

The Protestant Ethic versus the "New Ethic"

The Protestant ethic and the "new Ethic"

by **Klaus Lichtblau**

"Askese des Protestantismus als Grundlage der modernen Berufskultur - eine Art 'spiritualistischer' Konstruktion der modernen Wirtschaft."

Max Weber

"Den psychoanalytischen Faden sozusagen ins Labyrinth der Verdrängungen und ihrer Folgen, den die Freudsche Methode erst in langwierigem Fragen und Beobachten sich aufsuchen muß, beständig in Gefahr noch, ihn wieder zu verlieren - den hält die Kirche von Anbeginn auch in der Hand."

Willy Hellpach

"Schlug ehemals Askese den ästhetischen Anspruch reaktionär nieder, so ist sie heute zum Siegel der avancierten Kunst geworden."

Theodor W. Adorno

In his methodological essays Max Weber declared that one of the main prerequisites of historical interpretation

and explanation are the scholar's own value commitments (Wertbeziehungen) and the main cultural problems of his period.^[i] Weber shared this insight with theoreticians of his time as the philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel who first elaborated such a theory of interpretation in a systematic way, as Weber freely acknowledged.

^[ii] In 1908 Simmel refined his argument by saying that all individuals are only fragments who need the glimpse at the "general other" to complete the picture of their own self. But if another human being appears as a generalization and typification of our own self, he/she is also a fragment which we shape into a whole. Thus we interpret our inner world with reference to the outer world and symbolize them both vice versa.^[iii]

Instead of discussing this core problem of the hermeneutic process of "interpretation" (Verstehen) in general, I shall first ask which were the main problems of Max Weber himself and his period at the time when he started to write his study about the religious background of the modern capitalist professional ethics and its relations to the modern gender issues, that means the crucial development of the modern family structure and the "sexual question" at the turn of the century. Reading Weber's study about the genealogy of the ascetic roots of the modern lifestyle in the light of his own "family story" (Familienroman) and its close relationship to the modern feminist movement in Wilhelmine Germany and the "erotic rebellion" of his time also means to locate his work within a cultural context which not only gave rise to Freud's "discovery" and decoding of the language of the unconscious, but also to Simmel's "Philosophy of Money" as a general theory of a symbolizing process. According to these theoreticians it seemed that modern culture required a fundamental sacrifice of human nature and of the personal desires of the individuals.^[iv] One of the starting points for my interpretation of Weber's study on the "Protestant Ethic" therefore is to reconstruct his own answer to those cultural questions about the ascetic roots of the

capitalist money economy and the personality structure of the modern individual. This does not mean that I try to reinterpretate Weber's work within a psychoanalytic framework.^[v] Rather I want to point to the fact that there are some striking "elective affinities" between the works of Simmel, Weber and Freud with regard to the same main issues of the cultural crisis of the bourgeois society at the turn of the last century.

Weber's own nervous illness was not only a personal disaster but symptomatic and representative of the "nervous" character of his period that gave rise to many formulas describing the nature of this cultural crisis, and to very different therapeutic programs for solving the problems which were specific to it. Early in his inaugural lecture of 1895 Weber characterized his own generation as one of epigoni who were condemned to carry on the work that the fathers had started so successfully.^[vi] His own "generational rebellion" therefore can be interpreted as an attempt to gain a new platform for renewing not only the forces which had led modern capitalism to its worldwide victory but also made possible the successful founding of the new German Empire. Distancing himself from the dominant Wilhelmine aristocracy and those "liberal" politicians who like his own father had made peace with the "personal regime" of William II and the predominance of the "Junkers", Weber was searching for some historical forerunners of those German liberals which he described as the real "heroes" of the German bourgeoisie and the true "founding fathers" of the new Empire. Lack of heroic action and subordination to the authority of William II and the Junker's regime were major charges in Weber's critique of the contemporary bourgeois politicians of his nation.^[vii]

The diversion of action in favour of a subjective culture of hedonism, consumerism, aestheticism and eroticism

also was a main topic of Weber's critique of the bourgeois culture of his period as a whole. The search for a genuine "inner experience" (inneres Erleben) of the individual and the cult of a personal conduct of life appeared to him as symptoms of a general "decadence" of the active forces in human being which not only gave rise to severe "pathologies" in modern culture, but also to some tensions within his own personality structure and way of life.

