With and beyond Max Weber:
The process of rationalisation[1]

At the basis of the lasting, even growing, fascination of Max Weber as man and thinker there are probably two reasons. First, there is an essential reason: Weber tackles a central theme, still today at the heart of our concerns, and to which he returns in all his works, more or less directly - the nature, direction, and future of the "modern world." Second, there is the question of the method in the broad sense of the word, including the theoretical-conceptual apparatus and specific research techniques, or an especially immediate *démarche.*

What is, for Weber, the "modern world"?

It is a world ruled and defined by "rational calculation." In Weber's perspective, the modern world, is that of *total calculability.* The construction of this modern world as one rationally calculated or calculable, passes through two basic phases: (a) "disenchantment" *(Entzauberung der Welt),* and (b) the laicization and routinization of the "profession" *(Beruf),* which becomes mundane as a specific bureaucratic methodical competence, instead of a "calling" or religious vocation.

It seems hardly necessary to note that this two-layered process of social transformation takes place and develops in the framework of a still more radical passage - a real historical leap - wherein we have a transition from a magicoreligious traditionalism, a vision of one's destiny which is essentially transcendent, of which we might say with Goethe that *`Alles Vergängliche / ist nur ein Gleichnis."* We move on to a society characterized by a process of increasingly large-scale industrialization, with the openly declared intention of producing its own values, and which furthermore does not acknowledge the binding force of any criterion of evaluation outside the internal correctness of its own proceedings. Once transcendence has collapsed, or, more exactly, once transcendent principles have been translated and reduced to methodical daily habits (at the basis of which Weber sometimes seems to perceive still the reflection of ancient religious values no longer consciously grasped or accepted as such), Weber's modern world seems to be in a Nietzschean sense "human, all too human."

The contrast with types of preceding societies - traditional paleotechnical, preindustrial - all linked to a marked, all pervasive, magicoreligious symbolism, is so strong as to be presented as a qualitative break.

---

[1] I am greatly indebted for long and fruitful discussion on these subjects to the late Professor Benjamin Nelson, a good friend and an unforgettable intellectual stimulus.
A first shorter version has been published by Social Research. Franco Ferrarotti, *Bismarck's Orphan: The Modern World and Its Destiny, from Disenchantment to the Steel Cage*, Autumn 1982.

As Huizinga, for example, comments,

> the spirit of that time was so full of Christ that the slimmest analogy with the Lord's life or passion which any act or thought might have, would instantly summon up his image. A poor nun bringing firewood into the kitchen saw herself as bearing the cross. The simple idea of bearing wood was enough to surround the action with the aura of a supreme act of love. A blind washerwoman takes the washtub and washboard for the crib and stable.[2]

From the Magico-Religious to the Individualized Rational

In the modern world, there is no longer room for this magicoreligious, essentially otherworldly symbolism. In Weber's view, at the most it lies in a residual space, necessarily destined to disappear. The "sense," the meaning, of the modern, rational, individualized world can develop only in reverse proportions to the gradual withdrawal, the so-to-speak contraction of the magicoreligious sphere. Indeed, as Weber says in Economy and Society,

> the more intellectualism rejects belief in magic, and thus the processes of the world become "disenchanted" *[und so die Vorgänge der Welt "entzaubert" werden],* they lose their magical meaning: they are restricted to "being" and "appearing" *[geschehen],* instead of "meaning" *[bedeuten],* so the need increases for the world, the "conduct of life" [*Lebensführung*], insofar as they make up a whole, to be meaningfully set out and "provided with meaning" [*sinnvoll*].[3]

In his usual meticulous manner, Weber analyzes the "paths" whereby "intellectualism" - first of all responsible for "disenchantment" - gradually becomes a current shared idea instead of a characteristic of narrow intellectual circles. It is the typical attitude of a whole social form and existential inclination, or an empirically testable character proclivity, of a total historical phase. In Weber's view, the resulting collapse of "magicoreligious meaning" increases and indeed makes essential the responsible adoption of "lifeconduct' in itself "meaningful" *(sinnvoll),* endowed with meaning no longer as tied to transcendent symbolic meanings and collective-communitarian validity, but rather as they emphasize the moral and intellectual responsibility of the individual - only now, at last, faced with his knowledge and his god. Weber, therefore, not only makes clear the results, but primarily the premises and *cultural* bases, of the process of industrialization as a universal social one which defines the modern world. He also stresses the elitist and typically intellectual nature of those bases, right from

[2] Cf. J. Huizinga, *L autunno del medioevo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1978), p. 264.

3 Cf. M. Weber, Economia e Società (Milan: Ed. Comunità, 1978), 1: 505.

their evolutionary-genetic beginning.[4] However, one should not thereby believe in a Weber indulgent toward a formulation of the description and interpretation - if not the explanation - of social phenomena in a monocausal sense. Nor, on the basis of the undeniable implication in certain passages taken out of context, should one support a basically "evolutionistic" Weber, as latterly Talcott Parsons has done. This demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of Weber's position - which, however, from his point of view, had the advantage of making Weber a kind of forerunner of "social action," as was to be developed by the author of *The Social System* in collaboration with sociologists and social analysts running from Robert Bales to Edward *A.* Shils, George C. Homans, and Neil Smelser.

In Weber, the analysis of the process of rationalization (which lies at the basis of the coming of the modern world and, *in essence,* defines it and makes it up) makes no concession to the theory of the "great evolutionary universals" which in Parsons's view can be identified in the growth of all human societies. In the same way, he is very careful regarding the ever-possible confusion between analytical concepts - needful for research as *mental constructs* for meaningfully reordering the immense mass of empirical data - and concrete historical situations, nonreducible in their specificity. Far from the often empty generalization which characterizes Parsons' method, with its curious identification of social theory with the simple construction of basically arbitrary, excessively generalized, abstract models - to the point of tumbling into theoretical vagueness and the generic - Weber is concerned with identifying what is *unique* in the historical experience of the West. He strongly criticizes the evolutionary, holistic tendencies both in their cumulative and mechanistic form (Spencer) and their historical dialectical one (Marx).

It is easy, especially regarding "disenchantment" and "rationalization," to adopt a misleading view of Weber's thought. Weber can be reproved for a limitation, or for a certain Nietzschean taste for the aphorism, the fragmentary, but in reality this is his great asset. I do not think it correct to regard this as solely the reflection of his logical philosophical position as a neo-Kantian, which excludes any generalization on the ultimate nature of the social phenomena dealt with, just as it would be hard to find in Weber the equivalent of a supraindividual reality comparable to Durkheim's *representations collectives.* Rather, it should be remembered that Weber always clearly distinguishes and keeps separate the analytical level and specific historic content. In his analysis of social phenomena, Weber is a rigorous individualist, applying and achieving a strictly individualist methodological approach, although - far from failing into a psychologistic position or one, as has been suggested, close to

[4] For the cultural bases of the process of industrialization, I should like to mention the work of the historian of the English coal industry at the time of the first "industrial revolution," J. E. Nef, *The Cultural Foundation of Industrial Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958); for a further treatment of this problem, see my *Macchina e uomo nella società industriale* (Turin: ERI, 1962).

