

Max Weber Today

Basit Bilal Koshul.

The Postmodern Significance of Max Weber's Legacy.

Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 192 pp.

\$US 65.00 hardcover (1-4039-6784-9)

Fritz Ringer.

Max Weber: An Intellectual Biography.

The University of Chicago Press, 2004, 264 pp.

\$US 19.00 paper (0-226-72005-5), \$US 55.00 hardcover (0-226-72004-7)

Alan Sica.

Max Weber and the New Century.

Transaction Publishers, 2004, 201 pp.

\$US 39.95 hardcover (0-7658-0190-6)

Introduction

It is not difficult to argue that Max Weber has outlived all his competitors in the classical tradition. His ideas have inspired scores of sociologists in a host of areas for more than sixty years. The contemporary vitality of these ideas is in no small measure due to the fact that he is the most salient advocate of modernism and that he has both resisted and vindicated some of postmodernism's most cogent criticisms of modern social science and society.

This essay first reviews what three recently published books have to say about Weber's liberal pluralism and his significance in the new century and postmodern legacy. Following this is a critical commentary that discusses how the modernist and postmodernist facets of his theory of rationalization frame the books' shared interest in his relevance for our present-day concerns with diversity and the value of scientific inquiry and expansion of substantive rationality. Lastly, I conclude with some reflections regarding the reasons for the perennial standing of Weber's sociology and the challenges it faces.

The Books Themselves

In the introduction to *Max Weber: An Intellectual Biography*, Fritz Ringer proffers – somewhat against the grain of contemporary scholarship (Sahni, 2003) – that the unity of Weber's work lies in the liberal pluralism at the core of his intellectual personality (5). He also admits up front that he is not on top of the debates surrounding Weber and, consequently, that for experts what he writes 'may seem old or outrageous' (4). The omission of secondary sources hampers the very cursory biography that ensues; integrating the findings of this literature would benefit the reader and help substantiate Ringer's exegesis. For example, he makes no mention of Weber's English familial background and its bearing on his political and substantive sociology (Roth, 2001; 2002). Likewise, Ringer asserts that Weber in all likelihood inherited a manic-depressive predisposition (2). Considering the difficulty of assessing the nature of his *Krankheit* (Frommer and Frommer, 1993), referencing other

sources would shed valuable light on both the interpersonal origin (Jameson, 1988; Mitzman, 1970) and cultural determination (Chalcraft, 1994; Roth, 1991; Whimster, 1995; 1999) of his illness.

The first chapter effectively illuminates the academic culture in which German scholars sought to 'define what shall count as intellectually established and culturally legitimate' (7). Towards the end of the 19th century, Ringer narrates, the initially progressive conception of *Bildung* assumed an ideological character inasmuch as it was invoked to discredit specialized knowledge and check the influx of new social groups into universities. Ringer links these respective connotations to the discord between modernist and orthodox mandarins. Whereas the latter perpetuated an antidemocratic ideology of social confirmation and railed against utilitarianism and moral corruption, the former raised it to critical consciousness and adapted the notion of self-enhancement to the realities of the day. Following this, he touches on the allied emergence of German sociology. The focus here is on the views of two of its founders, namely, Tönnies and Simmel, and not the institutionalization of the discipline. The précis of their ideas, as well as those of the older and younger Historical School and other prominent thinkers like Dilthey, Rickert, and Windelband that runs through this chapter is very lucid. Ringer, however, fails to situate Weber in relation to them or explain exactly why he remained skeptical about the nascent discipline of sociology.

The strength of the second chapter is the attention given to the questions that motivated Weber's political tracts and its convincing – albeit tendentious – argument in support of his liberal pluralism. Ringer's explication of the technical issues and anxiety about Germany's world standing that stimulated Weber's inquiries into the situation of East Elbian rural labourers (Weber, 1984; 1993) is aptly used to contextualize his 1895 Inaugural Address (Weber, 1994a), a text which first became notorious for the brazen nationalism that 'made it repugnant to many sociologists' (Barbalet, 2001: 149). Ringer persuasively argues that the *Antrittsrede* 'should not be read only as an expression of his commitment to power politics or to nationalism.' Accordingly, he exposes its concern with "human greatness," the aspiration to "freedom," and the desire to share in the "intellectual and cultural goods of mankind" (49). This construal is buttressed by calling attention to Weber's subsequent rejection of a racial or ethnic definition of the nation, as well as his sober estimation of Germany's complicity in the First World War. Ringer brings the chapter to a close by unearthing the thematic unity of his preoccupation with academic freedom and his 1906 assessment of the Russian Revolution (Weber, 1995) and 1917 treatise on *Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order* (Weber, 1994b). In so doing, he gives compelling evidence of Weber's perennial commitment to human rights (*Menschenrechte*) and active parliamentary rule.