[viii] That "modernism" as a whole was a source and symptom of many cultural pathologies and human diseases is one of the most striking issues of cultural criticism inaugurated in the nineteenth century by such influential philosophers and poets like Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Baudelaire, Tolstoj and Nietzsche. The notion of décadence and dégénérescence also was one of the typical stereotypes which were used by the modern psychiatric and sexual scientists for describing the "anomalies" and "pathologies" of the individuals which deeply were rooted in the "modern" lifestyle. The imposing "career" of such mental "diseases" as hysteria and neurasthenia in the eighties and nineties of the last century therefore not only was a matter of the psychiatric and medical sciences but also a widespread topic in cultural and literary criticism describing the central features of modern culture as a whole. There were close intellectual relationships between the different "orders" of the psychiatric, medical, literary and aesthetic discourse in general which also gave rise to some common key issues within the quarrels concerning the modern "gender question". [ix]

In his German History Karl Lamprecht had characterized his own culture as a subjectivistic and impressionistic one which was closely intertwined with the decline of the symbolic, typical and conventional character of the Middle Ages and gave rise to a mental state that Lamprecht called "period of nervousness" (Periode der Reizsamkeit). [x] In his cultural studies Georg Simmel also interpreted the nervous character of his time as a

consequence of the vitalistic character of the money economy and the modern lifestyle in the cities. The search for "new impressions" seemed to him necessary for a human being confronted with the continuous acceleration of the "modern times" and his own desire for a truly authentic, personal lifestyle.^[xi] In contrast to this "value-neutral" description of cultural modernism Willy Hellpach asserted in 1902 the genuinely pathological character of modern culture and pointed to the "elective affinities" between the aesthetic, erotic, religious and medical issues of the period. The "phantasmagoric apperception" which according to Hellpach was a specific character of the medieval mind now returned in the symbolic and ornamental character of the hysterical body which not only was a peculiarity of the female but symbolized femininity as well as cultural modernism as a whole.^[xii]

In the work of Otto Weininger the antagonism between male and female appeared as the core of this "crisis of culture" which now was decoded as a return of oppressed femininity. The destabilization of the male personality could therefore be ascribed to a loss of the traditional role ascriptions and the division of labour between the sexes.

^[xiii] Hence, one of the most important aims of the anarchist movement at this time was to overthrow the ascetic and repressive character of capitalism and patriarchalism in favour of restoring the power of ancient "mother right" (Mutterrecht) and reactualizing the tradition of the "holy prostitution" as well as the ars amandi of aristocratic society. That eroticism also could be regarded as a surrogate for the religious experience was for instance mentioned by Gertrud Bäumer, one of the most influential leaders of the German women's movement, who observed in 1904:

"A sensual and artistic epoch of history that desires to experience the intoxicating power of all natural

drives is dawing. People have become attuned to the vibrations of the sensual energies in the balance of pleasure and pain. Eroticism has become vitally important. Ellen Key goes so far as to claim that love is for people in the present what religion was in the past. Love becomes the object of a restless interest that drags all its mystical secrets into the lime light ... and multiplies its power through ever greater auto-suggestion." [\[xiv\]](#)

For women like Gertrud Bäumer the glorification of eroticism appeared, however, as an exaggeration that eviscerated the theoretical and literary expression of this life experience. "The first female enthusiasts for the rights of man", she continued,

"held womanhood in almost ascetic disdain. But today we encounter a mood for which all Weltschmerz, all dissatisfaction with life, is attributed to unfulfilled erotic desires. Ricarda Huch is right when she says in her essay on Gottfried Keller that people are overestimating the importance of love. 'In modern life as in modern art love occupies too much space, and this is one of the most important causes of the sickliness and weakness of our time'." [\[xv\]](#)

In fact, the question of "eroticism" and the demand for "free love" was one of the main issues discussed in some influential intellectual circles and within the women's movement at the turn of the century. In Munich some members of Ludwig Klages'"Cosmic Round" championed the idea of a "new paganism" as spokesmen of the Schwabing bohème. They advocated radical "sexual liberation" from all ascetic ideals and patriarchal forms of

domination. Their paganism attacked not only the values of occidental rationalism, but also the standards of bourgeois sexual morality. Already a cult figure, the Countess Franziska zu Reventlow played the role of the new hetaera who disdained the bluestockings of the bourgeois women's movement and demanded the reestablishment of an erotic culture in the sense of l'art pour l'art.^[xvi] This sort of Kulturkritik was radicalized by the Freud pupil Otto Gross, who was also influenced by the works of Bachofen and Nietzsche. Gross raised the political demand for a "sexual revolution". The revolutionary force of "free love", he believed, had a socially therapeutic function and could transform society.^[xvii] Such ideas entered the German's women movement at 1904 when the "Association for the Protection of Motherhood" was founded and began to play a crucial role within the divisions of the bourgeois women's movement during the following years.

