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**No 'new spirit'? Max Weber's account of the dynamic
of contemporary capitalism through 'pure adaptation'
and the shaping of adequate subjects**

Isabelle Darmon

Abstract

This article takes issue with Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's already classic thesis according to which contemporary capitalism rests on a 'new spirit', bringing to bear a reading of Weber's own account of the dynamic and spirit of the contemporary capitalism of his age, and of the way in which it mobilises workers and entrepreneurs. More specifically the article highlights Weber's idea that advanced capitalism, far from relying on any 'new spirit', simply thrives by fostering 'pure adaptation' and both adequate and active 'economic subjects'. This is shown to be due, in particular, to the dynamic of rationality and irrationality at the heart of the spirit that turned capitalism into a mass system.

Keywords: adaptation, rationality, spirit of capitalism, type of human being.

Introduction

Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's already classic *New spirit of capitalism* (2005 [1999]) has undeniably contributed in re-establishing 'capitalism' as an issue for a critical social science (Kemple 2007: 147), about a century after Werner Sombart and especially Max Weber had began a 'serious discussion' of it (Ghosh 2005: 382). But although the very title of the book directly and conspicuously echoes Weber's enquiry into the encounter of capitalism with the spirit that turned it into the dominant and all pervasive economic system of the contemporary age, their account of the dynamic of contemporary capitalism and its spirit does not take any notice of Weber's own analysis. Weber sketched out such analysis in the second chapter of the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (first published in 1904, and complemented in the 1920 revision) and further explained them in the 'Rebuttals' he wrote in response to his critics (most clearly in the second reply to Rachfahl); he defined modalities of empirical

investigation in his 1908 methodological introduction for the survey on industrial labour; and he proposed a conceptual elaboration in the ‘Sociological Categories of Economic Action’ (chapter 2 of Part I of *Economy and Society*), especially, as seems logical, in section 14, which compares market and planned economies in particular with respect to the nature of the ‘impulse for economic action’ – or the sources of mobilisation for work and enterprise – in each of the two economic systems.¹ Weber’s exposition of the momentum of contemporary capitalism as arising from the interplay between formal capitalist rationality and the material rationalities constantly interfering with it, as well as of the sources for the mobilisation of individuals for work and profit seeking, that is to say the spirit of capitalism itself, is paralleled by Boltanski and Chiapello’s exploration of what they refer to as the constrained ‘moral dimension’ of capitalism (2005: 486) and of the spirit of capitalism as ‘*ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism*’ (2005: 8). But their perspective – the (constrained) contribution of capitalism to the ‘common good’ – radically differs from Weber’s conception of the contemporary capitalist economy as a differentiated sphere with its own logic at war with those of other life orders and value spheres. I thus argue in this article that, in the very much needed reflection on the dynamic and spirit of contemporary capitalism perhaps re-opened by Boltanski and Chiapello, a re-examination of Weber’s texts addressing contemporary capitalism is indispensable – as these have been ‘much neglected’ (Ghosh 2005: 369; see also Swedberg 2011: 62).

This article purports to be a contribution to such re-examination, more specifically of Weber’s idea that advanced capitalism, far from relying on any ‘new spirit’, simply thrives by fostering ‘pure adaptation’, which does not mean absence of life or innovation. The contention that we could be in a phase of capitalism with a ‘new spirit’ is problematic and misleading insofar as any renewal, in Weber’s understanding, could only take place within the limits of overall adaptation to the rationality of the ‘cosmos of the modern rationalised capitalist economy’ (1991: 214). The spirit of inner-worldly asceticism had meant exceeding the everyday and its repetitiveness,

1. As we shall see, there are also crucial elements on the dynamic of contemporary capitalism at the end of the preface to the lecture on *General Economic History* (hereafter *GEH*). A more complete exposition of Weber’s conception of the spirit of capitalism in advanced capitalism should also take into account the writings anterior to the *Protestant Ethic*, singularly his pieces on the stock exchange and on rural labour.

it had required 'stretching out' towards a point beyond the everyday – as Weber vividly put it in his comparison between the Confucian and Puritan ethics (1991: 199) – but precisely this is what has disappeared with the entrenchment of modern capitalism.