In the third chapter, Ringer restates arguments set forth in his book on Weber's methodology (Ringer, 1997). Because these have been painstakingly reviewed elsewhere (Burger, 1998; Oakes, 1998; Turner, 1998), they need not detain us here. The chapter concludes by making a cogent case for the affinity between his concept of value-neutrality and his liberal pluralist *Weltanschauung*. The fourth chapter provides a standard summary of the 1920 version of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 1991). Here, again, drawing on the secondary literature would be enlightening, particularly since Ringer notes that the work was, among other things, motivated by '[A] kind of Anglophilia' that heightened Weber's distrust of the Lutheran *Gemütlichkeit* of Imperial Germany's office holders and which led him to confess: "That our nation never in any form went through the school of hard asceticism is...the source of everything I find hateful in it (and in

myself)'" (125).¹ Following his summation, Ringer gives a largely anecdotal account of Weber's 1904 trip to the United States and a synopsis of his *The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 1958a). Although he alludes to the piece's relation to *The Protestant Ethic* and its political undertone (142), the emphasis is placed on Weber's interest in the practical consequences of American sectarian organization. As result, Ringer misses an excellent opportunity to sustain his line of reasoning by bringing to light Weber's discernment of the political magnitude of voluntary associations (see Kim, 2004) and the extent to which the political and cultural critique embedded in *The Protestant Ethic* 'holds up an Anglo-Saxon past as a mirror to the German present' (Roth, 1987: 7).

The fifth chapter situates Weber's *Protestant Ethic* against his subsequently undertaken 1913 investigation of 'the "practical incentives to action" that were formed in the psychological and pragmatic contexts of particular religions' (143). Ringer goes over the *Zwischenbetrachtung* (Weber, 1958b) and concisely explains Weber's conception of the theodicy problem and how Puritan, Indian, and Chinese doctrines of religious asceticism were shaped by the social station of their propagating strata (*Träger*). Ringer, however, passes over his study of ancient Judaism, which he justifies by averring that, according to Weber, it 'developed nothing that really resembled Western asceticism' (152). This point notwithstanding, an exegesis is warranted in view of Weber's identification of its crucial standing as an impetus for the rationalization process and his avowal that 'in considering the conditions of Jewry's evolution, we stand at the turning point of the whole cultural development of the West and the Middle East' (Weber, 1952: 5).

In the sixth chapter, Ringer highlights the shift in Weber's approach, around 1909-1910, which entailed 'a change in his emphasis and in the breath of his perspective, if not in his method' (175). The new elements in his later work, he argues, 'were his frequent recourse to comparison and his predominant interest in persistent historical structures' (176). The chapter deals exclusively with *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Weber, 1978) and rightly foregrounds Weber's types of social action as the pivot of this posthumously published work (Eliaeson, 2002: 43; Orihara, 2003). Thus Ringer shows how he brought ideal types to bear in delineating sociology as a generalizing and regularity-seeking science that facilitates the causal analysis of historical phenomena. Wrapping up with a review of the 'Sociology of Law,' he puzzlingly disregards Weber's analysis of the relation between law and capitalism, a governing topic of the *Rechtssoziologie* and *Economy and Society* more generally (Hunt, 1978: 99; Kronman, 1983: 118; Rheinstein, 1954: 1; Roth, 1978: lxxxi). Focusing instead on his historical theory of legal rationalization, Ringer skillfully recounts his explication of how differing types of legal rationality were shaped by the triangular relationship among the legal professionals (*Honoratioren*), political structure, and entrepreneurial class obtaining.

The seventh chapter pulls together strands from Weber's writings on the city, capitalism, socialism, and bureaucracy. Ringer asserts that the 'revolutionary innovation' of the Western city is the historical background of Weber's bourgeois liberalism (204) and, therefore, details his account of the challenge it launched to traditional authority and forms of association and economic organization. After this, a rundown of his concepts of formal and substantive economic rationality serves as a prologue to his criticism of socialism's technical impossibility and ambivalent endorsement of bureaucracy: laudable for its efficiency and predictability, lamentable for the threat it poses to

‘individual freedom, equality, and cultural vitality’ (221). The last chapter discusses Weber’s sanction of specialization with regard to promoting pluralism and intellectual autonomy and probity in *Science as a Vocation* (Weber, 1958c), and concludes with an overview of his appraisal, in *Politics as a Vocation* (Weber, 1958d), of plebiscitary democracy, Germany’s negative parliamentary system, and the agonistic nature of political ethics. In the conclusion, Ringer makes an effort to cement Weber’s present-day significance and thus elaborates upon his earlier claim that he ‘was the first to address the crucial problems of modern social life’ (3). The Weberian inspired sermon on the need for equality, intellectual rectitude, and objectivity is too short to be effective.

The book’s jacket claims that it ‘offers the first comprehensive introduction to Weber’s thought for students and newcomers.’ While this statement exaggerates its standing given the many excellent introductions to his work in print (see Albrow, 1990; Bendix, 1960; Freund, 1968; Käsler, 1988), the book does provide an accessible overview of Weber’s sociology. It should be noted, though, that this narrative is disjointed and complicated by Ringer’s attempt to advance a particular interpretation of Weber’s political philosophy. Also, only German sources are cited. Available English translations are indicated in the last endnote of each chapter.

Alan Sica’s *Max Weber and the New Century* insists ‘[T]here are ways to demonstrate – even to the recalcitrant or harried postmodern citizen who lives in a post-literate condition – that Weber’s ideas speak in a language that is our own, but with more rigor and with a degree of historical and cultural sensitivity which elude most writers today’ (7). His relevance, Sica upholds, stems from his breadth of knowledge, intense awareness of unavoidable theoretical and practical tensions, and concern with cultural diversity.