Originally the main purpose of this league was to help non-married women and their illegitimate children to solve their moral and material problems within an oppressive patriarchal society. Some progressive liberals like Friedrich Naumann, Werner Sombart and Max Weber himself supported this union founded by Ruth Bré. Other supporters were such active combatants of the women's movement as Adele Schreiber, Henriette Fürth, Lily Braun, Hedwig Dohm, Marie Stritt, Rosa Mayreder and Ellen Key. But soon Helene Stöcker and her circle used this forum for propagating their own convictions about the emancipating character of "free love" and the illegitimate child of love and forced the members of the association to come to terms with this "new ethic" which in fact was a very old one.^[xviii] In 1909 Gertrud Bäumer pointed out that among the crucial inspirations for this new ethic of sexual liberation was not only the Nietzschean doctrine of the Übermensch but the declaration of the power of love by the early German romantic movement around 1800, especially in the works of Friedrich

Schlegel and Schleiermacher.^[xix] But in contrast to these romantics the development of the individualism of love during the nineteenth century gave rise to a new sexual ethic which also proclaimed the emancipation of love from the traditional conjugal restrictions. This revolutionary claim for a real "free love" and the woman's right to the illegitimate child was one of the most important challenges to the marital values which Max and Marianne Weber had taken for granted in respect of their own personal way of life. Their controversy with the "new ethic" helps us to understand in which way the Webers tried to legitimate not only their own marriage but also the historical traditions and cultural values related to it.^[xx]

At the time, Max and Marianne Weber defended bourgeois sexual morality from the standpoint of a Christian worldview that was anchored in the tradition of ascetic Protestantism. Sexual fidelity is for them a taken-for-granted ascetic ideal that binds the "beautiful moment" to the rule of the moral law, which determines the mutual responsibility of the partners "up to the pianissimo of old age."^[xxi] Law, duty and asceticism constitute the ideals of a monogamous community, which demands sacrifice and subordinates unbridled eros to the ethical norms of a puritanical union of souls. The demand for free love and a child out of wedlock appears as a "desecration of monogamy" that amounts to "killing something divine." According to this ascetic ethic of responsibility, sensual enjoyment must not become "an end in itself, not even in the form of an aesthetically sublimated eroticism."^[xxii]

Here we encounter the spirit of ascetic Protestantism, which shaped not only the Webers' marital understanding but also influenced the comprehensive study Wife and Mother in Legal Development, which Marianne wrote

during the years of Max's illness and convalescence.^[xxiii] Weber's 1904 essay on the elective affinity between ascetic Protestantism and the modern capitalist ethos provided her not only with a theoretical framework but also guided her substantive interest in the development of marriage law from archaic communities to the bourgeois marriage and its puritan morality. Like her husband, Marianne was interested in identifying the non-economic, purely spiritual determinants in the emergence of modern secular conduct. As against the monistic approach of the economic interpretation of history, she emphasized the multiple influences that shaped the development of marriage law and marital conduct. Again, like her husband, she concluded that bourgeois marital morality resulted from that religious radicalism which began with the Reformation and continued through Calvinism, English Puritanism and the Baptist sects. Let us now turn to Weber's text.

In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism Weber attempted to reconstruct the purely religious motives at the root of the capitalist sense of vocation. The religious conviction of the world's sinfulness demanded an inner-worldly asceticism that aimed at destroying any "spontaneous sensual enjoyment of life."^[xxiv] Sexual intercourse appeared at most acceptable in marriage and only for the sake of procreation, and in the selection of partners erotic attractiveness was subordinated to sober rational choice. Like his wife, Max Weber believed that a sexual morality which rested basically on a rationalist affirmation of abstinence had led to an ethical transformation of marital relations and thus to the "flowering of a chivalry" that helped bring about the modern "emancipation of woman."^[xxv] The idea of a universal priesthood, the demand for freedom of conscience for both sexes, and the rejection of any kind of militarism favored the formal equality of women in the Puritan communities. But what was the price?

In vivid imagery, Weber sketches the fundamental rejections of all sensual culture (Sinnenkultur) in its consequences for practical conduct and its relation to cultural values that have no immediate religious relevance. On the one hand, the impersonality of charity and the distrust of friendship in ascetic Puritanism appear as the logical consequence of every ascetic ethic that perceives in all purely emotional and personal relations the danger of the "idolatry of the flesh." On the other hand, this attitude must in principle oppose the aesthetic sphere insofar as the latter retains any elements of sensuality (Sinnenkunst). Therefore, Puritan England sacrificed most art forms, which was accompanied by the emergence of a uniform and standardized lifestyle. Together with the industrial mode of production, this process eventually led to the iron constraints on conduct and the tragedy of modern professionalism of which Weber spoke with such pathos.

It is not difficult to see that Weber, in depicting the rejection of sensual culture as well as the treatment of positive science as the only explicitly approved non-religious value, also portrays his own personal ethos. This originally religious rejection of sensual culture, to which the Webers still tried to adhere, was challenged to the core by the erotic movement and the literary-aesthetic avant-garde of the time. The challenge from a "free love" that eluded ethical and religious regulation and had affinity with an aesthetic and expressive lifestyle deeply affected Weber and finally made him modify decisively his views on the cultural significance of a purely ethical and religious value position. He came to develop three strategies toward the "erotic question". First, with Marianne he continued to uphold the unconditional validity of the ethical ideal of monogamous marriage, but he became willing to allow persons unable to live up to it a practical dispensation under certain preconditions, a dispensation

that he claimed in the end for himself.^[xxvi] Second, given his conviction of the autonomous value of sexual abstinence, Weber became now strongly interested in the effects of a norm-free eroticism on the personality. This interest is reflected in his reception of Freud's works and in his virulent critique of Otto Gross. Weber repudiated the latter's plea for a sexual ethic that embraced the therapeutic function of sexual release, but he accepted the lasting contribution of Freud's studies insofar as they succeeded in creating an "exact casuistry."^[xxvii] Third, Weber was troubled and fascinated by the notion that ethical values are not the only normative ones, since the spheres of the erotic and the aesthetic each possess a value of its own (Eigenwert). In Nietzsche's terms, they are "beyond good and evil" and thus have a close elective affinity. Weber began to plan a sociology of art, but he managed to write only the fragment on the sociology of music. He also developed an avid interest in the various efforts to found a specifically modern aesthetics.