"symbolic interactionism", he is solely concerned with large institutional complexes with a basically structuralist outlook.

We shall see later, when we look more directly at the form of Weber's method, what is implied by the contradiction we have indicated. What should be stressed here is that the concept of rationality, which for Weber underlies the process of rationalization is in no way schematic or intrinsically necessary. It is not necessarily progressive or cumulative in a unilinear sense. Indeed, it contains a multiplicity of meanings and thus is presented basically as a problematic concept.

Sociological analysis has often gone forward by way of a schematic counterposing of historically different situations and phases, nicely summarized in an umbrella concept such as: community versus society, nature versus culture, economy versus ideology, structure versus personality, tradition versus rationality, military versus industrial society, and so on. As regards these rather mechanical, historically ingenuous dualisms, Weber's position appears much more problematic and complex, and in any case far removed from black-and-white interpretations. One can even say that he was strongly attracted by the contradictory aspects and antinomies of rationality.

In this regard, Reinhard Bendix has cited two well-known, convincing examples. As against the widespread notion that Weber's thought describes a unilinear and necessarily progressive development from a magicoreligious epoch to an historical, rationalist-scientific phase, or from a patrimonial type of economic undertaking - or one of robbery - to one based on rational calculation (written, ongoing accountability, with scientific planning of available resources as regards profit), one should remember his analysis of ancient Judaism and Calvin's teaching in the context of the Protestant ethic.[5] In the first case we have a decline of the magicoreligious sphere because of the rise of prophecy. However, as Weber accurately notes, after the Babylonian captivity, the dynamic power of the prophets yields and gives way to ritualized faithfulness to the law under the tutelage of the rabbis. Thus here increasing rationality first determines, or accompanies, the broad values of a monotheist religion, only later to debauch into the irrationality of formalized rituals and the loss of interior meaning regarding commandments initially rich with symbolic significance. As Weber observed,

> the prophetic horizon remained wholly terrestrial, like the official Babylonian one, as against the Greek mysteries and the Orphean religion. Jewish prophecy, though linked to the Levites' care of the soul, was concerned only with the destiny of the people as a whole. Thereby it repeatedly demonstrated its political orientation. The increasing bourgeois rationalism of a people integrated into the

[5] Cf. R. Bendix, "Max Weber's Sociology Today", *International Social Science Journal 17* (1965).

> relatively pacified world of the Persian empire, and afterwards that of Hellenism, made the suppression of prophecy possible for the priests.[6]

As for Calvinism, the analytic precision with which Weber makes clear the paradox of the teaching is well known. This referred to the total inscrutability of divine will as well as to the *certainty of salvation.* At the same time, as regards the practical business of life, or lived morality, it draws conclusions about methodical living, industry, the sanctification of life, sobriety and saving, and thus about accumulation and the subsequent reinvestment of capital. One starts with uncertainty regarding one's own ultraterrestrial salvation and ends up with the foundation of the major Swiss banks. This same brilliant nature of Weber's work has itself created an opportunity for crude misunderstanding. Even a cursory reconstruction of the cultural climate prevailing at the time Weber's text saw the light - at the beginning of the century - may be sufficient to let us understand both its success and these deficiencies in understanding. A major success is almost always a great danger. Weber provided the example for an unusual heterogenesis of aims, in order to show the complex, multidimensional character, the basic *reciprocity,* of the relation between structure and culture. However, Weber's meticulous analytical precision has not been given full credit. Bendix himself, as Eisenstadt has shown, did not explore his subject profoundly enough, being content with a cursory presentation.[7] For Weber, there was no question of overthrowing Marx's argument - or more precisely, that of the Marxism of his day, mostly undialectical and as yet unaware of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* as well as of the *Grundrisse* - *but* to expose the complex interaction which cannot *a priori* be established by a wholly theoretic deductive calculation. It thus requires a specific historical research of the bi-directional relation between the structure of "material" and "ideal" interests.

The Idea of Interest

We are not thus faced with a counterposition between "material interests" and "ideas" but rather between two different types of interest. However, the central category is always that of interest - also what is involved in the sphere of knowledge which is not directly applicable or useful. This must be borne in mind as it helps to explain some important aspects of Weber's Position: (1) His rejection of vulgar anti-Marxism and his explicit recognition of Marxism as one working hypothesis or "ideal-type" model, albeit among others. (2) The rejection of an all-inclusive conceptual system, tendentially dogmatically closed, in favor of the "open system" linked to the *value* choices of the individual. This gives rise to the characteristic "moderate relativism" (moderated by the major values of the European liberal tradition which, as we can

[6] M. Weber, *Sociologia delle religioni* (Turin: UTET, 1976), pp.1161, 1234.

[7] Cf. S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Protestant Ethic Thesis in Analytical and Comparative Context* (New York: Random House, 1966): note too the introduction by L. Cavalli to M. Weber, *Religione e società* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1968).

boldly say today, Weber sees as *eternally* conquered and so beyond question). (3) The typically Weberian tendency not to be limited to a literally correct reading of the theoretical texts and the ethic of Protestantism and other religions, but rather to be concerned with a lived ethic - that is, with ethical precepts as they are manifested in everyday existence through the practical behavior of determinate individuals and social groups. (4) Finally, the profound argument dealing with universal religions, immediately relevant to our discussion in that it rests on a dual purpose. First, it attempts to establish comparatively in terms of the *uniqueness* of the historical experience of Western Europe *("Nur im Okzident . .")* contrasted with the failure to develop capitalism in other parts of the world, governed by other ethical or religious systems, or other magicoreligious models. To these last, Weber does not attribute a necessarily causal responsibility in the literal sense for the failure of capitalist development of the West European kind, but he sees them as meaningful accomplishments. Second, it tries to determine the process of the beginning of rationalization which was to peak and be diffused through the triumph of rationality as a principle of social organization and a new source of the legitimation of power by means of a series of intermediate stages which run from "disenchantment of the world" to the camouflage of religious values under fake lay dress. This is Thomas Luckmann's "invisible religion". At the other extreme these arrive at the scientifically, rationally determined work of formal bureaucratic orders and ultimately at the dubious victory of a white-collar world peopled by hard-working, malleable men.

What strikes one in Weber's broad analysis is the precision with which he grasps and brings out the traditional elements in the innovative, rationalizing processes and at the same time the factors of change in a rational direction already present in the structure of traditions. (Some imperfections of form are certainly to be attributed to its posthumous appearance and to the fact that it was edited by J. Winckelmann, with great fidelity to the originals.) In this perspective, it would be hard to see in Weber a kind of precursor or distinguished forerunner of the schematic theories of "secularization," and still less of the current well-known argument concerning a supposed "eclipse of the sacred." The somewhat extemporaneous nature of these and similar theories is clear in the connection - so much taken for granted as not to require empirical testing - between urbanization and industrialization and still more between industrialization and the scientific attitude, based on the cause-effect sequence. However, the survival in advanced industrial societies of many animistic, and sometimes crudely anthropomorphic, beliefs shows that acceptance of a cultural model based on rigorous rationality in a scientific sense is still sporadic and in any event liable to major exceptions.

