to unveil general and necessary laws. The latter deal with historical and social

phenomena; their goal is to bring to light the significance of individual and unrepeatable events by relating them to "values." The nature of values was the focus of Heinrich Rickert. For him, values come in different clusters: logical, ethical, aesthetic, mystical, religious, erotic. Although their "mode of realization" changes across cultures, for Rickert the intrinsic fundaments of each value (essentially truth, morality, beauty, personal sanctity, impersonal sanctity, and happiness) are universal, eternal, unrelated to historical contingencies, and independent from human judgment. Consequently, the meaning of values became an important object of discussion and dispute within the Baden school. In Berlin, Wilhelm Dilthey developed Windelband's and Rickert's ideas about historical knowledge by introducing the notion of *Verstehen* (understanding) as the foundation of valid knowledge in the "spiritual" domain. The basis of <u>Verstehen</u> is *Erlebnis*—"lived experience," or the internal reproduction within the observing subject of the experiences of external social agents. *Erlebnis* grounds validity because it deliberately reconstructs a unity between subject (the historian) and object (the historical subject as observed by the historian).

The Baden debate and, more generally, the neo-Kantian perspective permeated Weber's thinking from its very beginning. We cannot experience the external world directly, he always believed, but only through the mediation of our thought. Reality has an essence of its own that is inaccessible to us in its entirety and ultimate structure. This is true in particular for history (Weber's main interest). In the absence of intellectual elaboration, history is nothing but "a vast chaotic stream of events that flows away through time" (Weber 1949, 111). Given this neo-Kantian metaphysical backdrop, no "objective" sense can be attributed to the world, which is thus ethically irrational. Mind-reality, thought–experience, ethics-world dualism typically constitutes the human condition, generating our incessant compulsion to rationally understand the surrounding environment that is foreign to us, to order experiential signals, to identify "motives" for our actions and "sense" for our individual and collective existence (Koch 1994). Temporally and spatially situated action is moved by two fundamental drives, the practical drive to orient oneself amidst a multiplicity of external entities and to manipulate them in order to achieve one's aims; and a spiritual drive to confer meaning and value upon the external world and our relationships with other human beings.

What, then, is worth knowing, doing, hoping for? The problem of meaning (*Sinnproblem*), Weber believed, is always addressed within a

given culture, constituted by "a finite segment of the meaningful infinity of the world process, a segment to which *human beings* confer meaning and significance" (Weber 1949, 81, emphasis his). Weber's main focus was on Western civilization and its long-term development, especially after the consolidation of Christianity. Christian ethics was the primitive "value-sphere" in Europe; it encompassed all types and dimensions of human activity, subordinating them to its own deep and demanding religious axiology. In the modern period, however, individual orientations began to be shaped by a multiplicity of distinct norms and operating principles. Weber speaks of "value spheres," each autonomous in the sense of being characterized by its own logic and evolutionary dynamics (*Eigengesetzlich-keit* or *Entwicklungsgesetzlichkeit*)—the economic, political, aesthetic, erotic, and scientific spheres (Weber 1946b, 323-57; Weber 2004, 220-41). The type of autonomy, however, varies from sphere to sphere (Brubaker 1984; Oakes 2003).

Like the economy, politics has no univocal axiology as a sphere. However, in the economy, actions typically are instrumentally rational: "ends" are chosen based on contextual and often extemporary preferences or tastes in a purely consequentialist logic: their content may change at any time during the means-to-end calculative chain. In politics, actions serve "causes" based on deep personal commitments and normative engagement. And every choice of a given value is at the same time a choice against other values. Admittedly, if politicians act responsibly (see below), they temper and adjust their actions in the light of their expected consequences. But they compromise only in certain situations, when there are risks of violence and disruption. Politics is thus inextricably linked to ethics. Given that objective values cannot be grounded in historical reality, this link is inherently unstable and problematic. The epoch of scientific disenchantment has brought about value "polytheism," such that the ethical choices of politicians are made "without either God or prophets."

For its part, the scientific sphere has, like the aesthetic and erotic, a distinctive axiology. But the overarching value of science has a "negative" nature: it consists in the neutralization of individual positive axiologies and the search for "objectivity." Those who engage in intellectual work should not, as scientists, judge, but only describe, understand, and explain. Between politics and science there is, in other words, a relationship of almost mirror symmetry, which places them on the opposite edges of that process of rationalization and differentiation between life orders

that began with modernity. Politics is the sphere where actions are moved —*cum ira et studio*—by evaluative passions, by commitments to subjective "causes" that are pursued because they are thought to have intrinsic value. It is not a matter of preferences and tastes that can be compared and traded according to some shared metric (e.g., prices). Success is not mere "want satisfaction" but the achievement of those (and only those) substantive values that motivate the action in the first place. By contrast, science is the sphere of dispassionate work, conducted *sine ira et studio*. It is the realm of theoretical reason, of objective factual judgments; it is successful to the extent that it reaches universally significant results.

What connection can there be between two spheres so distant from each other, guided by criteria so different? The answer may be sought by revisiting and recombining various arguments of Weber's thought, examining first the internal logic of each sphere.

II. THE SCIENTIFIC SPHERE, OBJECTIVITY, AND "CLARITY"

Doing science presupposes a meta-value choice, the commitment to value-freedom, *Wertfreiheit* (Gerth and Mills 1946, 1-47, 49-112; Weber 1949, 25-156). The "postulate" of value-freedom is particularly crucial in the case of historical knowledge, the object of which is inherently imbued with values and the primary objective of which is understanding of the meaning of actions, that is, the cultural significance of the phenomena under investigation (Hennis 1994).

At this juncture, Weber's departures from neo-Kantianism need to be emphasized (Oakes 1988; Rossi 1971). From Dilthey, Weber accepts the dichotomy between natural and spiritual sciences and the concept of understanding (*Verstehen*). But he criticizes the *Erlebnis* and maintains that there is in fact a strong link between understanding and explanation.[3] From Windelband, Weber draws the contrast between the nomothetic and idiographic approaches and agrees that historical knowledge should strive to grasp the meaning of phenomena in their individuality; but he contends that the explanatory aim of historical understanding must be achieved through nomothetic knowledge. Finally, from Rickert Weber takes the concept of value-reference (*Wertbeziehung*), which orients both the selection of the objects of investigation and their understanding, but he distances himself from Rickert's metaphysical conception of values as eternal and universal entities, assigning to them instead a mere normative transcendence, an operational validity, irrespective of their substantive

content (Bruun 2001; Oakes 1988). Any state of affairs, segment of reality, or practical orientation becomes a "value" to the extent that it directs concrete individual actions.

Weber justifies this syncretistic position not only theoretically but in terms of historical evolution. The gradual intellectualization and rationalization of knowledge has created a sphere of action in which the only directive criterion (and therefore value) is the use of reason as a tool to understand and manipulate the world. In a first (millennial) stage of development, it was thought that reason could be the path to knowledge of "true" reality, beauty, nature, God, and happiness (Weber 1946c, 143): a bridge between the apparent/questionable and the transcendent/certain. "Present" science has, however, taken a new step, leading toward disenchantment. After taking this step, it is apparent that reason can offer a foundation for the methods (and thus results) of science, but not for its starting points nor, more generally, for its value as an autonomous sphere.