From modern aesthetics Weber also expected a clarification of eroticism as a particular value sphere. For instance, he wrote to Georg Lukács after reading the first instalment of his Heidelberg Philosophy of Art:

"I am very eager to see what happens when you turn to the concept of 'form.' After all, form is not only found at the value level that rises above the level of the experiential. The erotic sphere, which reaches deep down into the 'cage', also has form. It shares the fate of bearing the guilt common to all formed life. It stands close to the aesthetic attitude by virtue of its opposition to everything that belongs to the realm of 'form-free' divinity. The topographic location of the erotic must be established, and I am very interested to find out where you will place it."^[xxviii]

Unfortunately, Lukács' aesthetic theory also remained a fragment. Thus we must determine the topographic location of the erotic and the aesthetic elsewhere. Weber's sociology of religion provides us with a key, in particular through the three versions of the "Intermediary Reflections." Together with the two speeches on science and politics as vocations, the last version became Weber's ultimate legacy to us. Not surprisingly, much of the recent Weber literature has dealt with these last writings. [\[xxix\]](#)

Weber sketched the cultural autonomy of the aesthetic and the erotic in a typology and sociology of rationalism, which lays out the range of fundamental conflicts among the various orders of life (Lebensordnungen). In the great salvation religions and their image of a transcendental god the basic tension between religious ethics and the world becomes radicalized through the opposition of a "cosmos of natural causality" and a "cosmos of ethical, retributive causality." [\[xxx\]](#) The sublimation of salvation in the direction of an ethic of conviction (Gesinnungsethik) exacerbates the conflict with the world, because the religious rationalization of conduct also leads to a greater comprehension of the logic inherent in the other value spheres, and thus to a greater awareness of the tensions between them. In Weber's scheme, the rise of a universalist ethic of brotherhood is of crucial importance for the differentiation of the other spheres.

The logical precondition for the "universalism of love" and "acosmistic" (unspecific) love is the emergence of religious congregations that differentiate themselves from the household and the sib and gain support from the authorities in the politically pacified empires. But the universalist claims of this ethic of love are directed against

the extended family and the neighborhood association no less than against the sphere of political power proper.

Thus the moral "slave revolt" organized by the priests reveals itself also as an "ethic of the ruled." Since "women had everywhere shown a particular susceptibility to religious stimuli," Weber observed, "this domestication provided ever stronger grounds for assigning religious value to the essentially feminine virtues of the ruled."[\[xxxii\]](#) The more political authority became institutionalized in its own right, the greater was the likelihood that subjects would "take flight into the irrationality of apolitical sentiment," especially into the erotic sphere.

[\[xxxii\]](#)

Weber was especially concerned with the tension between the universalist ethic of brotherhood and the secular spheres of economy, politics, and science, on the one hand, and the spheres of sexual love and art, on the other.

The latter two stood in particularly sharp opposition to the salvation religions because of their close similarities with mystical religiosity. The psychological similarity between the highest forms of eroticism and "the sublimated forms of heroic piety" and their "mutual psychological and physiological substitutibility" explain why these two spheres became sharpest rivals in the rationalized and intellectualized world of modernity.[\[xxxiii\]](#) Only a culture that claimed to be able, in principle, to rationalize all spheres could provoke the emergence of "irrational" subjective experience as an autonomous sphere.

Religiosity, however, came to share a retreat into the private experience of the extraordinary with erotic intimacy and with subjective enjoyment of l'art pour l'art. The sublimation of sexuality into eroticism, in the sense of a "consciously cultivated, extra-mundane sphere," was possible only in a purely intellectualist culture that

embraced ascetic professionalism. Extra-mundane, especially extra-marital, sexuality thus could appear as "the only tie connecting human beings with the natural source of all life," opening "a gate into the most irrational and thereby real kernel of life, in opposition to the mechanisms of rationalization."[\[xxxiv\]](#)

