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Introduction

Max Weber (1864–1920), the son of an influential member of the Reichstag and an activist Protestant mother, came to maturity in Berlin in an intellectually lively home frequently visited by the Bismarckian era’s leading politicians and intellectuals. After receiving an outstanding secondary education in languages, history, and the classics, he studied law, economics, history, and philosophy in Heidelberg, Strasbourg, Berlin, and Göttingen.

Although his first appointments at Freiburg University (1894) and Heidelberg University (1897) were in Economics departments, he is best known today as one of the three major founders of modern Sociology and as an intellectual giant of interdisciplinary scholarship in the social sciences. His projects expanded far beyond the range of themes commonly explored by researchers past and present.

He investigated, for example, the distinctiveness of Japanese feudalism compared to Russian, English, German, and Islamic feudalism, the possibilities for democracy in Russia, the productivity of Eastern European and German farm workers, “exemplary” prophets in India and “ethical” prophets in ancient Israel, and the ways in which persons pursue high social status even in egalitarian and democratic societies. Although ranging far and wide, Weber’s research evidences coherent procedures and strategies, as will become apparent in this volume. It also manifests an overarching concern.¹

He sought to explore the origin of the modern West and the direction of its further development. Will its trajectory lead to a new civilization inhabited by citizens in possession of ethical ideals and notions of individual and civic responsibility? Will compassion become circumscribed, indeed to such an extent that the future will resemble a “steel-hard casing” dominated by impersonal and instrumental relationships? While welcoming the opportunities offered by the modern age for a burgeoning of individualism, higher standards of living, and an escape from the feudal chains of the past, Weber saw few firm guidelines for persons who sought to establish a comprehensive, *value-based* meaning for their lives (2005: 251–72). How, he queried, shall we live with dignity in the new era on the horizon?

These questions weighed heavily on him. While a search for answers pushed many in his generation throughout Europe toward philosophical speculation, Weber embarked upon unusually wide-ranging and detailed empirical research. Significant to all his concerns, the modernizing West gave birth to a type of capitalism, he argued, that diverged from the capitalism found universally. An

1 On the personal and political constellations that delineated the background dynamics behind the formation of his major themes, see Kalberg 2011a: 305–15, 348–56.

industrial, highly organized, middle class-based economy developed in Western Europe and northern America earlier than in China or India, he maintained. And why did this *modern* capitalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries never appear in the West's ancient or medieval eras? What causal role did technological innovations and expanded commerce play? For what reasons did an "economic ethic" that sanctified methodical work and the accumulation of wealth and profit arise with seventeenth-century Puritanism—and how can the causal impact of this "Protestant ethic" be evaluated? Parallel questions informed his vast comparative-historical studies on democracy, law, rulership (*Herrschaft*), and the state.²

Weber's sociology has broadly and deeply influenced the social sciences. Translated extremely widely, his works have been read and debated across the globe without interruption for more than 100 years. Even his most severe critics frequently borrow from his oeuvre.

This volume first reconstructs several major themes in Weber's corpus and his mode of causal analysis. It then utilizes his methodology in order to a) reconstruct his causal argument in three cases left incomplete in his writings and b) provide causal analyses of four separate developments. Hence, in these latter chapters Weber is *applied*. This study seeks in this manner to demonstrate the enduring relevance of Weber's sociology and its usefulness today.³ Let us be more precise.

Part I reconstructs in depth three major themes: Weber's definition of four "types of rationality" and his analysis of the influence of "rationalization processes" in the unfolding of Western history; the origin and development of "other-worldly" salvation religions; and the rise and influence of "world views" (*Weltbilder*). Part II reconstructs the complex mode of causal analysis he actually practices in his comparative-historical studies. Three chapters seek to convey the rigor of his concepts and research procedures. By reference to this mode of analysis, this volume then reconstructs in Part III several case studies left incomplete in Weber's works: the rise and expansion of Confucianism in China, the caste system in India, and monotheism in ancient Israel.

Finally, this study in Parts IV and V moves beyond a "reconstructing Weber" agenda to a demonstration of his methodology's capacity to offer powerful causal analyses. It is now *utilized* in order to explain the origins of four independent cases: the sources of a) singular aspects of the American political culture, b) the cultural foundations of modern citizenship, c) the cultural pessimism (*Kulturpessimismus*) widespread in Weber's Germany, and d) the societal "location" of work in contemporary German society. Throughout, a dialogue with prominent present-day schools of comparative-historical sociology is pursued.

2 For Weber's masterful summary of the West's uniqueness and his formulation of these queries, see his preface to the Economic Ethics of the World Religions series (2009: 233–50).

3 In this way it builds upon my earlier volume (1994). See below.

This volume complements the author's *Max Weber's Comparative-Historical Sociology* (1994).⁴ Two tasks dominated this study: a reconstruction of Weber's research procedures and a comparison to those dominant in three present-day approaches: Charles Tilly's interpretive-historical school, Theda Skocpol's state-centered theorizing, and Immanuel Wallerstein's World Systems perspective (see Kalberg 1994: 1–19, 195–204 *et passim*). This aim—"to explain Weber" through a dialogue with recent schools—constitutes one major thread in the present study. As mentioned, although it also reconstructs his research strategies, this volume pursues additional tasks: it reconstructs three of Weber's main themes and three prominent causal analyses from his texts; furthermore, it applies Weber's rigorous causal methodology to four cases. To my knowledge, the vast commentary on his oeuvre has never yielded a study along these lines.⁵