Values come into play in the initial moment of interest in a subject of research. It is crucial that researchers be completely free of external constraints in their initial choices; full intellectual autonomy is/a necessary condition for any form of scientific knowledge. The *Wertbeziehung* is the fruit of inspiration and creative intuition, which generates, however, an act of an essentially theoretical nature, the attribution of cultural significance to one's research subject. Devoid of any link with a metaphysics of values (as in Rickert), the Weberian notion of *Wertbeziehung* has been often accused of "decisionism" (the same accusation made against his/theory of politics). The absence of objective criteria for choice would, it is feared, lead to a relativist and constructivist gnoseological perspective (e.g. Aron 1970). As Jürgen Kocka (1973) has cogently argued, however, for Weber, a number of elements (admittedly not spelled out in a systematic way) do constrain initial research choices. In the first place, the social reality being studied has an independent existence "out there." True, it is a "heterogeneous continuum" which cannot itself dictate what is *Wissenswert*, i.e., worthy of being known. But this continuum is made up of "ontic structures" (as Kocka defines them) that limit the arbitrariness of selection—empirical facts (captured through the concepts of ordinary language) that leave material traces (e.g., in archival documents) on which we have to ground our investigations. In the second place, we can select a criterion and accomplish an act of *Wertbeziehung* only to the extent that we have some pre-scientific comprehension

of our objects of observation. Weber refers to this stage as a "moment of contemplation," during which the range of potential value-relations is briefly considered. In this moment we "objectify" social reality through a kind of nonscientific knowledge that rests on a host of cognitive competences. We contemplate the historical world as a source of empirical information (endowed with "a fundament in reality") with a view to identifying one particular and unilateral "accentuation" (whose fundament is a value) among the many *but not unlimited* possibilities. Finally, there is the fact that the social scientist is herself a *Kulturmensch*, an individual operating in a given cultural context that, to some extent, pre-defines the menu of potential viewpoints. Cultural embeddedness pushes the social scientist towards a selection that speaks to prevailing cultural perspectives and their practical concerns, if only with a view to challenging them and outlining new value perspectives. Thus, for example, a "scientific genius" is able, for Weber, to refer her investigation to new value-ideas that may determine the "conception" of an entire historical epoch.

Once the field and the direction of research have been chosen, the investigation must cross the boundaries between the reason-based, non-arbitrary subjectivity of *Wertbeziehung* and the objectivity of factual judgments. Objectivity is based on two components (Weber 1949, 49-112; 2004, 359-404). First is empirical soundness, i.e., the correspondence between the content of judgments and the factual knowledge at our disposal (the "fundament in reality," i.e., the link with ontic structures). Second is the formal correctness (the logical structure) of causal imputations, as well as their link with the available nomological knowledge.

To briefly expand on Weber's conception of objectivity (cf. Ringer 1997, Kalberg 1994, Burger 1976, and Turner and Factor 1981), a correct explanatory argument must be based on the construction of historical facts in the form of ideal types (such as the concept of "capitalism") that serve as "means of understanding." The explanation proper implies four distinct steps: (1) identifying, for a given historical situation, the field of "possibilities of development"; (2) singling out the decision or action that has brought about only one of the available possibilities; (3) ascertaining the conditions that made possible that particular development; (4) clarifying the cultural meaning of that development by comparing it to the other options that were possible. The causal imputation (step 3) takes place through counterfactual analysis, namely the construction of "fantastic" frames in which one or more elements of the prior constellation are analytically eliminated. Would phenomenon "y" (say, the birth of

capitalism) have been possible if it had not been preceded by phenomenon "x" (say, the spread of the Calvinist ethic based on inner-worldly asceticism)? One identifies the antecedents that have operated as "adequate" causes and not just accidental co-occurrences by resorting to the "rules of the experience," i.e., typical forms and modes of relationship between phenomena that we draw from the "whole body our nomological empirical knowledge" (Weber 1949, 175).[4]

Weber partly drew the notion of "ideal types" as heuristic devices from economic theory. In his writings on economics, Weber said that the fiction of *Homo economicus* can be very useful for certain purposes, but that "the explanatory methods of pure economics are as tempting as they are misleading" (Weber 1978, 115). In the attempt to imitate the exact natural sciences, pure economic theory pretends to deduce quantitatively determined real-world outcomes from abstract premises by means of formal procedures. Yet even if an occasional correspondence may be found, the economist can never be certain whether he is using a scientifically fecund conceptual elaboration or is merely playing a game, as the real world may depart significantly from the fiction.

Even when proceeding from historical facts, however, the objectivity of science has a methodological, not essentialist nature. One and the same aspect of reality can be understood on the basis of a (not-unlimited) plurality of interpretive possibilities connected to initial value-choices. Thus, social-historical knowledge can never lead "to a closed system of concepts in which reality is synthetized in some sort of permanently and universally valid classification and from which it can again be deduced" (1949, 84). The *Homo economicus* fiction must be treated as a unilateral accentuation of certain aspects of a much more complex reality, an ideal type in the service of empirical research, not a formal "utopia" from which to derive general laws. Being based, at its starting point, on a value choice and operating through unilateral accentuations, scientific research never ends; "the stream of events" moves ceaselessly toward eternity. The ambit of what acquires meaning (and therefore *Wissenswertheit*) cannot but remain eternally fluid.

But "if this is so, what then does science actually and positively contribute to practical and personal life?" Weber asks (1946c, 150). This is not a rhetorical question, as it is intimately linked with the *Sinnproblem*. If modern science has lost its foundational role in establishing what has value, what makes it worthy to be chosen as a profession (*Beruf*), a calling capable of providing meaning to existence? There is no univocal

answer to this question, which is extra-scientific. Those who choose science accept ~~to obey~~ to an "imperative": they commit themselves to producing knowledge that has a claim to validity since it complies with the standards of thought and the criteria of objectivity. The truth of this knowledge is limited, always relative to the assumption of certain values as points of reference for isolating a segment of the world and then explaining it. It is nevertheless a universally valid truth within those limits.[5] And the truths of science allow us to take evaluative standpoints based on the fullest possible awareness of all the empirical elements surrounding a given problem; they position us to make choices about competing values *and the means to achieve them*. In other words, science is relevant for choosing how to live. Unlike scientific truth, the *relevance* of science is not universal. But rejecting it or setting it aside means ignoring the intellect, giving up any form of cognitive awareness of the ultimate meaning (*Sinn*) of our life experience and thus surrendering to the abyss of the irrational (ibid., 122).

It should be noted that, in addition to a commitment to objectivity, for Weber scientists must make a commitment to intellectual integrity (*intellektuelle Rechtschaffenheit*). This second directive criterion relates primarily to the pedagogical function, in a broad sense, of science (Wellen 2001). The duty of the intellectual is to challenge through critical thinking the assumptions that underlie action in other spheres of life. As in the case of autonomy, the exercise and defense of integrity requires that scientific work be carried out in appropriate arenas, free from external interference with freedom of thought. It requires, in more abstract terms, the deployment of coercive power to uphold the institutional preconditions for genuine and productive intellectual work.

As outlined so far, the logic that guides science appears to be clearly different from that of politics, particularly when the latter is considered merely in its agonistic dimension. However, Weber builds some sturdy bridges that put science in a direct relationship with politics, and this "branching out" of the scientific sphere marks a novelty in Weber's conception, from a politico-philosophical point of view.

As mentioned, objective knowledge is not only true, it is also useful "for practical and personal life." The relevance of science reaches its maximum for those who make political decisions, whom it supports in rebutting nonobjective factual beliefs, unmasking value judgments disguised as factual judgments, resolving moral disagreements that arise from false empirical premises or logically incorrect reasoning, and,

ultimately, in orienting ethical choices themselves. For Weber the "good"
that connects the scientific with the political sphere is "clarity," i.e. the
clarification of value contents, of the possibilities (or impossibility) of
their mutual conciliation and combination, and of the compatibility
between ends and means through causal analysis. This contribution is
crucial mainly because, by promoting a sense of responsibility, it virtu-
ously conditions the behavior of political actors.