In recognizing the autonomy of "love for love's sake" and of "art for art's sake," Weber decisively modified the conceptual framework of The Protestant Ethic in relation to his theory of modernity. Thus Weber's oeuvre linked up with the cultural avant-garde which identified the distinctiveness of modern culture with a systematic differentiation of the aesthetic-expressive sphere from the purely cognitive-instrumental and moral-practical spheres.[\[xxxv\]](#) This theory of modernity took up central motifs of the early romanticist critique of reason, which had endeavored to defend the "internal infinity of the subject" (Hegel) against the logical and substantive imperatives of theoretical und practical rationalism and to rehabilitate the spheres of aesthetics and of sexual love as matters of authentic expressiveness.[\[xxxvi\]](#) By acknowledging the autonomy of the erotic and the aesthetic value realms, Weber integrated this aesthetic-expressive modernism into a theory of rationalization and modernization which had begun with a massive historical process of religious disenchantment and now conjured up the return of the gods. As a "praise of polytheism," Weber's theory can be understood as "myth (Mythos) directed against itself," a post-historical attitude to history.[\[xxxvii\]](#) He thereby anticipated that break between modernism and modernity that Daniel Bell later described as a cultural contradiction of capitalism. Demanding limitless self-fulfillment for the individual, the "post-modern" counterculture represents an aesthetic-hedonist, consumption-oriented expressive culture. But the institutional core of modern society, which found its historical paradigm in the Protestant ethic, still rests on a conventional ethic.[\[xxxviii\]](#)

In the two versions of The Protestant Ethic however, Weber rejected any allusions to the possibility of a reconciliation of eros and culture in a more liberal or aesthetic way of life. Sombart's critique of Weber's thesis concerning the ascetic roots of modern capitalism and his rehabilitation of the aristocratic "mistress economy" (Mätressenwirtschaft) as one of the main sources of capital accumulation is countered by Weber with the argument that it is not decisive to have money but how to deal with it.[\[xxxix\]](#) Like Simmel and Freud, Weber seeks the origins of the modern western culture in a fundamental oppression of desire (Triebverzicht) which leads to the emergence of a new world and destroys the wasteful traditional aristocratic one. In Weber's mind this act of purification and disenchantment of the world is the real "heroic" one. Sombart's praise of the "merchant adventureres" and the luxury of the grandseigneurs fails according to Max Weber as an explanation of why the "spirit" of modern capitalism and professional ethics appeared at the first time in regions which were far from the vast capital accumulation in the European centers of mercantile trade and ostentatious consumption. The ethical reglementation and calculability of the personal conduct of life through innerworldly asceticism appeared to him as one of the main sources of modern individualism and professionalism even though it had destroyed its own spiritual roots. But Weber accepted the form of this intellectual and cultural heritage which is not only conserved in the routines and constraints of every day life but also in modern science and a secular ethic of professional work as a quasi-transcendental value of his own personal way of life.

Like Karl Kraus, Arnold Schönberg, Adolf Loos, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Otto Weininger Max Weber belonged to that ascetic faction of the "antimodernist modernists" which opposed the revival of the mediaeval allegories,

ornaments and mysticisms within modern culture and looked for an act of purification in order to maintain the notions of form, distance and asceticism as a medium of intellectual and aesthetic therapy. Weber's sharp distinction between intellectualism and aestheticism and his condemnation of all theoretical fashions is an expression of that asceticism which he tried to localize as one of the main historical sources of modern capitalism and culture. His preference for action as a central sociological notion instead of inner experience (Erleben) may be viewed as a therapeutic device which he could find in the contemporary medical literature concerning the problem of how to leave a state of continuous psychic depression. His preference of asceticism instead of for mysticism may also mean that he was looking for a way of life which was able to avoid the personal risks and the political indifference that could result from getting lost in the labyrinth of "inner experiences." And his sympathy for the "English Hebrews" as well as his disdain for the political submissiveness of the Lutherans suggests that he was searching for those "heroes" who generated the modern workmanship described by Thomas Carlyle in a more literary than historical style. "Work, and don't despair" was a formula which not only was a frequently given medical advice at the turn of the last century or after the decline of the German Empire but also was the core of the ascetic Protestantism which itself was the expression of a depressive worldview.[\[x1\]](#) Thus Weber may have had felt some close connection respectively "elective affinity" with his own depressive and pessimistic worldview.

It is therefore the form of tragedy that characterizes as well his study about the origins of modern capitalism as well as his own way of life. For tragedy according to Nietzsche and Simmel, is that kind of downfall in which an individual and/or a whole culture destroy their own presuppositions. The paradoxical effect of innerworldly asceticism made the "heroic" fundament of modern culture vanish. And we might say that the virtues of ascetic

Protestantism made Weber fall into an iron cage from which he was released only by the "reenchanting" power of ("non-legal") erotic love that made him now work as intensive as many years ago. [\[xli\]](#)