However, advanced capitalism does not thrive on the mobilisation of mere *homines oeconomici* – the bearers of pure economic rationality – either. For Weber, as for Boltanski and Chiapello, there is a 'spirit' to advanced capitalism that continues mobilising the mass of human beings on other counts than just their material interests. Weber's investigation of the shaping of the modern type of human being, of modern *Menschentum*, which is intricately bound up with an analysis of the mechanisms for the fostering of adaptation to the dominant logics of the depersonalised orders, showed that these orders do not produce mere rational agents but rather shape human beings with substantive orientations, affects and attachments besides their rational interests. Each order 'educates and creates' the 'subjects that it needs' not only 'externally' but also 'inwardly', i.e. 'motivationally' (1920: 37, 1988a: 517, 1998a: 92), and Weber provided clear indications of what these subjects were in his own time, including in the thoroughly depersonalised capitalist economic sphere. Indeed my contention in this article is that it is this interplay between the 'rational' and the 'irrational' (unravelling in the first section below) that underpins for Weber the evolution of contemporary capitalism as a differentiated sphere of human action and its capacity for mobilisation, without any need to resort to the problematic notion of the contribution of capitalism to a 'common good' (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: xx). I bring out Weber's sketches of figures of contemporary types of human beings (the worker and the entrepreneur) and their formation and adaptation respectively in the second and third sections. This then allows me, in the fourth section, to set Boltanski and Chiapello's propositions regarding the dynamic and justification of contemporary capitalism against my understanding of Weber's analysis of the same – before concluding on the possibility of a new spirit.²

The spirit and dynamic of rational capitalism

As Weber explained in the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (hereafter *PE*) and the following 'Rebuttals', whereas the 'form' of capitalism had historically been filled by 'very different kinds of

2. This article is based on my recently completed PhD thesis (see Darmon 2011).

“spirit””, and, ‘could also—and most often [would]—stand in various graded “relations of elective affinity” to certain historical types of “spirit”’ (1910a: 200, 2001: 75), only the ‘specifically modern “spirit” of capitalism burst forth as a *mass phenomenon*. This is what matters here’ (1920: 42; 2002: 21).³ In particular, as Weber explained in chapter 2 of *PE*, ‘economic rationalism’, which Sombart makes the ‘basic motif of the modern economy’ (1920: 60), much pre-dated the advent of capitalism as a mass system. For economic rationalism to constitute, against traditionalism, the ‘spirit’ of a capitalist economic sphere which was fully differentiated and almost fully autonomous, there had to be a long ‘preparation’ and, fundamentally, the creation of a ‘type of human being (*Menschentum*) that made it [such rationality] his practically’ (1910b: 597).⁴ Economic rationalism of its own could not constitute the spirit that converted capitalism into a force ‘pervading life as a whole’ (1910b.: 587), this only happened once it was upheld by a component that instilled a whole ‘habitus’ into entrepreneurs and workers alike, ‘that made them very specifically suited to meet the demands of early modern capitalism’: the ‘spirit of the vocational-professional type of human being’ (*Geist des Berufsmenschentums*) (1910b: 592). *PE* is Weber’s demonstration of such process.

But Weber’s dedication to ‘the historical and theoretical knowledge of the general cultural significance of capitalist development’ (Jaffé, Sombart and Weber 1904: V) particularly stems from his assessment of the influence of capitalism for *present-day culture*, as Dieter Henrich showed in his analysis of the notion of significance (Henrich 1952: 81). And even though Weber stated the usually superfluous character of ‘religious factors’ for upholding advanced capitalism, even though he registered the ‘inner dissolution of the unity’ which had uniquely bound the Puritan’s personality (i.e. his ethical qualities) with his profession (1910b: 593), he still referred to the same ‘spirit of capitalism’ in the contemporary period. Indeed the content of this spirit consists in treating work and money-making as ‘absolute ends in themselves’ pursued rationally; not as a means towards a just sufficient income, towards unfettered gain, adventure and/or prestige. In other words, in putting man ‘at the service of his business and

3. I have reinstated the inverted commas for ‘spirit’ which are omitted in the Kalberg translation.

4. Wilhelm Hennis has established the centrality of *Menschentum* and its fate for Weber, and it seems to me that this importance is now widely acknowledged whether designated as ‘central’ or not (see Hennis 2000a).

not the reverse' (1920: 46, 54) remains the order of the day: work and money-making are to be treated by the worker and the entrepreneur respectively as if to a calling, a vocation. But the mode of mobilisation operated by this spirit is wholly different: where it had once consisted in ethical education through the constant inner and external checking of one's ethical qualification, the relation to one's work is now usually 'a pure product of adaptation' to the conditions of advanced capitalism (1920: 55; 2002: 32). However this also means that capitalism continues to be unable to mobilise purely on the basis of rational material interests: indeed in *PE*, Weber had uncovered how the interplay of the rational and the irrational had been at the core of the mass mobilisation for modern rational capitalism. But he also uncovered this dynamic at the heart of advanced capitalism. My argument here is that it is in fact this interplay that constitutes the spirit of capitalism and its dynamic. In order to see this more clearly, we need first to detour through Weber's discovery of the spirit of another sphere of human action, the 'spirit' of Western music.