III. THE SPHERE OF POLITICS:
POWER, VIOLENCE, AND DEMOCRACY

Territory, "occupiers" who pursue divergent objectives, instruments of
violence: it is from these "ontic" materials that Weber develops his con-
ception of politics. It is based on two fundamental concepts, the political
community (*Politische Gemeinschaft*) and the political value-sphere (*Poli-
tische Wertsphäre*). The relationship between these two concepts is not
spelled out explicitly, nor is it fully exploited as a unifying foundation
of his/political theory.[6] For the purposes of this article, then, we need
to reconstruct this relationship by highlighting four distinct analytical
movements or steps in Weber's reasoning.

The Political

The first step concerns Weber's general theory. What is the political
dimension of social/communal relationships?

As is well known, for Weber what characterizes the "political" is vio-
lence as a means, i.e., the exercise or threat of coercion, which can
produce restrictions on physical freedom and even the "destruction of
life" (1978, 903). There is political community only to the extent that
coercive resources are centralized in a given power structure that can
impose on the members of the territorial community "obligations
which many of them fulfill only because they are aware of the probability
of physical coercion backing up such obligations" (ibid.).

The specific connotation of the adjective *political* should not lead us,
however, to neglect the broader meaning of the noun. *Community*, too,
is a cornerstone concept in Weber's work, "omnipresent but frequently
misunderstood" (Grossein 1996, 119). It typically connotes a group
whose members share the subjective feeling of "belonging together," pri-
marily (but not exclusively) based on affectual and/or traditional

orientations. This feeling is the result of a self-reinforcing process that Weber (1978, 40) calls *Vergemeinschaftung*, involving the consolidation of cultural, emotional, ethical, and solidaristic bonds. In historical perspective, the culmination of this process is the birth of "nations," i.e. communities that attribute to their shared identity and "patrimony" a specific prestige and even universal "mission" (ibid., 921-26). Thus, at a general and abstract level, Weber conceives of politics as a two-pronged activity that has to do not only with coercive rule but also with communal bonding. Ruling and bonding are like two sides of the same coin, linked by a relationship that Weber calls *Legitimitätsverständnis*, a shared understanding that the rulers will safeguard the community and that the ruled will comply with "political" commands (ibid., 903-4).

Nationalism and the Nation-State

Weber's second step contextualizes the general concept of community by focusing in particular on the evolution and characteristics of the political and territorial order in modern Europe. With the emergence of the bureaucratic state, the political community assumes its most refined form. The state becomes an increasingly specialized enterprise (*Betrieb*) as well as the ultimate source of the legitimacy of physical violence. The rules for the application of the latter undergo a progressive rationalization, culminating in the formation of legal systems based on codified norms and legal-rational administrative apparatuses. The rationalization process has a double face: it tends to produce a growing schematization of individual behaviors codified by law; at the same time, it upholds new individual margins of maneuver (*Spielräume*) and protects freedom, understood as self-determination (Palonen 1999). Without this second face, the differentiation between autonomous value-spheres could not have taken place. In particular, scientific progress would have been impossible, since it typically rests, as we have seen, on freedom of thought and conscience—"the most basic Right of Man, because it comprises all ethically conditioned actions and guarantees freedom from compulsion, particularly the power of the state" (Weber 1968, 1209).

Bureaucratization ran parallel to marketization. The original takeoff of market capitalism was guided by the novel substantive/ethical rationality rooted in the Protestant ethic. But with the passing of time, market expansion progressed under the lead of practical rationality alone, supported by the formal rules of the *Rechtsstaat*. For Weber markets are

communities—or better, associations—"of [the] interested," meaning all those who have something that they wish to trade. In instrumental terms, markets are more efficient than state bureaucracies. They also operate as safeguards against the latter's propensity to restrict individual freedom, allowing for opportunities to "exit from relationships of disagreement" (Friedman 2000, 113). The market logic builds on "opening": it provides a constant incentive to transcend borders, including the borders of the political community. But in order to survive as such, the political community needs "closure." It requires boundaries as prerequisites for bonding and binding (Ferrera 2005). It was through boundary building, resting on coercive but also on symbolic power, that states were built in modern Europe. As Julian Benda ([1928] 2007) famously put it, it was not the *Zollverein* that made Germany, but Fichte's "Speech to the German Nation." One of the key outcomes of boundary building was the birth of nations: communities that attribute to their shared identity and cultural heritage a specific prestige and even a universal mission.

Weber made it clear that that the fundament of national identity—pride and prestige—is not univocal, as it can consist of a historically contingent plurality of elements, including language, religion, historical and cultural traditions, and so on. However, his political writings belie a strong sympathy for the specific conception of nationalism developed in Wilhelmine Germany—the object of Fichte's appeal. Linking this sympathy with his theory of charismatic leadership and plebiscitarian democracy, intellectual historians such as Wolfgang Mommsen (1984) characterized Weber as an illiberal thinker, part of the imperial tradition that attributed to Germany a superior culture and a historical mission, paving the way to National Socialism. More recent scholarship, however, has challenged this interpretation, showing that Weber's nationalism was entirely devoid of the ethnic obsession with primordiality that pervaded German nationalism. Even in the famous Freiburg Address of 1895, which displays an ardent nationalism, Weber makes it clear that his concern was with the formation of a robust ethos of public citizenship and moral personality, especially within the bourgeoisie, in order to prepare Germany for the challenges of a modern industrial society while withstanding socialist mobilization (Kim 2002).

With the progress of the state form and its transformation into the nation state, the political sphere gets "objectified": it frees itself from extrinsic moral references and becomes an autonomous *Wertsphäre*. The character of *objectivity* that the political sphere assumes during modernity

has not, in my opinion, been adequately appreciated in the debate on Weber's political theory.[7] By overemphasizing the agonistic and *subjective* nature of Weber's politics, this debate has neglected the key role played by objectification in establishing the preconditions for the free expression of subjectivity. The objectification of modern politics affects both its general and absolute purpose as "sphere" (the control of coercive monopoly and the legitimate domination over a territorial community become ends in themselves) and the legalistic and rationalistic means of managing it. The goal of maintaining orderly domination comes to obey only the "objective" pragmatism of *Staatsräson*; Weber's reference to Machiavelli is explicit (Weber 1946a, 123-26). The secularization of political power has the goal of stabilizing its instrumental base by securing coercive resources. The pursuit of this goal, in turn, confers full autonomy on two different types of political conduct (Bobbio 1981): actions aimed at concentrating and continuously holding coercive resources in order to guarantee the survival (and prosperity) of the territorial community, and actions aimed at making the monopoly of coercive resources legitimate in the eyes of subjects—individuals bound together by a web of communal/associational relationships—so as to obtain their durable obedience.

Democracy and Individual Rights

The advent of democracy is a new phase in the objectification of politics. Universal suffrage promotes a gradual equalization of the condition of the members of the community by eliminating status barriers linked to separate status groups (*Stände*) (Weber 1978, 57-61, 43-56). Subjects become citizens, co-participants in state power (Tuccari 1993), holders of guaranteed rights to exercise freedom of choice and autonomous will (Mommsen 1974; Kelly 2004).[8] Democracy strengthens objectification in several ways. It provides individual rights and diffuses political power (rights are in fact *Machtquellen*, sources of power); it proceduralizes political participation and the acquisition of "entitlements"; it extends legalization from the lower (administration) to the upper powers (parliaments and executives) (Bobbio 1981). Democracy also promotes the formation of a new social class that lives "off" politics (not "for" politics) (Weber 1946a, 84). In the shadow of mass parties and parliamentary governments, there is a proliferation of new officials specialized in electoral intermediation and trained in the methods of the power struggle. Weber is critical of the pursuit of power merely for its own sake (*Machtpolitik*), but he

acknowledges its legitimacy and is explicitly appreciative of parliamentary democracy as a form of government (Mommsen 1984; Mayer 1998).