Weber rejected any claim of an "aesthetic of style" (Stilästhetik) with respect of his own work. "Aestheticism" and "mysticism" are metaphors of an irrational and chaotic force that is symptomatic of the décadence of culture as a whole. These notions are also metaphors and analogies for femininity and the "feminist" character of cultural modernism that menaced the traditional gender roles of the patriarchal era. [\[xlii\]](#) The crucial methodological claim in Weber's study about the "Protestant Ethic" and of his later cultural studies lay in the rejection of any historical and social "laws" in favour of the recognition of the "infinite causal regressus" and the replacement of a new key issue to characterize the simultaneous "interactions" (Wechselwirkungen) between the different cultural spheres. In this context Weber often made use of the literary topos of "elective affinities" (Wahlverwandtschaften). In his novel of that title Goethe intended a "chemical analogy" (chemische Gleichnisrede) in order to characterize the different relations between his four dramatis personae. The artificial notion of "elective affinities" implies in this context a natural determinism or a magical attractiveness of love which tends to destroy the legal and moral base of the bourgeois institution of marriage. Weber criticized Simmel for enthroning the notion of "interaction" (Wechselwirkung) as the fundamental sociological concept and for using "symbols" and "analogies" in a quasi-aesthetic manner. [\[xliii\]](#) In spite of his critique Weber himself often made use of a literary metaphor which Walter Benjamin in his study on Goethe decoded as a mythical way of thinking. [\[xliv\]](#) It seems to be no accident that this metaphor also symbolizes the tragical decline of the legal conjugal form. But it is also surprising to see that Weber with this metaphor refers to the spirit of alchemy as one

of the main forces within the historical genesis of modern capitalism and insofar rehabilitates indirectly a thesis which originally was rejected by Werner Sombart![\[xlv\]](#) Talcott Parsons has "solved" this "overcoded" problem by mistranslating the German term Wahlverwandtschaften with the English notion correlations instead of the more precise elective affinities and favoring a term which now is closer to Simmel's terminology than to that of Weber. Isn't this an interesting displacement within Parsons' own "discourse of the other" (discours de l'autre)?

[\[xlvi\]](#)

In: Hartmut Lehmann / Guenther Roth (Hrsg.), Weber's "Protestant Ethic": Origins, Evidence, Contexts. Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press 1993, S.179-193.

Notes

[\[i\]](#) See Max Weber, The Methodology of the Social Sciences, translated and edited by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (New York, 1949), especially 72-112.

[\[ii\]](#) See Georg Simmel, Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie: Eine erkenntnistheoretische Studie (Leipzig, 1892), 14-33 and second, modified edition (Leipzig, 1905), 27-66. For a comprehensive discussion of Simmel's theory of interpretation see Guy Oakes' introduction to Georg Simmel, Essays on Interpretation in Social Science, translated and edited by Guy Oakes (Manchester, 1980), 3-94.

[\[iii\]](#) See Georg Simmel, Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung, fifth edition

(Berlin, 1968), 24-5.

[iv] According to Simmel the economic exchange itself is based on the renunciation of the immediate personal consumption of an object. Simmel therefore used the notion of "sacrificing exchange" (aufopfernder Tausch) to characterize the peculiarity of modern money economy. See Georg Simmel, Philosophie des Geldes, fourth edition (München and Leipzig, 1922), 24-46.

[v] Such an interpretation has been proposed by Arthur Mitzman, The Iron Cage: A Historical Interpretation of Max Weber (New York, 1970) and Nicolaus Sombart, Nachdenken über Deutschland: Vom Historismus zur Psychoanalyse (München, 1987), 22-51.

[vi] See Max Weber, Gesammelte politische Schriften, edited by Johannes Winckelmann, fourth edition (Tübingen, 1980), 1-25.

[vii] On Weber's "generational rebellion" and his critique of the political leaders in Wilhelmine Germany see Christoph Steding, Politik und Wissenschaft bei Max Weber (Breslau, 1932); Guenther Roth, "Max Weber's Generational Rebellion and Maturation," in Reinhard Bendix and Guenther Roth, Scholarship and Partisanship: Essays on Max Weber (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1971), 6-33; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Max Weber und die deutsche Politik: 1890-1920, second revised and enlarged edition (Tübingen, 1974).

[viii] On Weber's own psychic depression see Mitzman, The Iron Cage, 148-163 and Sombart, Nachdenken über Deutschland, 27-42.

[ix] See Wolfgang Drost, ed., Fortschrittsglaube und Dekadenzbewußtsein im Europa des 19. Jahrhunderts (Heidelberg, 1986); Jens Malte Fischer, Fin de siècle: Kommentar zu einer Epoche (München, 1978), 11-93; Wolfdietrich Rasch, Die literarische Décadence um 1900 (München, 1986); Andreas Steiner, 'Das nervöse Zeitalter': Der Begriff der Nervosität bei Laien und Ärzten in Deutschland und Österreich um 1900 (Zürich,

1964); Regina Schaps, Hysterie und Weiblichkeit: Wissenschaftsmythen über die Frau (Frankfurt and New York, 1982).

[x] Karl Lamprecht, Deutsche Geschichte. Erster Ergänzungsband: Zur jüngsten deutschen Vergangenheit. Erster Band: Tonkunst - Bildende Kunst - Dichtung - Weltanschauung (Leipzig, 1901), VII f., 53-66, 379-389 and 464-471.