As indicated, most chapters below address concepts, research strategies, and modes of causal analysis commonly found in comparative-historical sociology today. This sustained dialogue with Weber will demarcate, it is hoped, the uniqueness of his perspective and its particular strengths in respect to present-day approaches and schools. The emphasis throughout will be upon:

- The causal influence of culture and, in particular, of religion;
- The tight interlocking in Weber's sociology of the present with the past;
- His attention to "deep context" causes, whether those anchored in the religion, rulership, the economy, or law "societal domains";
- Weber's focus upon causes and a rigorous mode of causal analysis, and in particular the orientation of his investigations to *multiple* causes and their dynamic—or conjunctural—interaction;
- His orientation to the influence of both synchronic (present / present) and diachronic (past / present) interactions of patterned action;
- Weber's formulation and utilization of concepts ("ideal types"), including a domains-based theoretical framework that offers guidelines for empirical investigation;
- His stress upon the importance of constructing rigorous procedures that assist both the theoretical framing and causal explanation of empirical cases;
- Weber's attention to values as potential causes of regular action;
- His focus upon the enduring interaction of values and ideas with, in particular, economic, rulership, and power interests;

4 Following a procedure utilized there, citation to both the English and German versions of Weber's texts will be given throughout this volume (with the exception of two chapters). Bibliographical information regarding the German sources can be found in the Bibliography.

5 All chapters (except the appendices) have been published previously. They appear here in revised form; several have been substantially re-written. Publication data regarding original versions are provided at the beginning of each chapter.

- Weber's insistence, in opposition to all organic holism schools, upon viewing societies as a vast pluralism of groups and prominent societal spheres (for example, the economy, rulership, religion, law, and status honor societal arenas);⁶
- His contention that groups and organizations are constituted alone from the patterned action-orientations of persons;
- Finally, Weber's view that states of competition – and even conflict – are normally widespread and enduring across every society's multiple groups.

It must be noted at the outset that this study offers more than a fleeting glance at Weber's comparative-historical sociology. All chapters present multi-dimensional discussions rather than snapshots or straightforward recapitulations. Following his sociology generally, this volume a) attends to arrays of contextual patterns of action that influence the rise and expansion of new patterns of action; b) emphasizes multiple regularities of action and their conjunctural, or dynamic, interaction over reductionist, monocausal procedures; and c) stresses the explanation of unique cases—and the various long-range and short-range patterns of action that influenced their origin and development—over the formulation of general laws. As this study will testify, Weber abjures linear progressions, neo-evolutionary certainties, cyclical and stage theories, a-historical concepts, and all levelled terrains. He discovers contradictions and conundra throughout the course of history as well as in the present era—and in all civilizations. Unforeseen consequences and paradoxical outcomes abound in his works.

Weber deserves his reputation as a “difficult theorist.” Every effort has been made to present the central features and analytic power of his comparative-historical project in an *accessible* manner. An in-depth overview of all chapters will summarize this volume's main contours and chart its trajectories.

An Overview

Part I (Chapters 1–3) addresses three pivotal themes. Apparent throughout his oeuvre, all play central parts in his attempt to define the West's uniqueness and systematically to analyze its causal origins.

Chapter 1 reconstructs four “types of rationality” (*Rationalitätstypen*)—formal, substantive, theoretical, and practical—scattered in diffuse corners of Weber's works. Taken together, they form indispensable concepts at the foundation of his analysis of the rationalization processes that have appeared throughout history and, in particular, in the course of the West's development. In its conclusion, this discussion turns to an examination of the ways in which the types of rationality assist conceptualization of dilemmas widespread in modern Western societies.

⁶ Terms such as domains of life, societal arenas, and life-spheres will be used synonymously throughout (*Lebensbereiche, Lebenssphäre, Lebensordnungen*).

Max Weber's Comparative-Historical Sociology Today

Major Themes, Mode of Causal Analysis, and Applications

STEPHEN KALBERG

Boston University, USA

Bringing together the author's major scholarly work on Weber over the last 30 years, *Max Weber's Comparative-Historical Sociology Today* addresses major themes in Weber's thought, whilst also examining the mode of analysis practised in his comparative-historical writings.

By exploring Weber's concepts and procedures, the individual chapters seek to convey the rigor of his research strategies, demonstrating their uniqueness. In this light, this study proceeds to identify as incomplete and then reconstruct the analyses undertaken by Weber of the rise of Confucianism in China, the caste system in India, and monotheism in ancient Israel. The analysis then advances to the modern era, utilizing Weber's research procedures to explain the origins of four independent phenomena: the singularity of the American political culture, the cultural foundations of modern citizenship, cultural pessimism (*Kulturpessimismus*) in nineteenth-century Germany, and the "location" of work in contemporary German society. A dialogue with a variety of recent major schools is pursued throughout this volume.

Offering a rich examination of the major themes in Weber's sociology, alongside a reconstruction of his mode of analysis and application of his approach, this book will appeal to scholars around the world with interests in social theory, German and American societies, cultural sociology, political sociology, the sociology of knowledge, comparative-historical sociology, and the sociology of civilizations.

Stephen Kalberg has long been a penetrating and original interpreter of Weber's work. His publications stand out in the large Weber literature by focusing on Weber's modes of analysis that remain fruitful today, a century later. Putting that claim of continuing relevance to multiple tests, this is a significant publication.

Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Brown University, USA, author of *Usable Theory: Analytic Tools for Social and Political Research*

Both in the complexity of his work and its relevance to the crisis of his time Weber finds in Kalberg a commentator who is equal to the task of demonstrating how only an equivalent project could match up to the demands that the current global crisis makes on social science.

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