What emerges from the two analytical steps outlined so far is a composite and "nested" conception of politics. The most general concepts are *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Vergemeinschaftung* (communitization), which assume a political dimension to the extent that coercive resources are centralized within a dedicated power structure. In the "political community" perspective, the fundamental function played by politics is to bind people together in stable territorial groups sharing fundamental socio-cultural traits so as to safeguard their ordered interactions. Modernity has "objectified" the performance of this unifying and stabilizing function, first through the establishment of the rule of law and rational-legal administration, and subsequently through the creation of a liberal-democratic order. At the same time, however, modernity has allowed for the emergence of a distinctive value sphere nested within the wider political community, where professional political elites compete with one another in order to lead the political community and provide it with a sense of direction through the infusion of values. The necessary link between the political value-sphere and the underlying community implicitly assigns to the latter the task of managing the survival and inter-dependencies ~~between~~ the whole spectrum of societal value-spheres. In this sense, politics can be regarded as a sort of "meta-sphere," not only in functional terms, but in terms of its ~~very~~ underlying guiding principles.[9]

By following the *fil rouge* of Weber's arguments about political community, communitization, and "objectivization" (*Objectivierung*), we thus encounter the "positive" (integrative, pacifying) face of politics, involving the establishment and, as much as possible, the ordered management of communal relations as well as the maintenance of consensus and legitimation in the presence of pluralism.

The Polytheism of Values and the Two Ethics

Weber's third analytical step consists in the examination of the relationship between ethics and political action. The rationalization and objectification of the political sphere ~~has~~ made the state more and more inaccessible to forms of ~~substantial~~ morality. But for Weber, politics in its noblest sense is something more than just power politics or *Machtpolitik*. It is a "vocation" born from a twofold normative choice: choosing a "cause" to serve and choosing to transform such service into the overall

mission of one's own existence, the source of one's feeling of dignity and freedom, one's calling (*Beruf*).

    Clearly, Weber's reference point here is no longer the Baden School or Rickert's metaphysics of values, but rather Nietzsche's theory of nihilism, according to which, in late modernity, the subject is left without absolute beliefs (God, supreme values, metaphysical goals set us by reality) and thus remains alone and naked in the face of nothingness and void (Eden 1983; Strong 1992).[10] The authentic politician sees social reality as "an irrational world of undeserved suffering, unpunished injustice, and hopeless stupidity" (Weber 1946a, 122). The choice of the political profession as (authentic) vocation reflects a mixed attraction to and unease with this tragic irrationality, as well as a desire to affect it, to create meaning. The conquest of power is obviously important, but only as a means, a pre-condition for taking in one's hands the leading strings of historical events, shaping their development. While the impetus for ordinary political action is the mere *Machtistinkt*, the drive for power, *Berufliche Politik* has to do mainly with the choice of values, of the cause (*Sachlichkeit*) in the service of which to ~~submit~~/coercive power (Diggins 1996). Politics as a vocation lies where the subjectivity of purposes begins, where the exercise of political power encounters axiological polytheism (a metaphor that Weber draws from John Stuart Mill [Weber 1949, 17]).

    As in the case of *Wertbeziehung*, the commitment to the cause is not made on scientific grounds. But while the *Wertbeziehung* is a choice of theoretical nature, the choice of the cause is a *Wertung* in the genuine sense, an ethical-practical valuation. Both choices are aimed at imparting an order on the world, or at providing direction. But in the case of *Wertung* the subjective commitment is far greater. The *Berufpolitiker* performs a conscious and deliberate act of personal self-consecration to a given axiology and to the relationship between this axiology and the world. It is a choice that puts the entire personality at stake, giving full expression to the intellectual autonomy and freedom of the subject (Warren 1998). However, the exercise of such "Kantian" freedom—the freedom to exercise theoretical and especially practical reason—has a prerequisite that is almost entirely neglected by subjectivist and "agonistic" interpretations of Weber: the existence of a space protected from external intrusions ~~and of~~/institutions that keep the state apparatus under control. Political freedom is the condition of possibility for subjective freedom. The capacity ~~of making~~ ethical commitments and ~~striving~~/for their realization ideal-typically requires a neutral arena—nested in the political

community—that allows for unfettered axiological and normative choice and a peaceful and ordered confrontation of these choices. Since the liberal-democratic order offers the highest guarantees of political freedom, the contemporary "vocation" politician must always bear the practical burden of safeguarding such order, regardless of his own substantive commitments (D'Andrea 2005). Leaders with vocation must see to it that above all national life, in its composite entirety, remains viable, durable, sustainable, even at the expense of his own personal cause. As aptly noted by David Ciepley (1999), "this is no light burden. When things go badly, it is a burden [that the vocation politician] bears *for all of us*" (Ciepley 1999, 212).

As has been noted by numerous interpreters, Weber has a strongly elitist and plebiscitarian conception of democracy (Beetham 1985; Cavalli 1987; Tuccari 1993; Breuer 1998). The direct election of the leader fosters, in fact, that "spirit" which is adequate to politics as a profession, by creating a space and a moment in which the public communication of the "cause" and its unmediated sharing with a group of followers becomes the prime objective. Thus, for professional politicians, the normativity of the vocation has not only a private aspect (the calling) but also a public one, related to the terms of pursuit of the causes, the chosen values. The conduct of the professional politician can follow two different principles of action, to which Weber assigns the well-known labels of the ethic of ultimate ends and the ethic of responsibility. In the first case, the cause is an absolute goal, without any concern for the consequences. In the second case, after choosing the end to serve, the politician takes into account the objectively predictable consequences of her choice, and also accepts responsibility without blaming outcomes on the ethical irrationality of the world.

Unlike science as a vocation, politics as a vocation therefore implies an additional choice, not only the original decision to devote oneself body and soul to a sphere (science or politics) and, with that decision, an axiological choice (the value-reference in the case of science, the justifying cause in the case of politics), but also the choice between the ethic of ultimate ends and the ethic of responsibility.

Political Responsibility and Its Limits

Weber's well-known discussion of the two ethics is the fourth and most important step in his reasoning about the relationship between politics and

science. Is the choice between the two another example of subjective decisionism, about which no objective evaluation can be made? Are the two in any way compatible?

635 Weber argues that the most politically adequate type of ethics is a "tempered" ethic of responsibility. The ethic of ultimate ends is incompatible with the *raison d'être* of politics as a value sphere. A consequentialist stance is called for by the very "logic" of violence when deployed in politics. However, an excess of responsibility may lead to a surplus of adaptation to the world or, at the other extreme, to a paradoxical 640 inclination to use means that are too extreme.

The quintessential and defining maxim of political action is, as we have seen, the *Staatsräson*, i.e., the creation/preservation/strengthening of real-world political communities and, subsidiarily, the infusion of values with a view to providing a sense of direction. The ethic of ultimate ends (pure 645 *Wertrationalität*), however, directly contradicts both parts of the maxim. The ethos of pure intentions ignores the imperfections of the world in which intentional actions occur, and thus refuses the laborious task of transforming the world by means of realistic, feasible projects that inevitably include instrumental (means-end) considerations. The logic of *Wer-* 650 *trationalität* is that of evaluating each action in strictly moral terms through binary judgments of conformity to the chosen principle. Because its demands are unsuited to this imperfect world, its adepts either take refuge in an ultra-mundane reality (as with Christian "perfectionist" pacifism) or in attempts to overthrow reality (as with revolutionary syndical- 655 ism) in order to impose on it an ethically perfect order, in the conviction that a full alignment between principles and reality is actually possible. If that were true, however, transition costs would not matter, including surplus violence and the destruction of legitimate orders. With its incapacity to generate purposive goals from first principles, its 660 indifference to hard realities, and its neglect of the need to match means to ends, the ethic of ultimate ends is not only inadequate, but entirely unfit for politics. Weber's critique rests here on a "value-free" analysis of the typical forms of this ethic, in its relation with the guiding rationale of politics as an autonomous sphere.