[xi] Simmel, Philosophie des Geldes, 519-552; Georg Simmel, "Tendencies in German Life and Thought since 1870," International Monthly 5 (1902): 93-11 and 166-184; Georg Simmel, "Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben," Jahrbuch der Gehe-Stiftung 9 (1903): 185-206.

[xii] Willy Hellpach, Nervosität und Kultur (Berlin, 1902), 127-158; see also Willy Hellpach, Grundlinien einer Psychologie der Hysterie (Leipzig, 1904), 469-494. Already in the first edition of The Protestant Ethic Weber has referred to these studies. See Max Weber, "Die protestantische Ethik und der 'Geist' des Kapitalismus II: Die Berufsidee des asketischen Protestantismus," Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik 21 (1905): 1-110, 45 and 61. For a lucid interpretation of this topic see Manfred Schneider, "Hysterie als Gesamtkunstwerk: Aufstieg und Verfall einer Semiotik der Weiblichkeit," Merkur 39 (1985): 879-895.

[xiii] See Otto Weininger, Geschlecht und Charakter: Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung (Wien, 1903); Jacques Le Rider, "Modernisme - féminisme/modernité - virilité: Otto Weininger et la modernité viennoise," L'Infini 4 (1983): 5-20; Jacques Le Rider and Norbert Leser, Otto Weininger: Werk und Wirkung (Wien, 1984).

[xiv] Gertrud Bäumer, Die Frau in der Kulturbewegung der Gegenwart (Wiesbaden, 1904), 5f.

[xv] Ibid., 20.

[xvi] On Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow, see Marianne Weber, Die Frauen und die Liebe (Königstein and

Leipzig, 1935), 180-195; Johannes Székely, Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow: Leben und Werk (Bonn, 1979);

Helmut Fritz, Die erotische Rebellion: Das Leben der Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlow (Frankfurt a.M., 1980);

Regina Schaps, "Tragik und Erotik - Kultur der Geschlechter: Franziska Gräfin zu Reventlows 'modernes

Hetärentum'," in Wolfgang Lipp, ed., Kulturtypen, Kulturcharaktere: Träger, Mittler und Stifter von Kultur

(Berlin, 1987), 79-96.

[xvii] See Arthur Mitzman, "Anarchism, Expressionism and Psychoanalysis," New German Critique 10 (1977):

77-104; Josef Dvorak, "Kokain und Mutterrecht: Die Wiederentdeckung von Otto Gross," Neues Forum 295-296

(1978): 52-61; Emanuel Hurwitz, Otto Gross: "Paradies"-Sucher zwischen Freud und Jung (Zürich and Frankfurt

a.M., 1979).

[xviii] See Richard J. Evans, The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933 (London, 1976), 115-143; Amy

Hackett, "Helene Stöcker: Left Wing Intellectual and Sex Reformer," in Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann and

Marion Kaplan, eds., When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany (New York, 1984),

109-130; Ilse Kokula, "Der linke Flügel der Frauenbewegung als Plattform des Befreiungskampfes

homosexueller Frauen und Männer," in Jutta Dalhoff, Uschi Frey and Ingrid Schöll, eds., Frauenmacht in der

Geschichte (Düsseldorf, 1986), 46-64.

[xix] Gertrud Bäumer, "Die neue Ethik vor hundert Jahren," in Gertrud Bäumer et al., Frauenbewegung und

Sexualethik: Beiträge zur modernen Ehekritik (Heilbronn, 1909), 54-77; see also Helene Stöcker, "Neue Ethik in

der Kunst," Mutterschutz: Zeitschrift zur Reform der sexuellen Ethik 1 (1905), 301-6 and Heinrich Meyer-

Benfey, "Lucinde," Mutterschutz: Zeitschrift zur Reform der sexuellen Ethik 2 (1906), 173-192.

[xx] For a more exhaustive discussion of this controversy and the personal involvement of the Webers within the

"erotic movement" see Marianne Weber, Max Weber: A Biography, translated and edited by Harry Zohn (New Brunswick/NJ, 1988), 371-390 and Guenther Roth's introduction to this edition of Marianne Weber's biography, *ibid.*, xv-lx; Mitzman, The Iron Cage, 256-296; Martin Green, The von Richthofen Sisters: The Triumphant and the Tragic Modes of Love (New York, 1974); Sombart, Nachdenken über Deutschland, 22-52; Wolfgang Schwentker, "Passion as a Mode of Life: Max Weber, the Otto Gross Circle and Eroticism," in Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., Max Weber and his Contemporaries (London, 1987), 483-498; Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, "Max Weber und die Frauen," in Christian Gneuss and Jürgen Kocka, eds., Max Weber: Ein Symposium (München, 1988), 142-154.

[xxi] See Marianne Weber, Max Weber, 371-390. The phrase "up to the pianissimo of old age," a maximum of an ethic of responsibility, occurs at the very end of Marianne Weber, Ehefrau und Mutter in der Rechtsentwicklung (Tübingen, 1907), 572, and toward the last version of the "Zwischenbetrachtung" (1920), published under the title, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (New York, 1946), 350; it also appears in the dedication to Marianne Weber in the first volume of the Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie (Tübingen, 1920).