As shown so well by Christoph Braun (1992, 1999), Weber's study of music was in fact chiefly a study of its 'spirit', spurred by the specifically Western mode of rationalisation of chords (tonal ratio), and of the way in which it mobilised 'life', here the will and passion of composers, for musical creation⁵. How then does the 'spirit' of the Western harmonic music system compare with the 'spirit' of capitalism?

In the music study (Weber 2004),⁶ Weber unravelled and conceptualised the inner momentum of a worldly cultural sphere, the Western harmonic music system, in which the impetus of rationalisation so to speak discovers its own in-built irrationality, and where this interplay between the rational and the irrational and the way in which it is resolved becomes constitutive of musical creativity. He showed that (1) 'all rationalised harmonic music', i.e. based on the rationalisation of chords, is faced with the 'inescapable' difference

5. Weber's study of the musical sphere also unveiled the relations between the 'external conditions' of the sphere and its inner dynamic, in particular the way in which the organisation of production (of technical means, e.g. instruments) and consumption itself impacts on the inner dynamic of the sphere (see Weber 2004).

6. The title of the English translation, *The rational and social foundations of music* (Weber 1958), is the translation of a posthumous title devised by the editors (Marianne Weber and Theodor Kroyer), but Weber most often referred to it as his 'history of music' (which is consistent with the fact that the study is mostly about the inner momentum of the music sphere).

between the mathematical proportions corresponding to the chords and their 'empirical behaviour' (i.e. on a string): this difference, by a very small, inaudible, interval called the 'Pythagorean comma', thus constitutes an in-built irrationality in the musical rationalisation process.⁷ (2) The tension between the rational and the irrational becomes constitutive of different music systems and of their creativity, as they adopt a principle for productively coping with it whilst inevitably perpetuating it. (3) The encounter of that principle (e.g. 'tonal ratio' in the Western music system) with the needs of musical expression ('life') actualises the tension in a way that is creative and 'form-giving', in what can be termed the ever evolving 'spirit' of Western music (1924a: 455), but can also ultimately undermine the whole system, if stretched too far.

On the basis of this discovery, Weber sought to demonstrate that the interplay between the rational and the irrational is prompted by every rationalisation process and is 'dynamically of the highest developmental significance' (1988a: 438, 1981: 179). But it cannot be contended that Weber found a 'Pythagorean comma' in all spheres: rationalisation processes, as they stumble on 'irrationalities', there is only rarely a pure effect of the deployment of the dynamic of rationalisation itself.

As far as the sphere of the capitalist economy is concerned, its spirit was bequeathed so to speak from outside. Economic rationalism had always been associated with capitalist forms, but it is the Puritans' restless need to prove themselves as worthy of salvation which brought about the systematisation of the rationalisation of economic activity as an end in itself (1991: 11-12); the 'inner (psychologically conditioned) interests' of a particular carrier stratum was thus a wholly irrational motive seen from the perspective of economic rationalism. In generalising his findings of the music study to the workings of rationality, Weber suggested that the in-built irrationalities of processes of practical rationalisation of life are directly traceable to the motives and interests of the carrier strata of such

7. In effect, though the consonant intervals (octave, fifth and fourth) obtained by pressing down the string of a one-string instrument ('monochord') in different places, correspond, in the length of the string segment, to mathematical 'ratios' (respectively $1/2$, $3/4$ and $2/3$, which, in addition only resort to prime numbers) – a discovery attributed to Pythagoras, the encounter between mathematical and musical ratios quickly found its limits, since, for example, cycles of fifths and octaves end up meeting on the same note, whereas the corresponding powers of their ratios never equalise (the difference is, precisely, the 'Pythagorean comma').

rationalisations. He put forward this hypothesis in the 'Categories' essay (1913), as well as, more explicitly, in the 'Introduction' to the *Economic Ethics* (already in the version published in 1915):

Phenomena apparently directly conditioned by instrumental rationality were actually historically brought into being through wholly irrational motives, and thereafter, because changing life conditions let them accrue a high degree of technical 'correct rationality', they survived as 'adaptations' and occasionally became universal (1988a: 435).