665 The superiority of the ethic of responsibility lies in two aspects. First, it is programmatically geared towards directly affecting this (imperfect) world, achieving "success" in the pursuit of causes that are ethically justified (they are chosen with a view to making the world "better"). Actions are evaluated not based on their isolated conformity to a value, but on

whether, all things considered—including tradeoffs and unintended con-
sequences—they achieve in practice one (or more) values. A responsible
politician uses a complex purposive strategy aiming at "success," evaluated
in terms of the contextual and contingent unfolding of the whole strategy.
Resting on both *Wert-* and *Zweck-rationalität*, this ethical stance is fully
"adequate" to the logic and rationale of the political sphere: community
building and community steering through purposive practical strategies.
Second, the ethic of responsibility is the only one suited to the means
that are specific to that sphere/the coercive resources monopolized by
every political community and made available to its leaders. Again
drawing on Machiavelli, Weber does not hesitate to justify violence
(even at the expense of deeply felt convictions against it) when the absoute objective of every politician is at stake, i.e./the preservation of the territorial group.[1]

However, the relationship between politics and coercion does raise
peculiar ethical dilemmas. "Whosoever contracts with violent means,
for whatever ends—and every politician does—is exposed to its specific
consequences" (Weber 1946a, 124). The *Berufpolitiker* inexorably "lets
himself in for the diabolic forces lurking in all violence" (ibid., 125-6).
For Weber, it is precisely the need to contain these powers that makes
the ethic of responsibility crucial. Adopting the ethic of responsibility is,
in other words, an "objective" imperative that follows from the *fundamen-
tal and specific nature* of political activity: keeping together and directing the
political community through the use of power supported by violence—as
violence is always morally questionable (Brubaker 1984, 70).

In what way is violence "diabolic"? It may not only harm or kill; it may
undermine people's dignity. To this moral danger, which, while reason-
able, is not "scientifically demonstrable," Weber adds a factual argument
that is too often neglected. To be politically effective, the exercise of vio-
lence must be carried out through a collective organization—a party or a
movement. "He who wants to establish absolute justice on earth by force
requires a following, a human machine. ... The leaders' success is comple-
tely dependent upon the functioning of this machine and hence not on his
own motives" (Weber 1946a, 125). This apparatus is likely to get out of
hand, and in any case it is never fully subservient to the politician's will,
for its operation depends (sometimes exclusively) on the autonomous
choices of those who are part of the machine, often driven by lust for
"adventure, victory, power, booty or spoils" (ibid). This lust may lead
to unforeseen and unpredictable spirals of violence.

What Weber had in mind in the above passage was of course the postwar insurrectionary movements that sprang up in Germany and other European countries. But if we may connect this passage to the wider context of Weber's thought, he seems to be suggesting that any abuse of coercion is a risk to be avoided, for essentially *political* reasons. On the one hand, "surplus" violence may jeopardize the very survival of the community, irremediably undermining the *Legitimationsverständnis* between leaders and followers. On the other hand, unnecessary coercion may harm the cause for which it is undertaken, which "can be damaged and discredited for generations, because responsibility for consequences is lacking" (ibid., 126). Thus, one must careful/consider consequences in the choice of ends and means, which interweave and cannot be considered in isolation, as a purist would/ Alongside *Machtinstinkt* and *Sachlichkeit* (Diggins 1996), then, *Verantwortung*—responsibility—is a defining feature of the "vocation" politician.[12]

There are, however, limits to ~~for~~ the ethic of responsibility. An exclusive reliance on it risks an excessive adaptation to the world as it is. While the ethic of ultimate ends is necessarily inadequate in its absolutism and its distance from the world, the ethic of responsibility can be excessively close to the world. On the one hand, this may result in a failure to achieve anything of value. On the other, it may push a politician towards the acceptance of means that are too ethically extreme (e.g., torture till death) when the goal is preventing an evil that is considered even more extreme (e.g., a terrorist attack, to take a contemporary example). While it is certainly true, for Weber, that "success" (*Erfolg*) is what ultimately matters in politics, the ethic of responsibility must be tempered by some measure of the other ethic lest it degenerate into passive realism or unprincipled "Machiavellism."

The leaders of the democratic state are inevitably forced to suppress illegitimate violence with legitimate coercion. But their "maxim" must be to resolve existing tensions (the conflicts among values) in an "objective" manner, by bringing them within the frame of legal-rational decision-making procedures and democratic compromises between the parties. "Against putsch, sabotages and similar politically sterile outbreaks which occur in all countries," Weber wrote in 1918 (1978, 1461), the politician must keep his nerve and "a cold head," crushing force with force, but then trying to solve in a purely objective (proceduralist) way the tensions that had manifested in subversion, especially by immediately re-establishing the guarantees of an order based on civil liberties (ibid.). As

in the case of science, the objectivity of democratic politics lies in the method. This method has not only procedural but to some extent also substantive validity, as it assumes equal rights and respect for each citizen (one man, one vote) in return for their readiness to fight and sacri-
740   fice themselves for the sake of the community. The objectification of politics is a fruit of the general process of formal rationalization, but at the same time it institutionalizes liberal democratic values. Polytheistic fights do not disappear, but take place within a normative perimeter that has lexicographic priority over the gods and demons who inspire pol-
745   itical leaders. Within the boundaries of science one finds preconditions of the pursuit of "truth," and within the boundaries of politics, in the age of democracy, one finds the guarantees of a *Freiheitliche Ordnung*, an institutional order based on political and subjective freedom, where value conflicts can be peacefully resolved. This depends, however, on
750   selecting the right kind of leaders, capable of combining passion, judgment/and responsibility (Ciepley 1999). Only a mature politician, who combines these qualities, can maintain a clear vision of the risks of violence and its disruptive potential vis-à-vis the foundational bases of politics, in both its narrow (as a *Wertsphäre*) and broad (as *Gemeinschaft*)
755   connotations.

IV. TRUTH, RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE LIBERAL ORDER

Whether discussing science or politics, Weber's reasoning concludes
760   with a powerful call to *clarity*. On the one hand, politics, if conducted responsibly, requires clarity of vision in order to realize values in the real world, resorting to force but considering its consequences for order and freedom. On the other hand, if science is objective and correctly uses critical thinking, it is able to "illuminate," to help politics in
765   discerning values, in understanding the factual situations within which certain values can be realized. The two spheres remain independent and irreducible to each other. But their ultimate meaning can be traced back to a common challenge or task, which does not apply to the economic, aesthetic, or erotic spheres. This task is that of determin-
770   ing the conditions of human choice (Rossi 1971). The interdependence between science and politics stems from the fact that one sphere determines the most favorable choice conditions for the other. As Hans Henrik Bruun puts it, the two spheres are "closed systems, but contain the key to each other" (Bruun 2007, 55).

Let me outline, therefore, the typical characteristics of the two spheres and frame their interdependence within a broader system of relationships, which ~~also~~ includes culture and history.

From Science to Politics

The contribution that the historical and social sciences provide to politics consists of two different types of clarification: clarification of the meaning of values (what Weber called *Begriffsethik*, or analytical ethics) and of their empirical feasibility.