Rationality as a Problematic Concept

One can further plausibly argue that the examples quoted by Weber in support of his case, especially, as material proving the Protestant ethic to be a factor of economic development and the "spirit of capitalism" as a way of life, are not wholly credible. That Benjamin Franklin represents clearly a typification of the Protestant ethic in practice is somewhat dubious; likewise, or even more so, is the example of Fugger, cited by Werner Sombart, the distinguished critic and opponent of Weber. At any rate, it is not a question of this: or rather, it is not a question of accuracy or adequacy in the literal sense of the words, but rather of Weber's general conception regarding the nature of the modern world. In Weber's terms, this nature can be traced to the specific forms of the process of rationalization, as taken on from time to time in the different fields of the - analytically discernable - social. This process is seen in terms of a general concept of a rationality never completely or definitively stated, which varies and is transformed in the different sectors of social life, from the religious to the economic, political, juridical, and organizational - bureaucratic.

Weberian rationality is thus essentially problematic. As for that Eurocentrism which, for Weber as for the scholars of his generation is unconsciously taken as an initial premise, one might say that rationality is a unique characteristic of Western European history; at the same time, it is a normative term, an historic task to be performed, a real *Grenzbegriff,* an idea-limit. As such it is positive; but at the very moment it seems to be historically achieved, and at the point of becoming dominant it reverses itself and takes on a negative connotation in the context of a totally administered society and a tendentially totalizing bureaucratic formal organization which cheats the individual out of his rationality in order to set him in the name of efficiency in a "steel cage."

Weber's rationality fluctuates therefore between radical antinomies. It seems to be attached to the individual, his decisions and actions. In this context it is not, it cannot be, intersubjective. The romantic pathos of this does indeed have its roots in the oft-stated awareness which makes the individual - it is for him alone, in his solitude - to decide and act according to his "feeling." "Culture," he says,

> is an area closed off by the meaningless infinity of the future of the world, to which direction and meaning is ascribed from man's point of view. It is such also for men who conflict with a concrete culture as though with a mortal enemy, and who aspire to a "return to nature." They can arrive at this position only in that they refer concrete culture to their ideas on value.[8]

Yet Weber does not shrink from formulations which at times seem to point to a general characteristic of modern humanity as rationality, one which certainly has its

[8] Cf. M. Weber, *Il metodo delle scienze storico-sociali* (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), p.96.

historical roots in Western Europe, but according to a universalistic view which makes one remember a scientistic element, at times clearly technocratic, in the Veblen of *The Place of Science in Modern Civilization.*[9] There are lesser writers, pointless to mention here, representative of a "middle culture" - for instance, the famous author of *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution.*[10] In *Wissenschaft als Beruf,* Weber says that

> from the practical point of view, intellectualistic nationalization directed toward science and scientifically oriented technique does not indicate a general progressive knowledge of the conditions of life surrounding us. Rather, it points to something quite different: the awareness or the belief that everything in principle can be mastered by *reason.* This in turn means the disenchantment of the world. One no longer needs to resort to magic to master or to ingratiate oneself with the spirits, as does the savage, for whom like power exists. *Reason* and technical means provide this. Above all, this is the meaning of intellectualization as such.[11]

The Individual's Social Action

It could be considered that Weber sees the weight of reason in human history as decisive. In reality, this is not so. At least partially and also in the West, social action escapes from its control. For Weber, social action is an individual act which is *socialized* by anticipating and reacting to the acts of other people. As he said,

> as with any action, social action may also be determined: (a) in a rational way as regards the end - by expectations regarding the attitude of objects of the outside world and other men, making use of these expectations as "conditions" or "means" for rationally willed and calculated ends, as follows - (b) in a manner rational as regards the value - from the conscious belief in the unconditional value in itself (whether ethical, aesthetic, religious or interpretable in other ways) of a particular piece of behavior as such, leaving out any consideration of its result; (c) affectively - by sentiments and current states of sensation; (d) traditionally - by an acquired habit.[12]

Parsons' criticisms on this point manifest a deep misunderstanding (as we have noted above and elsewhere). Weber is not concerned to construct the total, necessarily reified "social system." He is aware that this would mean freezing history and producing an abstract exercise in modeling: this would possibly help to reorder the data concerning the existing situation, but it would not be possible to take social change into account.

[9] T. Veblen, *The Place of Science in Modern Civilization* (New York: Hoebsch, 1919).

[10] C. P. Snow, *Le due culture e la rivoluzione scientifica* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1970)

[11] Cf. M. Weber, *Il lavoro intellettuale come professione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), pp.19 - 20.

[12] Weber, *Economia e società,* 1:21 - 22.

The "grand visions," the all-inclusive social systems for Weber can only be the product of basically useless intellectual exercises. Anyone, he said with a certain irony, who wants a vision should go to the cinema: on the other hand, anyone who longs for sermons should go to a monastery. These aforementioned comments, which may seem ironic, distant, and tough, are really self-deprecatory, almost reaching the level of pathos. They contain *the core,* the nature of the concept of "disenchantment". In fact, he said, if the destiny of an age which has eaten of the tree of knowledge is to know that we cannot grasp the meaning of cosmic development on the basis of the conclusion of the investigation, however perfectly established, the consequence is logically inevitable. The responsibility for "meaning," once it has departed from the great traditions, or the authority of the "eternal yesterday" as its basic and essential foundation, rests finally on the individual's decisions. The "meaning" is no longer given: to Weber, we as individuals must be "capable of creating it ourselves."