In the same way as in music, the Pythagorean 'comma' resisted complete rationalisation steered to tonal physics, the various great [music] systems of all peoples and ages differentiated themselves above all in the art and manner in which they have covered up or bypassed this inescapable irrationality, or, conversely, put it at the service of the richness of tonalities, this seemed to happen to the theoretical image of the world but even far more to the practical rationalisation of life. There too, each of the great types of rational methodical life conduct were characterised above all through the irrational presuppositions, taken as a given, that they had integrated. What these were was determined, at the very least to a very large extent, by the specificity of those strata which were the carriers of the methodical [conduct of] life in question, at the decisive time for its coining, i.e. by their external (socially conditioned) and inner (psychologically conditioned) interests (1991: 11-12).

Thus, contrary to the dynamic of rationalisation in music, which so to speak breeds its own inner irrationality (even though it is then human beings – composers – who actualise it and, through their creations, make this spirit ever evolve), the 'irrationality' of the ascetic Protestant quest and the economic rationalism of capitalism were brought together through a relation of 'affinity' or 'adequacy', without there being any necessity to such relation.⁸ Thus at the same time as ascetic Protestantism decisively contributed to the coining of '*homo oeconomicus*', it lodged irrationality within the capitalist spirit: indeed Weber contended that there could have been no mobilisation for modern rational capitalism without such irrational underpinning. Here again, we see that the spirit of capitalism is deployed

8. As we shall see below, another modality of 'encounter' between the rational and the irrational components of a 'spirit' is that of the ethical 'transfiguration' (*Verklärung*) of the carrier stratum – such a phenomenon is pointed by Weber with regard to the bureaucracy of the Chinese empire, whose carriers' practical rationalism is 'transfigured' by Confucianism, the outcome constituting the 'spirit' of Chinese bureaucracy (Weber 1998: 148); as well as with regard to the 'spirit of rational bureaucracy' (see below in text).

in the tension between the rational and the irrational (or, said in more rigorous terms, between a kind of rationality and what from the point of view of such rationality is irrational). The spirit of capitalism, like the spirit of music, is not and, cannot be a spirit of pure rationality, as it mobilises life towards human accomplishments; and such life cannot be reduced to the mere expression of calculative rationality – the human being cannot be reduced to the rational ‘economic subject’ whom Weber had characterised in his 1898 lectures in economics (Hennis 2000a: 121). The following two sections illustrate the actualisation of this interplay for the continued shaping of ‘adequate’ workers and entrepreneurs.

But the tension between the rational and the irrational not only constitutes the spirit of rationalised spheres of human action, it also spurs their dynamic. The initial ‘lodging’ of irrationality at the heart of modern capitalism triggers its resurgence and irruption under the guise of material, substantive rationalities opposed to formal calculative rationality, which is how Weber conceptualised the dynamic of crises of capitalism. In particular, it is because the economic pursuit has been made a pursuit in its own right (initially for other-worldly motives) that the orientation of economic action ‘to the provision for the desire of utilities (*Nutzleistungen*)’, ‘or chances of disposal’ thereof, has, ‘since the middle of the 19th century’, been effectuated in a ‘capitalistic way’, that is to say, with ‘absolute indifference (in the case of a fully free market)...towards all substantive postulates whatsoever’, and hence also towards the distribution of income. The provision of goods is steered merely to the ‘constellation of marginal utilities’ in ‘the income group with typically the purchasing power and the purchasing inclination for a given utility’. This is a ‘limit of principle to its rationality’ but one which is constitutive of the rationalised capitalist order (1922: 31, 59; 1924b: 1, 239; Tribe 2006: 23). Indeed the tension between the (relative) dependency of modern capitalism on the ‘constellation of marginal utilities’ for the consumption of its products and its striving for enforcing what classical economists considered as the natural ‘whip of hunger’ (Weber 1924b: 240) ultimately opened up a terrain for social struggle and regulations which stretched formal capitalist rationality, and, with socialism, for the destruction of formal capitalistic rationality and the steering of the economy purely to a material rationality of provision for need (1922: 60). Weber also pointed to the irruption of speculative interests as another kind of material rationality which interferes with formal capitalist rationality and causes tensions, and

periodically, crises (e.g. 1924b: 16; Tribe 2006: 37). This was part of the momentum set off by the capitalist spirit, with its anchor in the initial, constitutive, resolution of the tension through the heralding of work and money-making as *Beruf*, as ends in themselves—a resolution that itself bore *in nuce* all the future tensions, as the calling gave way to adaptation. It is in this ever renewed tension that 'life' is mobilised and that human beings engage in capitalist ventures and work. The question is thus: how did Weber account for the resulting shaping of 'forms of life' suitable for the ever renewed and lively, active adaptation to the capitalist order?