Practical–political valuations always rest on axiological principles, of which, however, the actor may not be fully aware, or about which she may deceive herself. Science clarifies these principles in three ways: (1) by analyzing the relevant evaluative options in a given empirical situation; (2) by proceeding from the particular to the general level, and thus (3) by exposing the ultimate worldviews (*weltanschauungsmässige Grundpositionen*) that underlie the chain of evaluation. It is the *Grundposition* that provides the framework of compatibility between value-axioms and practical inferences. This type of clarification is purely logical and does not lead to any new factual knowledge, but it performs a precious function, as it promotes the consistency of subjective political choices and the effectiveness of means, which must be measured against clearly conceived ends. At the same time, it can solve conflicts based solely on mutual misunderstandings or deceit.

The feasibility of political actions in pursuit of values does not exclusively depend, however, on the mutual coherence and internal logical cogency of the values, but also on external conditions that can be determined by the "analysis of facts" (including abstraction and all empirically verifiable syntheses and hypotheses).[13] The nomological knowledge made available by the social sciences makes it possible to identify the actual consequences potentially associated with value choices.

The first step towards this goal is the examination of the means-ends relationship. According to the "rules of experience," are there means capable of achieving a given end? For the social scientist, analyzing the means-ends relationship is nothing more than an exercise in causal attribution. The proposition "x is the only way to achieve y" is in fact a simple reversal of the proposition "y always follows from x" (Weber 1949, 45). Causal analysis rests on the epistemic ordering of "ontic material" selected (through the *Wertbeziehung*) out of history's

heterogeneous continuum. By complying with the appropriate methodo-
logical rules, social science is able to identify means-end relationships that
are "objectively," not just subjectively, rational.[14] In addition, science can
reveal unpredicted and unintended consequences of political choices. This
faces the actor with new challenges of evaluation and possibly with new
dilemmas of responsibility.

The truth of science cannot ground ethical-political choices. But it can
help determine their assumptions, their opportunity costs compared to
other possible choices, and the consequences arising from the interlacing
of means and ends. It is in this sense that Weber suggests that science
works "in the service of ethical powers." It allows us to be fully aware
of *what* cause we are serving, *how*, and with *what* consequences. This clarifi-
cation renders Weber's conception of science so interesting for political
theory. Science clarifies the inevitable dilemmas, and sometimes the para-
doxes, intrinsically linked to the practical choices of politics; and it gener-
ates, so to speak, epistemic normativity, to the point that it may force us to
redefine or change ethical choices themselves. We might suggest, in other
words, that science provides politics with an "ethic of truth."

The clarifications of science also help to virtuously balance the ethic of
ultimate ends and the ethic of responsibility (Schluchter 1996). I said that,
for Weber, the second type of ethic is the background frame within which
the professional politician ought to operate. The analysis of values and the
empirical research on their feasibility produces objective truths that the
vocation politician can use in two ways: to temper her "responsible
realism" when it would otherwise conform too closely to the world as
it is, losing the transformative momentum of the chosen cause even
when more is empirically feasible; and, conversely, to trace insurmounta-
ble limits to the pursuit of *Staatsräson* and to causes that are too "extreme,"
i.e., ethically and/or practically disproportionate to the end (e.g., in the
case of surplus violence or severe but unintended consequences).
The ethical powers that animate science are mainly those of the ethic of
responsibility, but they always contain an appeal to coherence and loyalty
to principles. This appeal presses for the adoption of a value-oriented
rational action, capable of transforming ultimate ends into "purposes,"
i.e., projecting the fulfillment of ends into some expected point in the
future (if the situation necessitates this) and carefully choosing preparatory
means in accordance with a consequentialist logic. Value-oriented
rational action is different from both the value-rationality of the "convic-
tion" politician and the instrumental rationality of the bureaucrat or the

power politician (Suzuki 2003). The means that would allow me to achieve my end may, given the knowledge at my disposal, as well as my practical evaluation of the contingent situation, turn out to be too ethically reprehensible (once clarified by science). In this case, the value-orientation provides actors with a "sense of limit," the capacity to abstain from using certain means—even if conducive to "success"—because of their ethical unacceptability. Similarly, when there are no available means to achieve my end, I may refuse to merely "adapt to the possible." In the latter case I will continue to aim at the impossible (my conviction), striving in all ways to align my practical success with my ideal intention. "Man would not have attained the possible, unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible" (Weber 1946a, 128). Hence Weber's otherwise-odd declaration—given his opposition to the ethic of ultimate ends—that

> a man following the ethic of responsibility will arise at a place where he must say, Here I stand; I can do no other. Here, the ethic of ultimate ends and the ethic of responsibility are supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine man, a man who can have the calling for politics. (Ibid.)[15]

The need for a combination of the two ethics is rooted in two symmetrical factors: the practical ~~impossibility~~/irrelevance of an ethical and political stance that is indifferent to the possibilities of their realization in this world, on the one hand; and, on the other, awareness that only convictions formed (originally) as ideals without regard to their possibility of realization can contain the adaptive and compromising vocation of consequentialist logic—and especially the latter's tendency to "absolutize" the existing world. Weber's position reflects here his wider view on the fearful destiny of late modernity: a hyper-rationalized and disenchanted "petrification" of social reality, inexorably defeating any attempt at imparting meaning and direction to history and even suppressing the "anthropological" preconditions for this, i.e. a human subjectivity capable ~~to reject~~ of rejecting the world as it is in the name of ethical powers.

To summarize, the historical and social sciences contribute to illuminate both the framework of logical consistency and the range of practical feasibility of values. This contribution is intimately connected to the nature of the method followed by these sciences. Let us return for a moment to Weber's logic of causal explanation. This logic aims at

isolating, in a specific historical situation, a field of "objective" possibilities of historical development and to trace the conditions that have guided events to/only one of these possibilities, by means of individual decisions in favor of it. The field did not necessitate those decisions, but it has nevertheless exercised a form of restraint: some options (relative to either means or ends) were not available, others had no chance of success given the balance of forces in the field. Drawing on historical and comparative analysis, the modern social sciences have gained the ability to clarify the range of possibilities of value choices (highlighting the conditions that make them not only technically but also *politically* possible), to interpret their meaning even on a "universal" level, and to remind the *Berufpolitiker* of his/responsibilities.

From Politics to Science

Conversely, politics helps to determine the optimal conditions of scientific choice in at least three ways: by upholding a *Gemeinschaft* within which *Kulturmenschen* can interact; by guaranteeing freedom of thought and the existence of a forum of debate among scholars, facilitating the formation of intersubjective consensus through rational demonstration (Portis 1980); and by producing relevant facts and meanings through those incessant struggles that typically characterize politics as a value sphere.

The absolute purpose of the political sphere is the (responsible) realization of values within the territorial community. In pursuing this aim, politics creates two major and irreversible "field enlargements," both very important for the social sciences. First, it "makes history," it expands the range of objective historical possibilities. The political actor gives rise to a new reality (*Wirklichkeit*) and at the same time expands the variety pool of possibilities (*Möglichkeiten*) (Poggi 2004), not only for herself, but for the whole community of reference and even for universal history. As emblematically demonstrated by the birth of Western capitalism, such new possibilities have to do with both facts and values. On the one hand, they move forward the practical horizon of life chances; on the other hand, they enrich the range of standpoints endowed with meaning (i.e., value) that can be taken in the face of a given phenomenon (Weber 1949, 2-23). The generation of such new possibilities allows for a constant widening and deepening of our nomological knowledge, whose first step is the epistemic ordering of the historical continuum. The second field

enlargement concerns the *Wertbeziehung*. Politics does not only produce facts, but also meanings. The axiological innovations brought about by politics incessantly articulate and enrich the menu of cultural viewpoints from which the social scientist can choose in order to (re-)interpret history. Thus, the "light of the great cultural problems moves on," and when this happens "science too prepares to change its standpoint and its analytical apparatus, and to view the stream of events from the height of thought" (ibid., 112). The cultural sphere (e.g./"modern culture" or "Western culture") provides science and politics with the intellectual insights that prompt their internal movements. Science and politics, in their turn, constantly feed the *Kultur* with new elements to be brought under the scope of "meaning" and "significance" (Scaff 1989).