Because of this basic reason and logical bond, Weber speaks of a "polytheism of values," the "right to the unilateral analysis of reality," and the basic necessity of "presuppositions" declared and decided upon by the individual who undertakes the specific research, so as to succeed in determining what is important and what is not.[13] Rationality is thus handed over to the individual and his presuppositions; as already noted, it appears as a highly antinomic conception, whose meaningful connections are to be found within the general polarity which for Weber can be grasped in the tension-distinction between material and formal rationality. In most of the areas mentioned above, this tension-distinction particularly involves the economic, juridical sector. Weber said that an economic action should be formally defined as rational to the extent that the "economic thrust" essential to any rational economy can be interpreted, and should be interpreted, in numerical expressions of "calculation," wholly cutting out the technical formulation of these calculations, and thereby the monetary or natural nature of their estimations. Nonetheless, this conception is univocal, at least in the sense that the monetary form represents the highest level of such *formal* estimability - naturally, all other things being equal. In contrast, the concept of *material* rationality takes on very different meanings. It simply expresses this common element - that analysis is not satisfied with *the fact,* which can be stated in a relatively unequivocal manner, and that there must be a rational calculation as regards the aim, using the most suitable technical means. However, it gives weight instead to the ethical, political, utilitarian, hedonistic requirements *(Forderungen),* those of the stratum of equality, or indeed any other kind. It measures against them, on the basis of rationality as regards value, or a material goal *(Wertrational oder material zweckrational),* the consequences of economic action even if this be formally rational, calculable. One must, however, observe that it is always possible, in a totally autonomous form as regards this material critique of the economic effect - a critique which is ethical, aesthetic, and ascetic of

[13] Weber, *Il metodo delle scienze storico-sociali,* pp. 64, 83.

the intention and methods of economic activity *(Wirtschaftsgesinnung sowohl wie der Wirtschaftsmittel).* The merely formal *(bloss formale)* function of monetary calculation may appear subordinate or contradictory *(subaltern order geradezu... feindlich)* with their postulates, when confronted with all these forms of criticism.

Weber also remarks on natural calculation, and the natural economy which historically corresponds to this - that is, the economy which neither knows about nor practices the use of money. However, as usual, he expresses his own thoughts in analytically counterposed conceptual frameworks, returning to rational calculation as capital's calculation, a full and historically unparalleled expression of formal rationality. He does this in order to identify the connections and conditions which actually make it possible. Basically, there are three conditions:

> (1) Market competition *[Marktkampf]* between economies which are, at least relatively autonomous. Prices expressed monetarily are the products of struggle and compromise, and thereby the result of clusters of power *[Machtkonstellationen].*
>
> (2) The highest level of economic activity, as a means of orienting calculation, is achieved by monetary estimate in the form of capital's calculations: this involves the material presupposition of the widest market freedom, in the sense of the absence of monopolies, whether these be imposed from without and economically irrational or voluntary and economically rational (that is to say, directed on the basis of market possibilities).
>
> (3) Not all "demand" in itself, but demand for useful services based on buying power, materially determines - through determination of the calculation by capital - the production of goods in the context of an acquisitive economy. Thus, for the direction of production, the "constellation" of marginal utility of the social stratum living on unearned income is decisive. This stratum has the power and inclination to acquire a specific service for purposes of utility.

In Weber's outline of these three conditions, the extraordinary awareness of the historic nature of concepts and kinds of economic relation is striking: these, in the tradition of classical economics, seemed natural concepts and processes, and by definition non-modifiable and metahistorical. If only in passing, the attention Weber pays to money (which is not an innocuous designation of services of undetermined usefulness, and moreover cannot be arbitrarily altered without fundamentally affecting the nature of the prices established by the struggle between individuals) introduces a completely political and sociological element into the discussion of this theme; the theme is mostly regarded as ideally "indifferent" and purely technical and is not confronted yet by modem monetarists. Witness of this is the work of Milton Friedman and the discussions inspired by him.

Weber's analysis is not just limited to the discussion of macroeconomic conditions. It follows an examination of the motives which in a market economy are the "decisive stimulus for economic action." To understand fully the structure of these motivational pressures, as well as to avoid any lapse into the purely psychologistic level, Weber clearly conceptualizes - almost running the risk of schematic presentation - the distinction-tension between market economy and planned economy. In brief, one can say that in his view, while in a market economy the activity of particular, autonomous forms of the economy is directed also autonomously. In a planned economy, on the other hand, every economic activity is directed, insofar as it is realized, in conformity with the domestic economy, heteronomously, on the basis of regulations which command and prohibit, as well as on the basis of a perspective of rewards and punishments.

In the context of the market economy, the stimulus to economic activity is represented by three motivations:

> (1) For the have-nots by the coercive force of the risk of a total lack of supplies for themselves and their dependents (children, wives and ultimately parents), for whom the individual must typically provide, as well as, in various degrees, by an internal predisposition to economic work as a form of life. (2) For those who actually enjoy a position of privilege, because they have no possessions or education (in turn determined by possessions), the stimulus comes from possibilities of high incomes, ambition, and the value conferred on prized types of labor (spiritual, artistic, technical, etc.). (3) For those who take part in the possibilities of acquisitive enterprises, the stimulus comes from the risk of their own capital and their own opportunities for gain, in connection with the "professional" disposition toward rational acquisition. That is the case insofar as this is seen as a "proof" *[Bewährung]* of the service itself, and as a form of autonomous domination over the people who depend on instructions from them, and also control over possibilities of supplying the wants of an indeterminate mass of individuals; their instructions thereby have importance for their culture or their lives - in short, as a form of power.

Formal Rationality, Material Rationality, and Planning

Let us suppose that instead of a market economy there is, and operates, a planned economy. What would its results for structure and psychological-motivational "disposition" be? First, Weber notes that there would be a certain lessening of coercion derived from the risk of the lack of supplies. A planned economy would not in fact be able to discharge onto its dependents the results of a potentially lesser service from the worker. Equally, the autonomy of enterprises' management would diminish, with a subsequent lessening, probably to zero, of the risk to capital, with the apparently inevitable recourse to "idealistic stimuli of an altruistic nature". Yet, at the same time, a planned economy would also have to face up to a more-or-less-radical diminution of

formal rationality, basically linked with monetary calculation and that of capital. There thus arises the problem of the practical realization of socialism, in the sense that *formal* rationality based on an estimate regarding capital which allows rational accountability, and *material* rationality, which obeys ethical needs and those of postutilitarian justice, differ from each other so greatly that there arises an irreconcilable contradiction which, in turn, reflects the basis of the "irrationality of the economy which is one of the roots of any social problematic, above all that of socialism."

However, it is more in the political sphere than in the economic and juridical ones that those characteristics which split up the seemingly unitary nature of modern society become explosive and reach breaking point. They arise as an impassable obstacle. The process of rationalization broadens out here into the formation of formal bureaucratic orders, from which there grow contradictions, oppositions, which in Weber's analysis seem irreconcilable. Of the three pure types of legitimate power, the bureaucratic type would at first sight seem the one logically tied to rationality. In fact, Weber convincingly outlines its characteristics and presuppositions - rational and impersonal - as a "cosmos of abstract rules and norms established accordingly," regarding the value, ends, or both, as against the other two types of power, traditional and charismatic. One might say that, with the advent of legal, bureaucratic power in the formal sense, with a rational character insofar as it "rests on the belief in the legality of decreed regulations, and on the right to command of those called upon to exercise (legal) power on the basis of these," the process of rationalization finally triumphs. Meanwhile, complementarily, on the strictly political plane, on the ruins of the ancient social orders dominated by aristocratic, dynastic orders, there is proclaimed mass democracy and the modern "social" state; that is, alternatively, the entrepreneurial, planning, all-administering state. Bureaucratic structure is more than ever necessary. Legal bureaucratic power is inconceivable without its administrative apparatus. Furthermore, with its characteristic depersonalization of functions and, simultaneously, the specialization of responsibilities, the bureaucratic structure seems basically to cling to the egalitarianism of democracy and its intrinsic need for impersonal rotation and socialization of power. However, the egalitarianism of the bureaucracy is formal: that which underlies democracy is substantial, unless one wishes to reduce the concept of democracy to a simple ensemble of formal procedures, independently of socioeconomic content, on the basis of the principle that he who desires democracy must be content with this. (This is the conclusion drawn by most American politologues [Lipset, Dahl, Polsby, etc.], but also by the Europeans, who follow the same tracks with minimal variations [Lepsius, Crozier, Bobbio, Sartori, etc.].)