The second chapter purportedly tackles the rhetorical structure of *Economy and Society*. Reading Weber as a modernist writer – and not a political-economist – Sica underlines the Byzantine stylistic maneuvers that obfuscate the transparency of his ideas. The heading ‘The Opening Paragraphs’ suggests Sica will address the introductory chapters of *Economy and Society*. However, drawing on Marianne Weber (1988: 312), he instead delves into her husband’s intellectual relation to Gottl because, he curiously believes, it is especially revealing of his philosophy of social inquiry (37). He ultimately only reaffirms Marianne’s account of her husband’s desire to create a social science capable of explaining and understanding human action. The next section on Tönnies, which only intimates that his sentiments ‘resonate warmly’ with those of Weber (44), is followed by a lengthy one on the personal kinship between Jaspers and Weber and the former’s intellectual development and idolatry of his younger colleague. Succeeding this is a commentary on how Weber, a notoriously scathing critic, dealt gently with Simmel’s descriptive and aesthetic handling of *Verstehen*; Weber opted for a precise and scientific approach which, he surmises, embraces a ‘simple or elegant means of discursive argument’ (56). Finally getting to the text in question, Sica proposes reading ‘Basic Sociological Terms’ as a ‘unified prose performance’ in which ‘more than a few characteristic elements that make up the Weberian modus operandi come clearly into view’ (58). But he gets sidetracked again with a discussion of Weber’s conception of *sinnhafte Adäquanz* (adequacy on the level of meaning) – which is the real focus of the chapter – and with peppered references to Dilthey, Parsons, Husserl, and the hermeneutic tradition, makes an ineffectual case for its contemporary import. Sica closes with two astute observations. Firstly, that as Weber got closer to defining the *Grundbegriffe* for studying a social actor’s subjective meaning, ‘his prose began to waver under

qualifications and imagery' that have confused many of his readers (68). Secondly, that he had an unparalleled ability to speak, with equal force, on behalf of both sides of an antinomic pair of concepts, problems, and points of view as he fashions his own (69). These would be great starting points down a path that fleshes out Weber's rhetorical moves. Unfortunately, this chapter, which incisively exposes an area in need of further elucidation and promises something very interesting, does not live up to its ambition.

In the third chapter, Sica contextualizes Weber's (1976) proposal, at the 1910 meeting of the German Sociological Society, for a sociology of the press and extracts some of the queries he put to his audience. He then scrutinizes the apocryphal depiction of Weber, since the end of the 1980s, in the 'more or less highbrow organs' of American and British print mass culture (90). This inspection reveals that he has been conjured up mainly as a brooding German who launched an assault on Western values and, more recently (over the past three years), as the champion of the Protestant ethic and, therefore, an apologist for 'world-wide predatory capitalist practices' (89). Sica's recently compiled bibliography (Sica, 2004), he announces, attests to the current supremacy of Weber's substantive sociology because its grand ideas easily lend support to a host of claims being tendered about the world today. These have made him 'part of the lingua franca' of our civilized discourse (94). Thus the popularization of Weberianism, he suggestively remarks, is a phenomenon that would have intrigued Weber (97). A few conjectures about what he might have to say would be a nice complement to Sica's assiduous survey. For no apparent reason, the closing pages point out the validity of some of Weber's ideas – the Protestant ethic, types of authority, and modernization – for American history and some historians. This theme is carried over to the fifth chapter where, after a personal and intellectual biography of Weber, we come to a heading titled 'Max Weber and American Historiography.' This very short section recapitulates the appeal of the Protestant Ethic thesis and, relying on scant evidence, professes that, despite some posterior clarifications and alterations, 'the edifice of his argument held' (143).

The fourth chapter defends the claim that rationalization is Weber's primary analytical achievement, given that '[T]he range of alterations associated with rationalization is nearly synonymous with the most telling changes in world history over the last two centuries' (114). In line with conventional wisdom, Sica explains that this seminal concept stands for manifold and ubiquitous processes driven by a desire for perfection, predictability, efficiency, and systematization which, when aligned with bureaucratization, modernization, and science, are fated to fall over into the irrational. In addition to its pervasive impact on social relations, he sees its ineluctable threat to *Menschentum* as the *Leitmotiv* of an array of iconic dystopian movies and, more insidiously, as the basis of our therapeutic culture. While Sica's treatment of this concept as it appears in *Economy and Society* and Weber's sociology of religion is fair, his too cursory excursus on legal rationalization is misleading. Discarding Weber's all-important discernment of the anti-formalistic tendencies in modern law and the persistence of Natural Law ideals (Weber, 1978: 880-895), he reproduces a false – and frequently taken-for-granted – dichotomy between formal and substantive legal rationality, between legalism and justice (Sahni, forthcoming 2006).

An imaginable relationship between Weber and Pareto is the subject of the sixth chapter. Sica challenges the consensus that they knew nothing of each other's work or person and proposes that, perhaps, certain elements of their theories were composed 'in conscious response to one another'

(152). There are, he concedes, no references to each other in their work, but that this does not prove lack of mutual awareness. Sica reminds us of Weber's numerous trips to Italy between 1900 and 1914; noteworthy because during this period Pareto published scores of pieces in Italian newspapers and political journals, which Weber is likely to have read. Moreover, three dozen book reviews by Pareto appeared in Wolf's *Zeitschrift* and the second volume of an anthology of Italian translations of important French and German works, which bore an inscription acknowledging Pareto's editorship, included Weber's Habilitation (Weber, 1986). Pareto's possible knowledge of Weber, he admits, cannot be established. The rationale for contemplating this hypothetical connection is the comparable socio-economic backgrounds, rough congruence on some political issues, similar temperaments, and reliance on a rational-irrational conceptual dichotomy shared by these contemporaries. Regrettably, its conceivably rich substantive and theoretical implications are never broached.