The shaping of the modern worker

In chapter II of *PE*, Weber stressed the extremely artificial character of the mobilisation expected from workers, at least from the point of view of traditionalist rationality, whereby human beings seek to earn what they need with the minimum of exertion. The 'unnatural' consideration of work as a duty in itself could only come, in Weber's view, as a result of a 'prolonged process of education' (1920: 46). Although capitalism was likely to still need a 'powerful helper' (of a strength comparable to that of e.g. a Pietistic education) at times (1920: 47), Weber considered that this education process was now perpetuated through the conditions of economic selection as such:

Thus present day capitalism, which has succeeded in ruling economic life, educates and creates, through economic selection, the economic subjects—both entrepreneurs and workers—that it needs for itself (1920: 37).

The way in which and extent to which capitalist firms shaped human beings into adapted workers was at the core of a collaborative survey on the problems of workers and the conditions of industrial work in Germany between 1907 and 1911, launched by the *Verein für Sozialpolitik* (Association for Social Policy) and which Weber helped to coordinate. His guidelines to the collaborators on the survey asked:

What sort of men (*Was für Menschen*) does the modern large industry stamp (*prägt*) through its immanent characteristics, and what occupational fate (*berufliches Schicksal*) (and through this, indirectly, extra-occupational fate as well) does it prepare for them? (1924c: 37).⁹

9. An English translation is available (see Weber 1971). Weber wrote the 'Methodological introduction' once the survey questionnaire and workplan had already been adopted. Alfred Weber had drafted the questionnaire, and it is not known

This question, which heads part III of the 'Methodological introduction' to the survey, i.e. the methodology proper, synthesised and prioritised the two overarching opening questions:

The present survey seeks to establish, on the one hand, what effect large self-contained industry exerts on the personal particularity, the occupational fate and extra-occupational 'style of life' of workers (*Arbeiterschaft*), what physical and psychic qualities it develops, and how these are expressed in the general life conduct of workers (*Arbeiterschaft*); on the other hand, to what extent large industry, for its part, is bound, in its development capacity and development direction by given qualities of its workforce (*Arbeiterschaft*), generated by its ethnic, social, cultural provenance, tradition and life conditions (1924c: 1).

The former formulation shows that it is the way in which the profitability driven 'apparatus' set up in firms of the large 'self-contained' industry seeks to shape worker's performance (*Leistung*), so as to get maximum profit from it, which is at the core of the survey, rather than the influence of workers' backgrounds on the performance and orientation of the firm.¹⁰ Weber suggested that this takes place through procedures and systems of selection, remuneration, control, which he later generically referred to as 'discipline'.¹¹

Indeed the whole practice of discipline towards workers was contained in the invention of 'formally free labour', which Weber analysed in *Economy and Society* (hereafter *ES*). Formally free labour, of which one should not forget that it is predicated upon the 'coercive power of the property order', presupposes the employers' freedom of selection according to performance, the 'selection of the efficient (*leistungsfähig*)'. This, for the bulk of workers, happens 'on the job', through the 'on the job learning test' – but does not stop there: productivity is continuously monitored and the associated threat of dismissal is in fact the continuation of selection on a daily basis (1922: 71, 88; 1924c: 46).

whether Max took part in this first draft, but both the questionnaire and the work plan were collectively worked upon in the session of the responsible subcommittee of the *Verein* in June 1908, and both can be regarded as the product of collective work. See Schluchter and Frommer 1998: 229-30.

10. Weber made this clear in a letter to his brother: 'The inner structure and life chances which the self-contained large industry forms and creates, would in any case in my opinion be the *first* factor to investigate...' (Letter dated 3/9/1907 quoted in Schluchter and Frommer 1998: 227).

11. In the lecture on 'Socialism' (1918) and above all in chapter II of *ES* ('The sociological categories of economic action'), written in 1920.