In fact, as Weber never tired of pointing out, bureaucracy tends to involve society in its entirety, and to deprive politicians of their function by routinizing them and depriving them of authority. The instrument for removing this authority, which foreshadows

the atrophy of political judgment, is specialized knowledge. This is at the root of the institution of specific power (one only controls what one knows) and of the social figure of the bureaucrat. In fact, the specific mode of functioning of modern bureaucracy, in his view, rests on certain general "principles." First there is the principle of the spheres of competence of definite authorities, disciplined in a general manner through rules: that is, through administrative laws and regulations. Second, there is the principle of the hierarchy of offices, and the series of procedures - a rigidly regulated system of supra- and subordination of the organisms of authority, with control of the superiors over their inferiors. Third, modem office management is based on documents (agreements) which are preserved in the original or in duplicate, and on an apparatus of subaltern and clerical functionaries of all kinds. Fourth, every official activity normally presupposes meticulous specialized preparation. Fifth, official activity claims the whole of the bureaucrat's working capacity. Sixth, the office procedure of the functionary follows general rules which can be learned. The knowledge of these rules is thus a special technique which functionaries have[14].

The Sociopolitical Consequences of Specialized Knowledge

Modern techniques and the economics of the production of goods leave specialized knowledge out of consideration. Man thus cannot escape domination by the bureaucracy, since it is precisely that, in a form indissolubly linked to material, or at any rate objective, interests, which ends up by determining individuals' conditions of existence. The legal functionary type therefore seems to leave out the great sociohistorical upheavals, as far as Weber is concerned. "Power," "leaders" change, but the "function" of bureaucracy, its "specific technique" of performing all the duties of power, remains. It is transformed but cannot be eliminated. The potency that such a specialized knowledge in the bureaucracy involves, in reality increased by the competence acquired on the job (from which there is derived the concept of the "official secret," analogous to the commercial secrets of the firm), only the capitalist entrepreneur can oppose.[15]

Only the private interest in profit can, indeed, in the context of its own interest, attain the specialized knowledge and awareness of things which can free him from the dominance of the rational wisdom of bureaucracy, which thereby becomes a tool in his own hands. Elsewhere, bureaucracy, out of the need to be able to choose freely the best qualified functionaries, creates within itself the conditions for bringing about a certain kind of leveling; it tends, too, to create the "power of formalistic impersonality", which allows it to discharge in a purely technical manner - as regards "anyone" - the objective duties involved in a particular department. As we have

[14] Weber, *Economia e Società,* 1: 80 - 81, 103 -107; 2: 260 - 262.

[15] At the beginning, the coming of the charismatic leader may reduce or overthrow the existing type of bureaucracy. Later, it turns out that the latter acquires a new force according to strength of the requirement to observe the duties the "new law" imposes.

seen, there are two basic characteristics to Weber's bureaucracy: "permanence" and the function of "rationalization." Once in being, bureaucracy becomes the hardest social structure to throw down. Elsewhere, it represents the most suitable means for transforming "community action" into "social action," rationally ordered. It is at the same time an imposing instrument for "socialization" in the hands of whoever has control of the bureaucratic apparatus.[16] Any "mass" resistance is bound to succumb in face of the characteristic indispensability of a "continuous," "functioning," "impersonal" apparatus. The bureaucratic phenomenon, apart from having its own social and economic conditions, is also able to generate them; this is especially the case where the distribution of power and the direction provided to the apparatus of those who use its powers are involved.[17] The rationalizing function of this structure permits an understanding of the current and potential capacity of political and industrial capitalism, as against Marx, for whom the system of the capitalist economy is dominated by internal contradictions and class conflict.[18]

Charisma and Routine

However, the confines of the formalism and routinization of bureaucratic procedures did not escape Weber's notice. The concept of "charismatic power" also helps Weber to counterbalance certain consequences of the activity of bureaucratic power. Especially in relation to events in Germany during and after the First World War, Weber concludes by posing the dilemma of bureaucracy - presented as lying between the alternatives of organizational efficiency and the formalization of conflicts, characteristic of every sociological experiment and observation of the phenomenon: the problem, in short, of the relations between bureaucracy and bureaucratization, or

[16] One should remember in this context the famous criticism of the "indefinite progress of the bureaucratizing tendency," lately set out convincingly by R. K. Merton. However, we must look elsewhere for the valid aspect of Weber's insight - in having pointed out a common, indeed isomorphic, tendency in capitalism and socialism as rational systems.
See in this connection *Rivoluzione e trascendenza*, Bologna, CED, 2014, passim.

[17] An important fact regarding modem capitalist bureaucracy is its relative independence from state bureaucracy. The latter has characteristics in common with military organization, as the modem army has a pronounced bureaucratic character, in contrast with feudal armies, for example. However, it is important that two of the most characteristically capitalist societies (including those of older origin), England arid the United States, are in fact those, of all the great modem powers, in which the army has a slighter influence on social structure as compared with the major European states. These facts show that capitalist bureaucracy has an independent development. Cf. T. Parsons, *La struttura dell'azione sociale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1962), p. 626.

[18] The principle of the separation of the labourer from the material means of exercise of authority is wholly accepted by Weber, and use of this principle allows for a broader and deeper analytical extension applicable to a wider number of phenomena. It is common to the modern state exercise of power, and its civilization in a political and military sense, and to private, capitalist industry. In both cases, the disposability of these means is in the hands of the power to which the design of the bureaucracy conforms. This design is characteristic of all these organizations, and its existence and function is indissolubly linked, both as cause and effect, with the concentration of the material means of its exercise. Again, the hierarchical dependence of the worker, the shop assistant, the technician, the government or military functionary rests on a totally technical foundation. For the instruments, supplies, and the financial means indispensable for the maintenance and independence of the economy are concentrated for deployment on the one hand by the entrepreneur, and on the other by the political leader or government. Cf. M. Weber, *Parlamento o governo nel nuovo ordinamento della Germania* (Bari: Laterza, 1919), p.23.