The seventh chapter is a short note on Weber and modern philosophy. The matter is never attended to. Instead, Jaspers' vindication of Weber's credentials as a philosopher is documented and a remonstrance, first voiced in the third chapter, of Bloom's (1987) 'perverse' slant on Weber's pernicious influence is reiterated (175). The last chapter deals with Weber and Thomas Mann. Sica reconsiders Goldman's books (Goldman, 1988; 1992) because, he rightly observes, they have been undeservedly isolated from the mainstream literature on Weber. He extols the comparison drawn between *Buddenbrooks* and Weber's conception of work and asceticism, as well as the dissimilarity accentuated between Mann and Weber's notions of personality. Sica then raises a few objections: Goldman adds nothing new to our understanding of the latter and his literal reading of Weber minimizes the difficulties surrounding his idea of the calling and the ascetic self. The more interesting criticism, which deserves elucidation, is that Goldman does not cross the 'postmodern barrier' where, in sharp contrast to Weber's ideal, a "television personality" reigns (181) and selves 'come in mass marketed packages of predigested, misfitting fragments' (185).

The book is interspersed with a few evocative ideas but they, along with its scarce substantive theses, are neither pursued nor substantiated in any scholarly or meaningful way. The book never does what it sets out to do in the introduction or, for that matter, what it announces at the beginning of each chapter. Lacking focus and an overarching theme, it reads like a compilation of disconnected desultory essays.

Basit Bilal Koshul's short study of *The Postmodern Significance of Max Weber's Legacy* proclaims that, with a few exceptions, evaluations have followed Wittenberg's (1989) characterization of Weber as "a child of the Enlightenment born too late" and described his scholarship as "a vitriolic attack on religion." The book attempts to redress this 'gross misreading' by showing that he is anything but hostile to religion, insofar as his methodology replaces 'the dichotomous logic of Enlightenment thought with a relational logic that posits an intimate and irreducible relation between fact/value and subject/object' (1). In this way, Weber disenchantments disenchantment and opens up 'new horizons of post-disenchantment possibilities at both the intellectual and cultural levels' (7).

The first chapter outlines Weber's cultural sociology. Beginning with his explication of the religious rationalism that initiates rationalization, it concludes with a review of his disenchantment thesis and allied presumption of an unbridgeable divide between religion and science. This conjecture proffers that faith entails an intellectual sacrifice 'by positing that the empirical world does not exhaust all of

reality,' whereas science demands disciplining the intellect (15). Looking beyond this antinomy, the second chapter sketches an alternative reading by putting Weber the methodologist in dialogue with Weber the sociologist of culture. The former, Koshul argues, exposes the intimate proximity between religion and science when he brings to light three suprarational assumptions underlying the notion of objective validity: an affirmation of presuppositions and value judgments that cannot be deduced from empirical reality and a reliance on "'intuitive flashes of the imagination'" (46). So only a hairline separates religion and science, given that both require faith. More specifically, 'while the ends of religion and science are very different, the means of attaining the ends are exactly the same' (63). Consequently, the possibility exists that the difference can be mediated and even replaced by a more fertile relationship (42).

In this vein, the third chapter explains that Weber's conception of meaning (*Sinn*) bridges the gap between fact and value, in that it simultaneously produces knowledge of empirical reality and lays bare the veiled value-ideas that guide scientific investigation (71). This account of an objective description of reality, Koshul adds, also transcends the subject/object dichotomy. Placing Weber's protestation to the objectivism of the historicist method and the subjectivism of the *Verstehen* method in the context of the *Methodenstreit*, chapter four elucidates this point. The rift is surmounted with Weber's perception that all inquiry is based on subjective (cultural values and an interpretive imagination) and objective (nomological regularities) elements. In the end, however, the subjective component is paramount because it makes possible the criticism of imputed objectivity and the investigator's critical self-understanding and, therefore, the modification, refinement, and revision of scientific methods and value judgments (117). Thus Weber tackled the trajectory of rationalization 'with the hope of identifying the parameters and possibilities of challenging and modifying the disenchanting cultural condition' (5).

This said, the stage is now set for gauging the postmodern bearing of Weber's work. Chapter five notes that alongside an aversion to assessing individual facts in terms of their relationship to ultimate values, Weber stresses the increased self-awareness and capacity for self-expression occasioned by disenchantment. In this respect, he suggests that 'scientific rationalism is at the receiving end of the process of disenchantment rather than its perpetrator' (7). Science, then, will eventually travel a path that invests its findings with meaning which, in turn, will require affirming the validity, uniqueness, and value of scientific knowledge. This, Koshul decrees, will be the task of the artist; to breathe new life into religion and science by establishing a mutually enriching relationship whereby both gain a greater understanding of their respective scopes and limitations and ability for more coherent and rational articulation (133). Hence 'disenchantment does not have to be the great tragedy of modern culture, it could be the prelude to new mutually enriching relations and new cultural possibilities' (146).

Koshul's study skillfully exploits fissures in Weber's thought, but is limited on two counts. Firstly, it appears to be motivated by the contentious belief that 'the Enlightenment viewpoint is now only accepted by a cognitive minority,' and that there has been 'a rapprochement between the religious and the secular in recent decades' (38). Owing to this, it says virtually nothing about postmodernism; its tangible concern is with religion and, indeed, the quest for redemption in a disenchanted age (147-148). Secondly, it does not earnestly engage the substantial body of literature on Weber's methodology. Doing so might have yielded a more balanced interpretation, one which does not

overstate the significance of his pronouncement that scientific truth is an “essentially religious and philosophical presupposition” (58).