Part of this continuous selection process is, in addition, transferred to the worker himself, since the 'work-seeker' must make sure and show that he is up to the task – permanently so. As is well known, the remuneration system can also play its role in this.¹² Overall Weber points here to the emotional, affective component of the discipline of 'formally free labour', through the use of the word *Sorge*, which is both worry and care (the latter meaning also responsibility or duty for the care of). Thus, the transfer to the worker of the responsibility for family maintenance and for permanent self-selection is not only a transfer of responsibility: by generating anxiety and worry, it ties the worker further to his job with an economy of means that far outdoes the systems of unfree labour (1922: 87). This constitutes much of the enforced 'spirit of adaptation' of workers to advanced capitalism since productivity measurements lead workers to be constantly concerned with their own adequacy for the job or task.

The survey on industrial workers aimed at exploring not only the conditions and implications of selection but also the modalities of adaptation to the task and their own consequences on workers' 'style of life' and 'qualities'.¹³ For that purpose, the observation of the production process, and more particularly of the operation of machines, coupled with worker interviews, were meant to test the hypothesis that the key qualities required for the operation of a machine determined not only the selection of workers but also their occupational

12. This is especially the case with the system standing in closer 'adequacy' with 'formally free labour' and rational calculation: piece-rates. This system compels the worker to hold his own productivity constantly in check, so as to maintain sufficient earnings for survival. In forcing thus the implacable formal rationality of profitability calculations directly on to the worker himself, this remuneration system pertains to the most 'eminently dynamic, economically revolutionary' systems of income available in capitalism and as such it faced considerable resistance from workers' material rationalities, as noted by Weber in *PE* (1920: 44-5). By contrast 'salaries' (paid for a period of time) are 'economically conservative': they do not advance the cause of formal rationality, but rather find themselves on the side of material rationalities (1922: 87, 121; 1924c: 46).

13. Although, in his review of 'psychophysical' studies (1998b), Weber acknowledged the considerable work carried out on these issues by the 'natural sciences' (experimental psychology being considered as such), he also very much highlighted the limits of 'psychophysics' (and, by the same token, of studies of heredity), especially with regard to 'characterological' classifications, which in his view were far from being thought through and even remained inferior to the ancient notion of the 'four humours' (*Temperamente*) (see Hennis 2000b: 36-38). Weber therefore advised his colleagues to rely on their own observation, intuition and everyday categories to describe and analyse differences in dispositions and interests (1924c: 25).

path within the firm—and thus their objective ‘occupational fate’ (1924c: 11).

A key to understanding in what ways the task has a structuring effect on the whole make-up of the worker’s life, his whole ‘*habitus*’, is Weber’s treatment of the question of workers’ attitudes to job change and change in general, a crucial question for analysing the course of rationalising ‘developmental trends’ in the large capitalist industry. Taking into account that job change is only revealing where earnings are not negatively affected,¹⁴ it does appear, Weber remarked, that workers may be willing to move firm and place, but not alter the contents of the job. So that one can wonder whether some kind of habituation to the machine and the task one performs with it takes place, which perhaps even translates into an inner attuning (*Eingestelltheit*) to the task. Weber expressed strong reservations with regard to the possibility, aired by psychiatrists and experimental psychologists Wilhelm Wundt and Emil Kraepelin, of ascertaining a psycho-physical attuning (i.e. the inner effectuation of set dispositions through ‘practice’), as well as with regard to the relevance of doing so. Nevertheless, he did consider it a definite possibility, worth exploring, that workers’ attitude to job and task change could be linked to the nature of the work and to an ‘inner binding’ to the job, which in part could take the shape of a feeling of ‘mastery’ (*Beherrschen*) over the machine (1924c: 15).

In other words, I would contend that Weber was looking to account for workers’ ‘subjective attitude’ to their job directly in *Eingestelltheit*, i.e. here through the inscription of an habitual orientation to the job as unintended consequence of imposed discipline. Whilst such habituation could be rationally encouraged and spurred by firms, since the general idea is that familiarity with a task brings about maximum output (1924c: 23), it is nonetheless at the same time irrational, in the sense of engendering an inner bonding (*Bindung*) of the worker to his task, job and machine: a combination of habituation and affect which must stand as the ‘polar opposite’ to economic self-interest, be it under the guise of need (1922: 15). Indeed habituation could also very well be targeted and crushed by that very discipline, if it

14. The ‘Methodological introduction’ makes clear that one has to start from the premise that workers’ attitude to job change is overwhelmingly determined by the economics of the equation: and since any job change requires a period of adaptation during which one’s productivity is likely to be below standards—which, in systems of remuneration through piece-rates immediately translates into lower earnings, workers usually resist change (Weber 1924c: 23-24).

was seen as hampering the workings of the economic logic (e.g. as workers were made to be more and more mutually substitutable—see Weber 1988b: 318).