> between the development of organizations which promote and facilitate the achievement of certain ends. They provide services, fully performing important functions, but are in contrast with the phenomenon of an ever-increasing absorption of uncontrollable powers from the side of these organizations.[19]

Weber sees bureaucracy as a compendium of rationality and technical efficiency - an autonomous body, full of beneficent power destined to rationalize the life and activity of society: but it is really the concept of "rationalization" which appears problematic for him, and does not seem sufficiently clarified.

Using Mannheim's famous distinction,[20] we can say that Weber left obscure the differentiation between a functional type of rationalization as technical efificiency, and "substantial" rationalization. He was certainly aware of, and could demonstrate, the differences between some forms of ancient bureaucracies and the modern organization of industry and public administration, but it is also the case that to use the measure of efficiency and productivity so plainly could more than once be of little assistance in evaluating and prompting rationalization. One may argue that Weber ends up by counterposing to the undervaluation of the bureaucratic phenomenon by historical materialism a symmetrical position: however, one of the opposite kind, employing a kind of rationalistic overestimation of the phenomenon. In modern society the growing process of bureaucratization takes place simultaneously with the process of socialization. This process - for Weber - is irreversible, and he sees it as highly improbable that there can be any working out of means suitable for containing it. Nonetheless, for Weber, this is what should be attempted, in order to conserve part of "free humanity" and bring individuals to an awareness of their rights. This could provide hope for a new; different "meaning" to give to the unstoppable "bureaucratic travail" and lessen for man the dangers of hypostases in terms simply of calculation, efficiency, and productivity.

Possibly only in some remarks by Nietzsche, whose work Weber was familiar with, are there critical demands as passionate as they are tormented concerning the "bureaucratic travail," like those the theorist of bureaucratic power was setting forth after the Protestant ethic. Weber said that

> the puritan wanted to be a professional, while we have to be. Just as ecstasy was taken from monastic cells to professional life and began to dominate lay existence, it helped to build the powerful economic order - linked to technical and economic presuppositions about mechanical production - which now determines extraordinary strictly the style of life of each individual. Perhaps it will continue to do this until the last ton of coal is burnt: to determine the life -

[19] S.N. Eisenstadt, Bureaucracy and Bureaucratization in Germany, "*Current Sociology" 7* (1958): 103.

[20] K. Mannheim; *L'uomo e la società in una età di ricostruzione* (Milan: Ed. Comunità, 1959), pp. 50 - 79.

> style of everyone born in this system, not those taking part in purely economic activity. Concern for material possessions should - for the "chosen" - be wrapped around like a light cloak, easily thrown off, in Baxter's view. However, destiny made that cloak a steel cage.[21]

This concern returns pressingly and still more dramatically as a persistent *Leitmotiv* in Weber's Political writings. Weber, as regards the form of method, rejects any "substantial" *(substantielle)* notion of collective groupings, in order to start from, and preserve - in his analysis - the individual *(Einzelindividuum).* Here, too, regarding the aimless perfection which in his view seems an essential characteristic of bureaucratic-formal orders, typical of technically advanced societies on the way to being totally administered (to use Horkheimer's formulation), Weber's analysis easily overcomes the limits of a simply psychosocial phenomenology so as to broaden out more often into "structural explanations." That is, to expand into proposition at the basis of which it is a social formation, not an individual, which determines certain consequences for itself and other social formations. In the 1909 meeting of the Verein fur Sozialpolitik, Weber noted that if

> we look at a purely technical, efficient administration as the peak and sole ideal, one may certainly say - to hell with anything else. Think of the effect of this total bureaucratization and rationalization which we now see approaching. Every worker is measured in this calculation like a cog of the machine, and increasingly from within he is thus compelled to feel like this, to ask himself only if perhaps from being a small wheel he might one day become a big wheel. It is as though in politics the craze for order - in the perspective wherein those Germans who thought they were acting for the best will end up - was enough to decide everything. It is as though only through knowledge and will we *must* become men who serve "order" and nothing but order, and who become nervous and scared as soon as this order wavers for a second, and become helpless as soon as they are uprooted from this total incorporation into order. Let us hope the world does not know that these "sons of order" are the evolutionary development to which we are constantly dispatched.[22]

Weber perceives, therefore, and plumbs the depths of a purely instrumental rationality, but he does not have the technical nor the methodological means to solve it. He would rather historically analyze it, with great coldness and the academic modesty characteristic of him. His project of offering us the global vision of everything involved - as simultaneously cause and effect - in the makeup of the social is unquestionably fascinating. However, his limits are equally undeniable. They are plain in the very title of his major work: not "economy" as against, under, before, or after "society," but

[21] Weber, *Sociologia delle religioni,* 1: 321.

[22] M. Weber, *Scritti Politici* (Catania: Giannotta, 1970), pp. 112 -115.

"economy and society." That is, we have the economic framework together with the cluster of varied, multidimensional, contradictory social facts in equilibrium; at the same level, with a tendency to stand fast, if not freeze - despite their antinomies - they remain in unstable equilibrium. Only the will, the projects of individuals by chance ("charismatically") possessed by "Catalinarian rage" of the demon of action, will be able to set these things in motion - unpredictably, or by means of an inscrutable "destiny."

It may seem paradoxical that the theorist of the modem world as a totally calculable world should arrive at such a conclusion. However, this is also the proof of his rigorous intellectual honesty which led him to reject the illusory promises of "sacrified" history and the recipes of ideological speculations passed off as intersubjectively binding scientific certainties. This is the attitude of a sociologist who rejects consolatory shortcuts, by being satisfied with the role of the impartial and unbending witness to the crisis. Among the many duties of sociology he never accepted, still less counseled, consolation at all costs.

Max Weber's Limitations

The richness and depth of Weber's analysis are beyond question. However, there is still a question regarding what was mentioned in the third part of this article: Weber, as a committed intellectual, from the podium of his university chair and from that of political journalism, did not foresee the rise of Nazism. With the introduction of Article 48 into the Weimar constitution one may even argue that unconsciously he assisted it.

How is this? How could this famous scholar, troubled by scruples concerning the accuracy of documents involving ancient Eastern religions to the point of losing sleep over them, then so grossly fail down when there was a question of the immediate political future of his country? How could this champion of autonomous research have been so shortsighted when faced with the impending ruin of the Weimar Republic, which portended the coming to power of Nazism? What is the hidden reason for this complete blindness, which seems to damage quite unexpectedly his extraordinary analytical acuteness? The surprising element is still more evident if we think about the disturbing fact that, as regards the details of the European political and cultural situation, Weber gave ample proof of exceptional perspicacity. He foresaw the fragmentation and political segmentation which would result from adopting the electoral law of proportional representation. He has no illusions, and indeed describes extremely accurately the emergence of, and the sociopsychological type of, the professional politician, who no longer lives *for* politics but *of* it. He is more analytical than Marx, but also than Werner Sombart as regards industrial complexes and bureaucratic hyperdevelopment. He never tired of presenting typologies of the

city, endless catalogues of activities and social types, definitions, distinctions, and subdistinctions of strata, conditions, and power. All this is destroyed by the simple sociopolitical, economic, and cultural reality of post-Wilhelmine Germany. While the great sociologist set out his typologies with cultured intelligence, a former house painter and frustrated artist was writing *Mein Kampf,* and expressing in it the fear and anguish of a defeat which was never accepted and recognized as such - the desire of a whole people which felt it had been cheated of victory and thirsted for a new conquest but did not realize it.