The books reviewed here affirm Weber’s relevance for our present-day concerns with diversity, the validity of social science, and the ascent of substantive forms of rationality. Upon closer inspection, the convergence around these issues stems from their concentration – explicit in the case of Koshul and Sica – on his theory of rationalization. This, I submit, is because it concurs with the fundamental tenets of both modern and postmodern theory. It conforms to the former, inasmuch as it is a metanarrative about the proliferation of formal rationality and ‘the wider extension of instrumental rationalism through all spheres of life’ (Gane, 2002: 42-43). By the same token, it is equally in accord with the postmodern discernment that life ‘may be rationalized in terms of very different ultimate values and ends, and what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another’ (Weber, 1991: 26). According to this view, rationalization ‘is not a single process but a multiplicity of distinct though interrelated processes arising from different historical sources, proceeding at different rates, and furthering different interests and values’ (Brubaker, 1991: 9). It is, therefore, instructive to consider how this concept frames interpretations of the strengths and limits of his cosmopolitanism and notion of scientific investigation and what it says about the emergence of substantive rationality in law.

Critical Commentary

Rationalization, Sica notes, is fated to fall over into the irrational as competing standards of action and value increasingly confront one another (114). And this process, he insinuates, is fuelled by the fact that ‘one defining quality of cross-cultural postmodern culture is the breakdown of barriers between regions, religions, and the finer distinctions of quality that previously held sway’ (97). Privileging the cosmopolitan dimension of Weber’s political philosophy, Ringer submits that his censure of ‘the false prophecies of his time is still very much needed. For we are beset by a new brand of militant relativism that replaces the commitment to truth and to rational debate with a self-destructive “cultural war” among conflicting ideological perspectives, which are selected and proclaimed without recourse to either evidence or logic.’ Weber, he believes, ‘may help us to stand firm against this tide’ (255). In line with contemporary scholarship, Ringer buttresses Weber’s commitment to the ideals of individual self-determination and human dignity by coupling it with the substantive postulates of his methodological writings (see Eliaeson, 2002; Palonen, 2004; Schluchter, 1979). This reading, which shows his nationalism to be more moderate than chauvinistic, is a welcome corrective to the narrower interpretations that initially befell his political thought. However, one cannot simply neglect its profoundly antinomical structure and, in this connection, Weber’s confession that ‘For me, “democracy” has never been an end in itself. My only interest has been and remains the possibility of implementing a realistic national policy of a strong, externally oriented Germany’ (quoted in Mommsen, 1989: 25). His cosmopolitanism, in other words, was always subordinated to his concern with the nation and, in view of this, might best be understood first and foremost as an economic strategy (Roth, 1993). Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that Weber’s conception of the pluralism born of rationalization presupposes not only a modern openness to debate and self-reflection, but also competition and rivalry among differentiated world views. On the one hand, this standpoint sees a ‘lack of ethical objectivity as a lamentable, even “dangerous” situation’ (Hekman, 1994: 275). On the other hand, the opinion that conflict is a

necessary condition for morality discloses his 'preference for the tragic life' (Behnegar, 2005: 114). It is, therefore, too much to expect to find in Weber a postmodern politics of recognition which, as Koshul intimates, might help resuscitate repressed forms of difference (165 n.1) or, as Sica believes, has much to teach us 'about ethical tolerance for the Other' (8).

Weber's theory of rationalization and the resultant *Sachlichkeit der Wissenschaft* makes him as sanguine as he is guarded about the objectivity of social science and, for this reason, has been co-opted by both modern and postmodern agendas. In consequence of this sensibility, Weber declares: 'a dilettante's idea may have the very same or even a greater bearing for science than that of a specialist. Many of our very best hypotheses and insights are due precisely to dilettantes. The dilettante differs from the expert...only in that he lacks a firm and reliable work procedure. Consequently he is usually not in the position to control, to estimate, or to exploit the idea in its bearings. The idea is not a substitute for work; and work, in turn, cannot substitute for or compel an idea, just as little as enthusiasm can. Both, enthusiasm and work, and above all both of them jointly, can entice the idea' (Weber, 1958c: 135-136). The authors reviewed here all endorse the modernist aspects of Weber's *Wissenschaftslehre*. Koshul underscores the value of his personal commitment to a specialized vocation and intellectual integrity (144) and Ringer, likewise, avers that '[H]is grand defense of objectivity and of "intellectual rectitude"' against historical relativism and methodological irrationalism is vital today (254-255). In sum, as Sica asserts, '[I]f a fully literate historiography survives both the postmodernist epistemological assault on definitions of "truth," as well as the eradication of printed documents due to the predominance of electronic forms of communication, then Weber's methods, ideas, and scholarly demeanor will surely continue to play an ever-enlarging role within it' (145). For his opinions are 'fashioned by means of thorough immersion in pertinent "facts" – a word that is itself today suspect in many circles' (9). And this, he concludes, is an indispensable bulwark against the postmodern 'suspension of modern scientific principles that educated people find very difficult to manage – except those in dire psychological states' (123). However, Sica and Koshul also take up the other thread in Weber's methodological writings. For the latter, it is his intense awareness of the limitations of scientific knowledge (72) that makes room for the artist who 'sees relational duality where others see irreconcilable dichotomies' (133). In a similar vein, Sica calls attention to the 'narrative artistry' he employed when writing fascinating stories which suited him 'aesthetically and historically' (32-33). Accordingly, they do not accept the standard postmodern critique which holds that Weber's demonstrated interest in the innovative nature of the aesthetic sphere is crippled by his pragmatic neo-Kantianism and pursuit of an objective understanding of causality and meaning (Gane, 2002: 112, 123), that his project is a heroic but ultimately doomed attempt to revitalize the modern episteme (Hekman, 1994: 268).