[xxii] Marianne Weber, Max Weber, 371 and 374.

[xxiii] Marianne Weber, Ehefrau und Mutter.

[xxiv] Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York, 1958), 119.

[xxv] *Ibid.*, 264. The phrase "emancipation of woman" is an insert from 1920. For a similar discussion of Puritan sexual morality, see Marianne Weber, Ehefrau und Mutter, and the formulation: "Just as freedom of conscience

was the mother of 'the Rights of Man,' so it was the cradle of women's rights" (290).

[xxvi] See Marianne Weber, Max Weber, 371.

[xxvii] Ibid., 376. On the relation to Freud, see Tracy B. Strong, "Weber and Freud: Vocation and Self-Acknowledgement," in Max Weber and His Contemporaries, 468-482.

[xxviii] Weber to Georg Lukács (March 10, 1913), in Eva Karádi and Eva Fekete, eds., Georg Lukács:

Briefwechsel 1902-1917 (Stuttgart, 1982), 320. The Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst appeared as volume 15 of the Lukács Werke.

[xxix] On the controversial interpretations of the three versions with regard to their significance for Weber's oeuvre, see Wolfgang Schluchter, Rationalism, Religion, and Domination: A Weberian Perspective, translated by Neil Solomon (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1989), Chapter 12.

[xxx] From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, 355.

[xxxi] From the first version of the "Intermediate Reflexions" in Max Weber, Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1978), 591f.

[xxxii] Ibid., 601.

[xxxiii] From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, 348.

[xxxiv] Ibid., 345f. A lucid analysis of Weber's theory of erotic love and of its possible significance for feminist theory today is found in Roslyn Wallach Bologh, "Max Weber on Erotic Love: A Feminist Inquiry," in Scott Lash and Sam Whimster, eds., Max Weber: Rationality and Modernity (London, 1987), 242-258. See also Roslyn Wallach Bologh, Love or Greatness: Max Weber and Masculine Thinking - A Feminist Inquiry (London, 1990).

[xxxv] Weber himself recognized the elective affinity between the postulate of value-freedom in science and the postulate of autonomy in aesthetics, and in this connection mentioned Baudelaire and Nietzsche. See "Science as a Vocation," in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, 148.

[xxxvi] On the "Modernism of Romanticism," see Hans Sedlmayer, "Ästhetischer Anarchismus in Romantik und Moderne," in Scheidewege 8 (1978): 174-196; Hauke Brunkhorst, "Romantik und Kulturkritik: Zerstörung der dialektischen Vernunft?," Merkur 39 (1985): 484-496; Karl Heinz Bohrer, Die Kritik der Romantik (Frankfurt a. M., 1989).

[xxxvii] This phrase refers to a modernist rejection of any history founded on the Judeo-Christian tradition and of any philosophy of history related to it. See Theodor W. Adorno, Ästhetische Theorie, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a.M., 1970), 41f.; see also Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Rationalization and Myth in Weber's Thought," in The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber: Collected Essays (Chicago, 1989), 133-144.

[xxxviii] See Daniel Bell, The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (New York, 1976) and "Beyond Modernism, Beyond Self," in Quentin Anderson et al., eds., Art, Politics and Will: Essays in Honor of Lionel Trilling (New York, 1977), 213-253.

[xxxix] See Werner Sombart, Liebe, Luxus und Kapitalismus (München, 1967); this book originally appeared in 1913 under the title, Luxus und Kapitalismus.

[xli] See Werner Stark, "Die kalvinistische Ethik und der Geist der Kunst," in Justin Stagl, ed., Aspekte der Kultursoziologie: Aufsätze zur Soziologie, Philosophie, Anthropologie und Geschichte der Kultur (Berlin, 1982), 87-96, 95.

[xlii] See Gilcher-Holtey, "Max Weber und die Frauen."

[xlii] See Jacques Le Rider, "Das Werk des Weiblichen in der (Post-)Moderne," in Jacques Le Rider and Gérard Raulet, eds., Verabschiedung der (Post-)Moderne? Eine interdisziplinäre Debatte (Tübingen, 1987), 133-147.

[xliii] See Max Weber, "Georg Simmel As Sociologist," Social Research 39 (1972): 155-163.

[xliv] See Walter Benjamin, "Goethes Wahlverwandschaften," in Gesammelte Schriften I (Frankfurt, 1974), 123-201; Benjamin also speaks of a "mythical play of shadows" (mythisches Schattenspiel; 140).

[xlv] See Werner Sombart, Der moderne Kapitalismus I: Die Genese des Kapitalismus (Leipzig, 1902), 385-8.

[xlvi] On Parsons' relation to Simmel see Donald N. Levine, Simmel and Parsons: Two Approaches to the Study of Society (New York, 1980).