To understand both the merits and limits of the method and substance of Weberian sociology this question is basic. However, this question is never clearly raised. Rather, even the most incisive commentators tend to draw from Weber's deep well all the materials which, by chance, they happen to need, without thinking of the construction of the whole - with the same merry thoughtlessness with which the medieval church-builders ravaged the temples of classical antiquity. Teachers are usually destroyed by their disciples, and Weber did not escape this rule. We have already pointed to Parsons' approach, which basically sees in Weber no more than his own forerunner. For Parsons, Weber began the construction of the general theory of the "social system" and intentionally directed action. Too bad, Parsons seems to say, that he stopped half-way. There is no surprise, therefore, that it is up to Parsons to take up and complete the task. Naturally, this is a total misunderstanding. Parsons is facing problems which do not even marginally enter into the problematic context of Weber's interests. Weber is faced with a problem of change or at least the reorientation of an elite - an economic summit - social and political, summoned by the increasing power of a Germany reunited by Bismarck to measure up to its real historic stature: its own suitability as regards the needs of rational direction and optimal use of human and material resources - clearly on the increase - so as to break definitively the traditional balances in Europe, established by the Congress of Vienna and already flawed by the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. Parsons has to discharge, more or less consciously, a quite different function.

Even before 1940 - *The Structure of Social Action* dates from 1936[23] - and especially from the years immediately following the war, setting himself up as the interpreter of the re-emergence of a systematic claim from the social sciences, Parsons quietly began a discussion which perfectly suited the deepest needs of American society. There is no doubt that in both his manner of thought and his life-style, Parsons belonged to the descendants of the great cultural systematizers and the "lay popes." However, one should see these things from closer at hand. The America which was a victor in the Second World War was radically different from the America of the prewar period. Whitman's verse was a long way off; the crude simplicity of the pioneers, their domestic

[24] T. Parsons, *La struttura dell'azione sociale*, it. Tr. Bologna, il Mulino, 1960.

virtues - a memory tinged with rhetoric - the innocence of a whole new world, beyond the complicated entanglements of conflicting ideologies and the defiling struggles of power politics, was lost forever.

Almost by surprise, America found itself after the Second World War in an essentially new position, now distant from any concrete possibility of isolationism and irremediably involved in world affairs. It was an uncomfortable position, to which middle Americans and the ruling classes themselves were unaccustomed, but it was inevitable. Once Wilson's moralism and rigid Puritanism had spent itself in the immediate postwar period, the United States had been able to return to its normal framework, having obviously made good bargains. Having entered the war in 1917 when the die was already cast, with few casualties and, all in all, little bother, they managed to go from being a debtor nation (especially as regards France and England) to a creditor nation, among moribund and starving allies. Once the armistice was signed, American soldiers, strategists, and statesmen had been able to abandon Europe and return peacefully to their own domestic customs, leaving behind almost a little elite of writers in Paris and thereabouts who were to have a ball at least until the great crash of 1929, when the collapse of industrial shares on Wall Street and the adverse exchange rate of the dollar were, somewhat brusquely, to close the splendid Parisian interlude of Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and the others. In this context, despite its meannesses - especially as regards Fitzgerald - we should remember Hemingway's A *Movable Feast, a* required reading on this phenomenon.

The period after the Second World War was radically different. The United States came out in a hegemonic position on the world scale and could no longer simply go home. In this profoundly altered situation, one can grasp the deep purpose and the reason - not by chance - for Parsons' destiny. His work became emblematic. The construction of the "social system" and the identification of its functional prerequisites might appear as a purely theoretical undertaking in intellectual terms. In reality, it was the reply to a complex political need which postwar America felt in its most sensitive nerve-endings, in the tormenting sense of a new, unspoken imperial responsibility which England's decline placed on its back: this made her insecure. It provided a still emoted sensation, though already perceived as an inevitable result, or a kind of murky penalty, that the country would not be able to go home and barricade itself within, forgetting the Old World and its complicated intrigues and irresolvable problems. America was forced to face up to the external world - the "un-American" world. This was no choice but a question of survival. Beyond ideological confrontation and questions of the empire, there were only irrelevance and historical destruction. America had to acknowledge herself, settle on her own identity so as to present herself as a credible point of reference and an ideal assembly or meeting point for the ideological loyalty of human beings.

Parsons' "social system" is the visiting card of the United States. That is, it is the toughest, most mature attempt the country makes to recognize and identify itself - the attempt, so to speak, to "reflect itself' in a systematic construct at a high level of abstraction, in which the basic principles of their common life, analytically justified and guaranteed against any possible development, are laid down and established forever. This is done as a reply, an exorcism of the danger of falling apart before making contact with the "outside world," "other" cultures.

This complex political need for self-analysis and self -affirmation of postwar America is double: it has an internal and external dimension. On the internal level, this need shows the necessity for homogenization, integration, that it becomes an effective "union," not simply as a juridical entity *(our more perfect Union* - as a society of immigrants, blacks and whites, people of radically different racial and religious origins, and with profoundly conflicting interests, beneath the official credo of equality). On the level of international and intercultural relations, a postwar America has not only to resolve the problem of the photogenic projection of its own image. For this, the tale of the returning immigrants, those who in some way made their fortune in "God's own country," would perhaps suffice. Rather, there is a question of presenting America as a determinate historical reality, while simultaneously making it tend toward, or coincide with, the absolute, atemporal model of an industrially advanced, technically progressive society. This would be done so that it might join onto and identify itself with, ultimately, the only civil society believable these days, empirically identifiable and at the same time normative in ideal terms for all possible societies. The confusion, typically American, between datum and value becomes clear in this perspective: the confusion, that is, between what is and what ought to be. In addition the - typically American - inability to see one as the other, to accept the otherness of the other, also becomes clear: that is, one sees the imperialistic, "missionary" tendency to want to reduce the other to oneself, to project oneself, one's values and culture, onto what is other than oneself. They are projected onto other cultures, other different values, so denying - along with the pluralism of cultures and values - the dialectic and history. So it externalizes itself, with the level of development historically determined and attained, as though it were the absolute level, the terminus of history, the end of the evolutionary potential of humanity and of the economic, political, and cultural stage of its common life. At the same time, it refuses in the specific historical and political reality to understand others and to have relations with other peoples and cultures which are other than the American direct or indirect domination.