Whereas Koshul concentrates on how Weber's theory of rationalization reveals the substantive values that guide scientific inquiry, Sica (116) and Ringer (252) give attention to its perception that increasing formal rationality occasions substantive irrationality. Given Sica's assertion regarding the ascendancy of Weber's substantive sociology (94) and Ringer's observation that he repeatedly emphasized the opposition between formal and substantive legal rationality (193), it is perplexing that the 'Sociology of Law' is not given serious treatment. The 'Sociology of Law' is arguably the core of Weber's substantive sociology (Parsons, 1971: 40) and his theory of legal rationalization is particularly illuminating of modernism's conflicting developmental tendencies, that is, the simultaneous extension of formal rationality and deepening of substantive rationality (Lash, 1987).

The *Rechtssoziologie* thus speaks directly to the nature of decision making and the qualifications of decision makers in a modern administration of justice.

Weber's understanding of legal science is consistent with his methodological contention that rules only make sense in the context of a given form of life (Lash, 1987: 369), insofar as it 'entails an ideal-type construction of the rational meaning inherent in actual legal evaluations that can be set against meanings arising from other sources – emotion, custom, situational contingencies, and the like – to promote an interpretive cultivation of the sense of law' (Green, 1988: 209). This casuistry, which emerges with the disenchantment of lawmaking, also requires that law makers negotiate the ethical poles of justice by delivering general verdicts which, in the name of rightness, treat like cases alike, as well as particularistic ones which, in the name of fairness, are tailored to the specificities of the case at hand. Weber's theory of legal rationalization, then, exposes the acute tension between formal and substantive principles of justice at the heart of adjudication (Treiber, 1985: 851; Weber, 1978: 874, 893) which, if it leans too far in either direction, undermines the rule of law. The former excludes considerations based on equity and severs the connection between law and ethics 'so that an empty legalism results.' The particularism of the latter threatens the continuity and stability of a legal order (Schluchter, 1981: 114; Weber, 1978: 886). When seen in this light, the 'Sociology of Law' shores up Weber's decisionism (Lash, 1987: 374), inasmuch as it tenders that '[T]he implications of the postulate of "justice" cannot be decided unambiguously by any ethic' (Weber, 1949: 15). But his alertness to the heightened self-conscious realization of values galvanized by legal rationalization is limited to administrators because it excludes 'lay actors, whose acceptance of norms is mostly due to "habit" or "faith"' (Lash, 1987: 372). Thus the accent is placed on the personality of the decision maker. As a rule, the point of reference here has been Weber's discussion of political leadership; politicians need to be flexible and consistent in order to secure the confidence of their populace. The 'Sociology of Law,' though, provides an analogous – if not better – example given its elucidation of the trials of adjudication and the intimate connection between law and legitimacy. In the modern state, he argues, judges are frequently instructed to render their decisions 'on the basis of ethics, equity, or expediency' (Weber, 1978: 645). Hence in the last instance it falls upon them to deliver verdicts that are at once predictable and creative.

Concluding Remarks

The authors reviewed here have touched upon some of the most important reasons for the continuing relevance of Max Weber's work, namely the value of his liberal pluralism and scholarly demeanour, the wide range of areas with which he dealt, and the self-referential nature of his epistemology. In addition to these, I would like to add the following.

Firstly, the heuristic value of his political sociology remains unparalleled. Beyond shedding light on the thorny issues surrounding cultural diversity and the politics of civil society, his conceptual arsenal has proved invaluable in helping to expose the dark side of democracy and the sources of social and political power (Mann, 1993; 2004; 2005). The resurgence of charismatic and nationalist political movements, and the complex intersection of material and ideal interests in the state, certifies their enduring utility.

Secondly, his methodological writings are as relevant as ever. They have proven to be a perennial

resource for causal and interpretive analysis and equally germane to renewed debates about relativism and the influx of the findings of cognitive science in the social sciences (Turner, 2002).

Thirdly, the insights contained in many of his substantive and larger works – often due to a dearth of translations – remain untapped. In particular, his sociology of law has much to tell us given that since the end of the Second World War judges have progressively acquired constitutional powers that are indispensable to the operation of democratic states (Scheppele, 2003; Stone Sweet, 2000) and because over the past few decades there has been a discernable move toward substantive forms of adjudication (Boucock, 2000; Kettler and Meja, 1996; Sterling and Moore, 1987).

Weberian sociology certainly faces some serious challenges in the new century. Most notably, the advent and speed of new telecommunication technologies are fundamentally transforming the makeup of the social and the self. Their increasingly virtual and rhizomic character will test the limits of Weber's conception of social order and interpretive sociology. Be it as a foil or a beacon, though, he will surely be part of the debate.

Isher-Paul Sahni
Concordia University
isherpaul@hotmail.com

Isher-Paul Sahni is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Concordia University, Montreal. He has published articles on the residual status of judges in Max Weber's 'Sociology of Law' (forthcoming 2006) and the influence of Goethe's fiction on his conception of social action and political ethics (2001), as well as a review essay which discusses the current state of Weber studies and the significance of Weber's methodological writings for interpretations of his substantive sociology (2003). He is currently engaged in comparative research on constitutional adjudication and judicial decision-making.