I have emphasized that Weberian epistemology portrays the social sciences as clarifying the coherence and feasibility of values. The conception of the political actor as a creator of new possibilities and chances and as "ferryman" of objective possibilities effectuated in reality provides Weberian epistemology with an ontological basis. Working within the limits of a concrete historical situation, which constrains but does not compel her, the politician decides. Her decision is epistemologically intelligible in an "adequate" (though never exhaustive) form only by assuming her freedom of maneuver in facing the range of objective possibilities, as well as the contingency and axiological rationality of her choice. In addition to the thought-experience dualism and the inevitability of value pluralism (Koch 1994), freedom as contingent choice in concrete historical situations must also be considered an ontological trait of the human condition (Palonen 1999). To a certain extent, the politician who makes ethically conditioned, free/and contingent choices can be seen as the Weberian counterpart of Kant's noumenal self (Slammon 2008). But while the latter is a transcendental subject who belongs to the intelligible world under self-determined laws which, independent of nature, are not empirical but founded on reason, Weber's politician is immersed in a historical context that cannot be transcended, but only transformed, acting on a self-imposed ethic of responsibility founded, again, on reason and underpinned by scientific knowledge. It should be added that the ethic of responsibility serves as a particularly powerful stimulus to both "ontic" and axiological innovation. As Karl Jaspers (1989) noted, the professional politician is like a tightrope walker, incessantly forced to seek new solutions in the open arena of possibilities.

The other important contribution that politics (or more precisely a liberal order) makes to science is the protection of freedom of thought, without which there can be no authentic search for truth. Only a genuine *Freiheitliche Ordnung* provides the political and institutional guarantees that make knowledge possible. Under the protective wings of a *Freiheitliche Ordnung*, science produces truths that enable the politician to develop clear vision in making subjective choices; the internal logic of the (tempered) ethic of responsibility, in turn, produces a constant demand for knowledge of causal connections between phenomena, of instrumental options and their costs and benefits, and so on. The reciprocity between freedom and responsibility is not the product of occasional and voluntaristic dynamics, but a systematic interdependence on which the very conditions of possibility of both science and politics ultimately depend.

Love, Politics, and the Iron Cage

Insofar as the liberal-democratic order protects science, safeguards a space in which "mature men" can exercise free choice in relation to values, and facilitates the "objective" resolution of conflict, then this order could well serve as a corrective to the "iron cage" of modernity. However, Weber did not make this interpretative step, preoccupied as he was with the grip of instrumental and formal rationalization. The gradual closing of the iron cage would contract the margins of maneuver not only for politics and ethical choices, but also the aesthetic and erotic spheres. Weber wrote intense pages on love as a human experience devoid of external constraints, allowing for a transgressive relapse into primal forms of subjective fulfillment. He even compared the intensity of love to a mystical experience in which it becomes possible to know "life itself" (Weber 1948, 347), to open the gate "onto the most irrational and hence most real center of life in contrast to the mechanism of rationalization" (ibid., 345). Some have argued, correctly in my view, that the strong passions and internal energy of the erotic sphere might have themselves been considered as a possible counterforce against the disciplinary machine of modernity and its unbearably impersonal "steel encasement" (Whimster 1995). The antidotal potential of the erotic sphere was later highlighted by Foucault (1987), who saw precisely in the self-willed balancing out of pleasure and continence the essence of freedom and self-realization, as well as the most effective tool for the subject's emancipation from the external imperatives of rationalization.

Baudrillard (1990), however argued that this comforting scenario can be self-defeating, as revealed by the growing removal of sexual experience from the private realm and its subordination to the economic sphere through the commodification of the human body. Perhaps the reason Weber did not consider the erotic sphere as the ultimate counterforce to the iron cage is its inherent privateness. The completely inward nature of the erotic experience is ill suited for weaving a larger project of societal reconstruction. To the extent that they will not be annihilated, the "last men" will thus have to fight petrification acting in public, within what remains of the political sphere, inventing novel ethical prophecies or reviving old and noble thoughts and ideals. In this battle, the freedom of thought guaranteed by a liberal order may be essential.

V. THE NON-RELATIVISTIC WEBER

"Weberology" has been dominated by relativist interpretations of Weber's political thought and even its epistemology. The interweaving and mutual complementarity of politics and science is thus depicted as a tragic and desperate embrace, as Aron (1970) famously had it. Unable to re-establish axiology in a world without God and prophets, the intellectualization and disenchantment connected to the progress of science condemn practical action to navigate the irrationality of the world on the basis of extra-rational choices.

This article has proposed a different interpretation. Far from leading to tragic and desperate outcomes, the science-politics nexus can operate as a safeguard of scientific knowledge and freedom of thought, and reciprocally of clear-eyed political action. There is no doubt that Weber forcefully laid bare the risks and paradoxes inherent in this process. But he did not predict its collapse or reject its ideals (Bianco 1997).

My interpretation has rested on three main argumentative lines. The first has been the recovery of Weber's general theory of the "political community," a broader concept than that of the "political value sphere" on which the subjectivist interpretations have restrictively focused. By revisiting the former concept and linking it systematically with the latter, I have attempted to highlight both the logical primacy of community and legitimate order over tragic conflicts among values, and the objective constraints that the monopoly of violence and its concrete use typically exercise on political choice and action, orienting it toward responsibility.

As previously noted, recent interpretations have distanced themselves from radically subjectivist views of Weber, acknowledging the role played by cultural elements in disciplining the modes and contents of polytheistic battle, above all in the arenas "objectified" by liberal-democratic institutions. Moreover, the existence of a political community provides cognitive criteria and institutional filters to differentiate between culturally significant values and mere idiosyncratic preferences. Of perhaps greater importance is the fact that, in politics, axiological subjectivism is not only indirectly conditioned by external circumstances, but is inherently constrained by the absolute goal, the guiding principle of this value-sphere: the preservation of the political community through legitimate domination. The vocation politician is indeed motivated by an internally and freely chosen cause, but he must always comply with the meta-duty of *Staatsräson* and must seek to know the consequences of his action by rationally considering the objective facts relevant to the pursuit of his basic imperative, always avoiding "surplus violence."

My second argumentative line has highlighted the key role played by clarity, not only in linking science and politics, but also in their mutual relationship with values and ethics. Weber's position here did indeed rest on a metaphysical backdrop of ~~empirical~~ chaos and lack of any absolute sense. He nevertheless thought that the authentically human response to the *Sinnproblem* must be an intellect that the looks *beyond itself* in order to impart sense to the world. Though devoid of an absolute foundation, axiological choices must be based on clear vision and supported by intellectual integrity and autonomy, which define the "adequate" posture of the late-modern individual facing the *Sinnproblem*. Axiological choices are reflexive, make use of the critical intellect, and must display overall coherence.

Weber's perspective on ethics and justification is certainly not foundationalist, but I see no problem in defining it as cognitivist and coherentist.[16] In the vocation politician's *Wertung* (but also in the scientist's *Wertbeziehung*), first principles cannot be demonstrated *by* reason, but they must be chosen *for* "good" reasons, within a coherent normative framework.