Behind Parsons' systematic exposition, there thus emerges the double political need of the United States to integrate and cohere within, and at the same time to assert itself hegemonically at the level of international relations. The task Weber assigns himself is quite different. The rationalism he sees as the distinctive mark of the West,

and which he sees as triumphing in the major bureaucratic organs and the rise of the modern state, should not be confused with the "instrumental activism" of which Parsons speaks. While for Weber the concern and basic preoccupation lies in the raising of a responsible political elite, independent of the major bureaucrats who lack responsibility in the full sense of the word, for Parsons political tension has already collapsed and been diminished to the extent that political direction and administrative practice can be passed off as the same thing.

Weber and the Dialectic

It is thus clear that it is impossible to see Weber as the premise for Parsons' systematic framework. The inadmissability of this conception rests on two basic orders of reasoning. The first concerns the specific historical context to which two writers belong and their responses to the different requirements they seek. We have already mentioned these reasonings. The second, on the other hand, lies in the intrinsic logical motives on which, however schematically, we ought to dwell. In this light, we should first point out that Weber, in clear contradiction with Parsons' purpose, nowhere shows any interest in building a "system." The sense of historical specificity is very much alive in him. Weber prefers to concentrate on the real changes in Western history rather than set about constructing a general theory of development or social change or "social system." In other words, he prefers an empirical science of concrete realities to an abstract system of global, undefined societies; the specificities of given, lived, historical life to a vague, timeless universalism. It is, however, true that Weber speaks of "causal law" *(Kausalgesetz).* However, in my view, Weber's "causal law" has nothing to do with the tendential general laws of the Historical School, nor with the equally general or even generic evolutionary principles of Spencer - nor, finally, with the evocative parallels, the "orders and reorders", or the spurious generalizations of the "philosophers of history," who constantly confuse principles of personal preference with scientific testing.

The problematic here indicated is important and can certainly not be dealt with in the brief remarks we can make here. Weber's "causal law" is one of imputation, a geneticocausal attribution, which thus tends to delineate and disentangle the causal-conditional interconnections between phenomena. However, it is a causal law which is strictly relative and limited to a specific, well-defined and circumscribed historic context. It is thus not valid "in general", or for other, different contexts, save by analogy, but only, rather, within the particular environment - that is, within a precise "historical horizon" (e.g., the phenomenon of capitalism within Western, only Western, history). From this there descends Weber's basic idea, which is so widely misunderstood, of the historical *individuum* or *unicum* as the *grounding object* of *comprehending* sociology. Weber's historical *individuum* is not the unique, irreducible, unrepeatable and thus

unpredictable, *ineffable* historic event of idealist historicism (from Dilthey and Rickert to the Italian neoidealists, especially Croce and Antoni). If it were thus, the very notion of sociology as science of the historic, human event would immediately collapse. This "event" is stated in terms of its elements of relative uniformity and so, as it is never absolutely determinate nor indeterminate, but variously conditioned, predictable, it still exists within the somewhat narrow margins of the specific conditions which indeed weigh upon every meaningful human activity, activity directed toward an end. Thus for Weber, the event - intentional human action - is not ineffable or unforeseeable but may, rather, be chosen and presented as the object of scientific analysis.

Having said this, it must at once be made clear that Weber's causal law does not fall into the classical ambiguities of the positivistic notion of the social fact, precisely thanks to the intentionality of human action with which it is concerned and which by definition escapes the "factualistic" petrification of the naively positivistic kind. However, once we have demonstrated, or at least referred to, the difference between Weber's causal law and the historicist-idealist and positivist conceptions, we cannot state that Weber launches historicodialectical analysis. Louis Schneider has recently noted that

> a dialectical view does not necessarily contain a dubious metaphysics of culture or history, and should not assume that the universe itself exudes a solution for the major social problems of man, a solution which will involve certain happiness. It may be compatible with an empirical tendency which demands proofs of dialectical propositions and may very well not be satisfied with a proposition simply because it has a dialectical form or argument. It is this type of dialectic, which is certainly not in conflict with science, which seems to me clearly to figure in Weber's thought.[24]

It seems to me fair to express some doubts. If one could prove the well-groundedness of Schneider's interpretation, the advantages would be obvious. A dialectic in agreement with science would offer above all *a way* out of the old Popper-Adorno impasse. However, the doubt arises that from the term and concept of dialectics there follows here a strongly, improperly, reductive meaning. Weber was always attempting to construct analytical typologies, catalogues, and inventories accurate enough to run the risk of the accusation of pedantry. At any rate, it seems clear that for Weber every law, type, or catalogue relating to historically specific, sociologically meaningful phenomena cannot be divorced from its intrinsically *formal* nature. In contrast, for instance, with Marx or Hegel, Weber seems to be convinced that objective reality cannot be "latched on to," as it were, by means of conceptual schemes (whence the charge - not without foundation of neo-Kantianism).

[24] L. Schneider, "Max Weber: Saggezza e scienza in *Sociologia", Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia* 11 (October - December, 1970): 536 - 537.

One might also point out, even though this appears somewhat difficult, and certainly wearisome, that Weber, in his actual research procedure and style of layout, would not seem to be a dialectical sociologist - that is, that he did not act and proceed from the basis of an assumption concerning a really dialectical motion in global social reality. His typologies (patrimonialism, bureaucracy, etc.) align elements of reality, abstract typifications, real - historically determinate, selected and subsumed - phenomena within a conceptual scheme intended to guarantee their methodical, rational reordering. This would thus provide a conceptual understanding instead of a purely subjective perception, as it were, in Dilthey's version of *Erlebnis.* Yet these elements, aspects, or facets which correspond to theoretically infinite modes whereby reality presents itself us like a prism, and which Weber has the great merit of not reducing, petrifying and constraining into the old mechanistic "factors," he never sees them as dialectically interacting in the strict sense. He collects them all on the same level possibility for reasons of maximum scruple for heuristic impartiality, and refuses to assert the priority of any one over another. He stops himself recognizing any privileged element, and thus condemns himself to paralysis, to shortsightedness, even blindness, as regards the dynamic of the present to which he was so attached and to whose study he devoted all his energy. Indeed, to go further, through this taste for accurate analytical typology, tending toward completeness and all-inclusive, Weber is basically retrospective. His analyses help understand the past. They are more or less silent about the present. In the last analysis, Weber, too, is paralyzed by an "excess of history," to use Nietzsche's phrase. We may discern in him foreshadowings of a new dialectic, able to link empirical data and conceptual universality, and to grasp history in its making, through the conception of sociology as a participation of researches and objects of research. However, for Weber to set out such a new "relational dialectic" completely, he would have had to transcend, along with his family and social origins, his deeply rooted elitism. This elitism was entrenched at the theoretical level, and in existential experience, in his methodological individualism, his tragic political vision, wholly permeated with an unconquerable mistrust of the masses at the very moment he saw with dazzling clarity the historic inadequacy, the technical shortfall, and the mental backwardness of the elite in power.[25]

[25] As a first step toward the construction of a "relational dialectic" I refer the reader to *my Storia e storie di vita* (Bari: Laterza, 1981).