Bibliography

- Albrow, Martin (1990) *Max Weber's Construction of Social Theory*. London: Macmillan.
- Barbalet, Jack M. (2001) 'Weber's Inaugural Lecture and its Place in his Sociology', *Journal of Classical Sociology* 1(2): 147-170.
- Behnegar, Nasser (2005) *Leo Strauss, Max Weber, and the Scientific Study of Politics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bendix, Reinhard (1960) *Max Weber, an Intellectual Portrait*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.
- Bloom, Alan (1987) *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Boucock, Cary (2000) *In the Grip of Freedom: Law and Modernity in Max Weber*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Brubaker, Rogers (1991) *The Limits of Rationality: An Essay on the Social and Moral Thought of Max Weber*. London: Routledge.
- Burger, Thomas (1998) 'Max Weber's Methodology in Its Place' – Review of *Max Weber's Methodology: The Unification of the Cultural and Social Sciences*, by Fritz Ringer. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 12(2): 277-291.
- Chalcraft, David (1994) 'Bringing the Text Back in: On Ways of Reading the Iron Cage Metaphor in the Two Editions of The Protestant Ethic', pp. 16-45 in *Organizing Modernity: New Weberian Perspectives on Work, Organization and Society*. Edited by Larry J. Ray and Michael Reed. London: Routledge.
- Eliaeson, Sven (2002) *Max Weber's Methodologies: Interpretation and Critique*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Freund, Julien (1968) *The Sociology of Max Weber*. Translated by Mary Ilford. New York: Pantheon Books.

- Jörg Frommer and Sabine Frommer (1993) 'Max Webers Krankheit – soziologische Aspekte der Depressiven Struktur', *Fortschritte der Neurologie/Psychiatrie* 61(5): 161-171.
- Gane, Nicholas (2002) *Max Weber and Postmodern Theory: Rationalisation versus Re-enchantment*. New York: Palgrave.
- Goldman, Harvey (1988) *Max Weber and Thomas Mann: Calling and the Shaping of the Self*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goldman, Harvey (1992) *Politics, Death, and the Devil: Self and Power in Max Weber and Thomas Mann*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Green, Bryan S. (1988) *Literary Methods and Sociological Theory, Case Studies of Simmel and Weber*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Hekman, Susan (1994) 'Max Weber and Post-Positivist Social Theory', pp. 267-286 in *The Barbarism of Reason: Max Weber and the Twilight of Enlightenment*. Edited by Asher Horowitz and Terry Maley. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hunt, Alan (1978) *The Sociological Movement in Law*. London: Macmillan.
- Jameson, Fredric (1988) 'The Vanishing Mediator; or, Max Weber as Storyteller', pp. 3-34 in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986. Volume 2: Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Käsler, Dirk (1988) *Max Weber: An Introduction to his Life and Work*. Translated by Philippa Hurd. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- David Kettler and Volker Meja (1996) 'Legal Formalism and Disillusioned Realism in Max Weber', *Polity* 18(3): 307-331.
- Kim, Sung Ho (2004) *Max Weber's Politics of Civil Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kronman, Anthony T. (1983) *Max Weber*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Lash, Scott (1987) 'Modernity or Modernism? Weber and Contemporary Social Theory', pp. 355-377 in *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity*. Edited by Scott Lash and Sam Whimster. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Mann, Michael (1993) *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 2, The Rise of Classes and Nation States 1760-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Mann, Michael (2004) *Fascists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mann, Michael (2005) *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitzman, Arthur (1970) *The Iron Cage: An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber*. New York: Knopf.
- Mommsen, Wolfgang J. (1989) 'The Antinomical Structure of Max Weber's Political Thought', pp. 24- 43 in *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Oakes, Guy (1998) 'On the Unity of Max Weber's Methodology' – Review of *Max Weber's Methodology: The Unification of the Cultural and Social Sciences*, by Fritz Ringer. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 12(2): 293-306.
- Orihara, Hiroshi (2003) 'From "A Torso with a Wrong Head" to "Five Disjointed Body-Parts without a Head": A Critique of the Editorial Policy for Max Weber Gesamtausgabe I/22', *Max Weber Studies* 3(2): 133-168.
- Palonen, Kari (2004) 'Max Weber, Parliamentarism and the Rhetorical Culture of Politics', *Max Weber Studies* 4(2): 273-292.
- Parsons, Talcott (1971) 'Value-freedom and Objectivity', pp. 27-50, 78-82 in *Max Weber and Sociology Today*. Edited by Otto Stammer. New York: Harper & Row.
- Rheinstein, Max (1954) 'Introduction', pp. xxv-lxxii in Max Weber, *Max Weber on Law in Economy and Society*. Edited by Max Rheinstein; translated by Edward Shills and Max Rheinstein. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ringer, Fritz (1997) *Max Weber's Methodology: The Unification of the Cultural and Social Sciences*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Roth, Guenther (1978) 'Introduction', pp. xxxiii-cx in Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. (2 volumes). Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Roth, Guenther (1987) 'Introduction', pp. 1-24 in *Weber's Protestant Ethic: Origins, Evidence, Contexts*. Edited by Hartmut Lehmann and Guenther Roth. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roth, Guenther (1991) 'Sachlichkeit and Self-Revelation: Max Weber's Letters', *Telos* 88: 196-204.
- Roth, Guenther (1993) 'Between Cosmopolitanism and Ethnocentrism: Max Weber in the Nineties', *Telos* 96: 148-162.