In chapter II of the conceptual part of *ES*, Weber summed up the 'external' and 'inner (motivational)' processes shaping workers:

A decisive impulse for all economic action under conditions of a market economy is normally: 1. For the propertyless: a) the compulsion (*Zwang*) exerted by the risk of complete deprivation (*Unversorgtheit*) for themselves and those personal 'dependents' (children, wives, sometimes parents) whose care the individual(s) typically assume(s); b) but also, though to a varying extent—an inner adjustment (*Eingestelltheit*) to economically productive work as form of life (*Lebensform*) (1922: 60).

Weber thus pointed to the formation of a 'form of life' (and various sub-forms) developing amongst workers, which was more and more alien to the traditional or pious form of life of worker communities described in *PE*, but nevertheless was both fostered by and underpinned dedication to work. Dedication to work as such was not effectuated through the vocational conduct of life (*Lebensführung*) anymore, but through a form of life, with its habits and affects, a form of life that could even be 'sublimated' into a value, as Weber suggests in the 'Basic Sociological Concepts' (1922: 12).

The shaping of the modern entrepreneur

In depicting those entrepreneurs in the section of *PE* which introduces us to the 'spirit of capitalism' Weber no doubt had in mind those families akin to Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* whose religious piety, still impregnating their life in the first half of the 19th century, had become etiolated in the second half of the century, but in which all other aspects of the early capitalist entrepreneur's life conduct had been transmitted from one generation to the next.¹⁵ Weber pointed out, in particular, those 'personal moral qualities' stemming from earlier 'ethical maxims', such as the feeling of inner duty and responsibility to one's business; dedication to the task (*Sache*); hard work (Weber remarked on various occasions that managing a firm is also 'work', 'labour', i.e. *Arbeit*, even though the term has come to be associated with the working class);¹⁶ and trustworthiness in the eyes

15. Weber dates the advent of the modern rational capitalist spirit amongst German entrepreneurs back to 'about the middle of the last century' (1920: 51).

16. E.g. see Weber 1922: 62.

of both the clients and the workforce, so that they will follow him when he 'innovates' and imprints his 'new style' (1920: 53).

But Weber's imagined interview with entrepreneurs about their 'motivation' (*Motivierung*) - probably a reflection of very real conversations - finally brings about the 'only possible answer': that their business has become 'indispensable to their life' (1920: 54). Although Weber immediately connected this assertion to the calling in which one puts oneself 'at the service of one's business and not the reverse', the former formulation points to an attachment, to an ingrained habit, a way of life, whereas the latter rather emphasises the subordination proper of who assimilates inner-worldly dedication to the task with proof before God and before one's fellows: perhaps it could be said that in that process, vocation subsides into lifestyle.¹⁷

This is how the paradoxical paragraph of *PE* chapter 2 regarding the spirit of contemporary capitalism as a product of pure adaptation can be understood in my view, as far as the entrepreneur is concerned:

At present under our political, private legal and market institutions, with the business forms and the structure proper to our economy, this spirit of capitalism might be understandable, as said, purely as a product of adaptation. The capitalist economic order necessitates such dedication (*Hingabe*) to the 'vocation' of money-making, it is a form of behaviour towards external goods which is so very 'adequate' to this structure, so intricately tied to the conditions for victory in the struggle for economic existence, that in effect there cannot be any mention anymore, *today*, of any necessary relation between this 'chrematistic' life conduct and any kind of unitary world-view (1920: 55-56).

The 'vocation' of money-making, the 'chrematistic' life conduct used to be anchored in an inner drive, a 'dedication', for reaching beyond: the early capitalist entrepreneurs were only 'adapted' to capitalist requirements to the extent that they transformed the world in so doing, for God's glory. But in becoming simply 'adequate' to capitalist forms and structures, the vocational life conduct has utterly lost all trace of the inner psychological tension that had spurred it in the first place. Dedication to money-making as such has simply become the habitus associated, for entrepreneurs, with advanced capitalism - an exemplar of that 'lifestyle of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism' (1920: 203).