The third argumentative line has been the explicit inclusion of the science-politics nexus within the problematic, and the historical frame, characterized by the state of "present" social science, as canonized by Dilthey and the Baden school and, in parallel, by the rise of democratic politics in the wake of universal suffrage and representative government.

These developments provide historical context for the two Munich lectures, which are so often taken as the basis of relativist interpretations of Weber. His discussion of value polytheism takes democratic politics for granted, as his discussion of value-reference, integrity, and the objectivity of science takes the rule of law for granted. This frame appears and disappears in the lectures, giving rise to misunderstandings about the scope and horizon of his arguments. As can be seen from his other political writings (Weber 1994), Weber was deeply concerned about the possibility of bureaucratic petrification. An equally important concern, however, was the possibility—an actuality, at the time of the lectures—that democratic politics will trigger the evil powers of violence uncontrolled. Likewise, as can be inferred from some passages of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Weber's reflections on the role of social science were moved by the observation that the state bureaucracy has now come to serve a huge range of functions, mainly in the economic and social realms, in relation to which science has a lot to say, as long as it says it in the right way. Science must not advance univocal claims of policy prescription, but must limit itself to clarification, with a view to helping political leaders to decide with responsibility and based on factual knowledge. Politics and science must respond to the problematic circumstances of possibly unbound bureaucracy and democracy; and the most effective response consists in activating a virtuous circle between the two spheres, in the service of truth and of the preservation of a political order based on individual freedom.

My goal has been to systematize Weber's thinking about science and politics by connecting various moments and parts of his work and highlighting neglected concepts and theoretical links, but I do not deny the fluctuations and, at times, contradictions in his thinking about these matters. I am also fully aware of the limits of Weber's perspective. Subjectivism is, for example, a reaction to a conception of reason anchored in nineteenth-century positivism: reason as a tool that can arrive at absolute knowledge of the world, *sub speciae aeternitatis*. The pessimism that pervades some Weberian explorations can, in turn, be seen as a romantic residue that partly echoes some positions of Oswald Spengler (Rossi 1971) and is similar to the "bad mood" that characterizes the work of other late modern authors. But if, by relativism, we connote a necessary connection between values and history—such as in Spengler—or the utter impossibility to connect axiology and rationality—as in Nietzsche —then Weber cannot be considered a relativist, let alone the modern "father" of relativism (as argued by Bloom 1987). If axiological relativism

(in a weak sense) is the thesis that values are not independent entities, eternally valid in themselves and demonstrable by way of reason, but rather normative landmarks freely (but coherently and reflectively) chosen by actors and endowed with only operational validity, then Weber was a weak relativist. But if we weave more tightly the thread of the political community, on the one hand, with that of value spheres, on the other, thereby reconstructing his nested view of the political and its relationship with science, the metaphor of polytheism and the meaning of the many "power words" (Wolin 1981) that punctuate his writings (fight, conflict, struggle, domination, power, and so on) should not frighten us.

It remains true that Weber's elliptical and not always crystal-clear language and his frequent shifts in argumentative temperament (typically introduced by "however") promote a pluralism of interpretations of many of the central hubs of his thought.[17] And, as is always inevitable—from a Weberian perspective—the interpretation which I have proposed in this article is the result of one-sidedness: my unilateral accentuations. But I hope to have been able to accentuate in a plausible and coherent way. And, above all, *sine ira et studio*, as befits the work of all social scientists.

NOTES

1. For a review and discussion of such positions, cf. especially Lassman 2006 and 2011. As pointed out by Villa 1999, Weber's alleged strong relativism has been the object of enormous criticism from both the left (Lukàcs, Horkheimer and Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas) and the right (Strauss, Voegelin, MacIntyre).

2. As the volumes of the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* (MWG) published by Siebeck Mohr are not available in English, in this article I have used the English editions suggested by Swedberg 2005. As to the secondary literature on Weber, this article extensively draws (also) on the Italian Weber scholarship (especially that of Norberto Bobbio and Pietro Rossi), still not adequately known in English-language debates.

3. According to Dilthey, understanding is based on the observer's ability to identify with the observed social object/phenomenon, "re-living" and reproducing within herself the experience of others. Weber denies that such "re-lived experience" (*Erlebnis*) provides a suitable starting point for sociological understanding (Rossi 1971).

4. Counterfactual analysis ensures the objectivity of causal imputation in the study of individual historical cases and singular events. If the scientific interest is in several cases, macro-structures, or macro-historical processes, counterfactual analysis is replaced by the comparative method. In the first case, what is practiced is a sociologically inspired historical analysis. In the second case, what is practiced is macro-historical sociology, of which Weber is rightly considered the founder (Kalberg 1994 and Ringer 1997). For Weber's role in highlighting the methodological promises of counterfactuals and a discussion of the state of the art, see Tetlock and Belkin 2001 and Levy 2008.

5. In a famous passage, Weber (1949, 59) states that a logically correct scientific demonstration must be acknowledged as true "even by a Chinese," by which he means an individual who lacks "sensitivity" to the cultural assumptions and value-reference of the author of that demonstration.

6. The role of "community" and "order" in politics is emphasized especially in Weber's sociological writings, while conflict is the main feature of his political writings, which are oriented toward practice and current issues. As noted by Beetham 1985, the different analytical emphasis and argumentative purposes of academic-sociological and political writings has/generated interpretative ambiguity and misunderstanding. In my view, this has also hindered a full appreciation of the foundations of Weber's political theory.

7. Even on a purely terminological level, the literature on Weber has not considered the different connotation that the concept of "objectivity" assumes in the scientific sphere, on the one hand, and in the political sphere, on the other.

8. Weber distinguished, as is known, only three pure types of legitimacy: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational. Democracy is especially connected to charismatic legitimacy. Elections are seen as the *objectification* of leader selection. It is documented that Weber had thought about the possibility of a free-standing fourth type of "democratic" legitimacy, autonomous and separate from the other three (Weber 1917). Cf. also Breuer 1998 and Beetham 1985.

9. Order is a prerequisite for social, cultural, and institutional articulation, and thus for the very existence of value-spheres. The absolute (and incommensurable) rationale of politics is the maintenance of the internal and external configuration of domination (Weber 1958), which is in turn a prerequisite for order.

10. As rightly argued by Boudon 2001, the parallel with Nietzsche has been exaggerated by many commentators.

11. He famously justifies, for example, the armed opposition of Florence against the Papal States to safeguard the survival of the republic (Weber 1946).

12. In light of the connection between passionate *Sachlichkeit* and democratic *Verantwortung* vis-à-vis surplus violence, the argument according to which a leader such as Adolf Hitler might qualify as a vocation politician (Sonin 2000) appears entirely off/mark.

13. The two expressions "analytical ethics" and "analysis of facts" were used by Weber in a letter to Tönnies (Baumgarten 1965, 399)

14. "Objectively correct" rationality (*Richtigkeitsrationalität*) characterizes those means-ends relationships that are based on "rules of experience." As Rossi 1971 explains, objective rationality connotes the effective adequacy, empirically verified, of a certain means in view of a certain end. Subjective and objective rationality may coincide, but not necessarily.

15. This statement is attributed to Martin Luther, who pronounced it after he refused to retract some of his heresies in front of the Worms Diet in 1521. For a detailed discussion of this "Luther-like moment" see Breiner 1989, Owen and Strong 2004 and especially Satkunanandan 2014.

16. I employ here the language of contemporary political theory. For "coherentism," the justification of ethical propositions does not rest on realist assumptions, but on their being part of a cohesive and coherent system of beliefs. See Brink 1989.

17. This is especially true for the discussion of ethical and political issues. As noted by Weber's student (and distant cousin) Paul Honigsheim (2000, 113), the position of his master is indeed "tragic," but dotted with reassuring "howevers."

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