- Roth, Guenther (2001) *Max Webers deutsch-englische Familiengeschichte 1800-1950. Mit Briefen und Dokumenten*. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck.
- Roth, Guenther (2002) 'Max Weber: Family History, Economic Policy, Exchange Reform', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 15(3): 509-520.
- Sahni, Isher-Paul (2003) 'The Many Max Webers', *Journal of Classical Sociology* 3(3): 315-334.
- Sahni, Isher-Paul (forthcoming 2006) 'Vanished Mediators: On the Residual Status of Judges in Max Weber's "Sociology of Law"', *Journal of Classical Sociology* 6(2).
- Scheppele, Kim Lane (2003) 'Constitutional Negotiations: Political Contexts of Judicial Activism in Post- Soviet Europe', *International Sociology* 18(1): 219-238.
- Schluchter, Wolfgang (1979) 'Value-Neutrality and the Ethic of Responsibility', pp. 65-116 in Guenther Roth and Wolfgang Schluchter, *Max Weber's Vision of History: Ethics and Methods*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schluchter, Wolfgang (1981) *The Rise of Western Rationalism: Max Weber's Developmental History*. Translated by Guenther Roth. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sica, Alan (2004) *Max Weber: A Comprehensive Bibliography*. New Brunswick (U.S.A.): Transaction Publishers.
- Sterling, Joyce S. and Wilbert E. Moore (1987) 'Weber's Analysis of Legal Rationalization: A Critique and Constructive Modification', *Sociological Forum* 2(1): 67-89.
- Stone Sweet, Alec (2000) *Governing with Judges: Constitutional Politics in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Treiber, Hubert (1985) "'Elective Affinities" Between Weber's Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Law', *Theory and Society* 14: 809-861.
- Turner, Stephen P. (1998) 'A Weber for the Right-Thinking' – Review of *Max Weber's Methodology: The Unification of the Cultural and Social Sciences*, by Fritz Ringer. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 12(2): 253-275.
- Turner, Stephen P. (2002) *Brains/Practices/Relativism: Social Theory After Cognitive Science*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Weber, Marianne (1988) *Max Weber: A Biography*. Translated by Harry Zohn. New Brunswick (U.S.A.): Transaction Publishers.
- Weber, Max (1949) 'The Meaning of "Ethical Neutrality" in Sociology and Economics', pp. 1-47 in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Translated and edited Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch. New York: The Free Press.
- Weber, Max (1952) *Ancient Judaism*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale. New York: The Free Press.
- Weber, Max (1958a) 'The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism', pp. 302-322 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weber, Max (1958b) 'Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions', pp. 323-359 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weber, Max (1958c) 'Science as a Vocation', pp. 129-156 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weber, Max (1958d) 'Politics as a Vocation', pp. 77-128 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weber, Max (1976) 'Towards a Sociology of the Press', *Journal of Communication* 26(3): 96-101.
- Weber, Max (1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. (2 volumes). Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weber, Max (1984) *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe, I/3 Die Lage der Landarbeiter im ostelbischen Deutschland: 1892*. (2 volumes). Edited by Martin Riesebrodt. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr.
- Weber, Max (1986) *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe, I/2 Die römische Agrargeschichte in ihrer Bedeutung für das Staats- und Privatrecht*. Edited by Jürgen Deininger. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr.
- Weber, Max (1991) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Talcott Parsons. London: Harper Collins Academic.
- Weber, Max (1993) *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe, I/4 Landarbeiterfrage, Nationalstaat und Volkswirtschaftspolitik: Schriften und Reden 1892-1899*. (2 volumes). Edited by Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Rita Aldenhoff. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr.

- Weber, Max (1994a) 'The Nation State and Economic Policy', pp. 1-28 in *Weber: Political Writings*. Translated and edited by Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weber, Max (1994b) 'Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order', pp. 130-271 in *Weber: Political Writings*. Translated and edited Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weber, Max (1995) *The Russian Revolutions*. Translated and edited by Gordon C. Wells and Peter Baehr. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Weber, Max (2001) *The Protestant Ethic Debate: Max Weber's Replies to his Critics, 1907-1910*. Edited by David J. Chalcraft and Austin Harrington; translated by Austin Harrington and Mary Shields. London: Liverpool University Press.
- Whimster, Sam (1995) 'Max Weber on the Erotic and Some Comparisons with the Work of Foucault', *International Sociology* 10(4): 447-462.
- Whimster, Sam (1999) 'Introduction to Weber, Ascona and Anarchism', pp. 1-40 in *Max Weber and the Culture of Anarchy*. Edited by Sam Whimster. London: MacMillan Press Ltd.
- Wittenberg, Erich (1989) 'The Crisis of Science in Germany in 1919', pp. 112-121 in *Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation."* Edited by Peter Lassman, Irving Velody, with Herminio Martins. London: Unwin Hyman.

¹ It is hard to overestimate the personal significance of *The Protestant Ethic*. First conceived a year after the death of his father (Weber, 2001: 62) and published soon after his emergence from the most paralyzing phase of his depression, it is reasonable to assume that Weber's inquiry into the origins of worldly asceticism was born of profound self-searching (Chalcraft, 1994: 20-21) and that he 'was identifying his own compulsiveness with the most important component of the spirit of capitalism and tracing both back to the Calvinist's psychological need for proof that he was in a state of grace and hence among the saved' (Mitzman, 1970: 172).

<http://www.cjsonline.ca/reviews/maxwebertoday.html>

October 2005

© Canadian Journal of Sociology Online