Indeed, when reflecting in *ES* on the motivations for economic action (notwithstanding the primacy of the striving for income) in

17. However Weber himself did not distinguish neatly between the two terms.

the context of a comparison between market and planned economies, Weber pointed out, alongside risk taking with one's capital, 'an inner "professional" adjustment ("*berufsmäßige*" *Eingestelltheit*) towards rational acquisitive activity'. *Eingestelltheit* is equivalent to *Einstellung*, an inner adjustment or attuning towards something which may rest, Weber tells us in the 'Basic Sociological Concepts', on 'traditional, affectual or value-rational devotion... or on purposive-rational interests' (1922: 26). Yet such adjustment or attuning evokes a durable orientation for which one is set or sets oneself – and thus a mode of relation which creates a habitual inner way of being, and must ultimately contradict pure purposive-rational calculation. It has for the 'lifestyle' and habitus of the contemporary entrepreneur the same function as that inner disposition and orientation referred to by Weber as *Gesinnung* for the life conduct and habitus of the early capitalist entrepreneur, but is wholly devoid of its ethical meaning, for *Eingestelltheit* simply comes about as a result of the 'political, private legal and market institutions, with the business forms and the structure proper to our economy', through which the selection of economic subjects is operated. *Eingestelltheit* and *Gesinnung* both set the individual inwardly to certain orientations and behaviours. Yet *Gesinnung* roots the capitalist life conduct into 'personal life' (1910b: 573), that is to say into a life with ethical qualities – or, in non-Weberian language, a life in which the person overcomes the self in the inner construction inherent in her pursuit; whereas *Eingestelltheit* rather entrenches self-centred passions – in particular, as Weber explained in the passage of *ES* already referred to, the enjoyment of competition and power as such:

The decisive impulse for all economic action under the conditions of a market economy is ... for those sharing in the chances of economic enterprises: (a) one's own capital-risk and own gain chances, combined with (b) an inner 'professional' adjustment ('*berufsmäßige*' *Eingestelltheit*) towards rational acquisitive activity as (α) 'proof' ('*Bewährung*') of one's performance (*Leistung*); as (β) form of autonomous free hand with those human beings dependent on one's own orders; and besides γ) with the chances of an undetermined number of people to access important cultural or life goods: in a word, power (1922: 50).

The *ES* portrait, with its focus on the drive towards risk and profit, as well as towards economic activity as a test of one's performance, suggests the universe of games, where one's own purely egotistic passions can come to the fore. Indeed Weber had evoked such universe at the end of *PE* as that of the American entrepreneurs:

In the region where it is unleashed most, in the United States, the acquisitive striving, stripped from its religious-ethical meaning, tends today to associate with purely agonistic passions, which not infrequently imprint on it the character of a sport (1920: 204).

The reference to agon ('agonistic passions') must not mislead us: whereas Weber considered struggle as a necessity for confronting the world, such a stance is completely opposed to indulging in agonistic passion as a style of life, as is the case here. Furthermore such games remain, in principle, within the calculative rationality of modern capitalism. They should thus also be radically distinguished from any spirit of adventure, such as found amongst entrepreneurs prior to the advent of rational capitalism: 'however hazardous from a purely objective point of view, [risk-taking] has absolutely not the meaning of "adventure", since it is a component of a rationally calculated business deal, imposed by the "task" itself' (1910b: 597).

The leader of the modern firm is not only a market actor, he exerts his power within his firm: how is that power to be characterised? Modern firms have become bureaucracies, indeed they can be described as 'unequalled models of strict bureaucratic organisation' (2009b: 25).¹⁸ The 'objective discharge of business' is put to the service of 'the pursuit of naked interest', and this means, vis-à-vis workers, the enforcement of naked power, since the only principle is the rational profitability of the firm. Weber's reference to the 'free hand' of the business leader over his workforce corresponds to the notion of a 'naked' power: the term 'naked' (as in 'naked interest situation', 'naked market principle', 'naked property') surges up again and again in Weber's account of the ideal-typical 'market situation', to signal the complete uprooting of any ethical regulation, the complete opposition to any form of ethical life conduct and the pure interplay of market forces (1922: 15, 23; 2009a: 78-88). Thus, again, the total power involved in the management of a capitalist business is 'adequate' to contemporary capitalism and its rationality. The institutions of the market economy are there to foster the corresponding aspirations and attitudes in entrepreneurs and business leaders, to 'set' them towards the correct behaviours. But these,

18. Edith Hanke notes that this link between bureaucracy and capitalism was frequently made amongst contemporary scholars (and Marxist politicians), especially with regard to their 'cultural significance' (Alfred Weber) and to their combined levelling effects. Weber was alone however in characterising bureaucracy in a systematic way (especially with regard to the administration without regard to the person). See Hanke 2009: 245.

Weber insisted, are so incomprehensible and reprehensible, not only to a traditionalist eye, but from the 'standpoint of personal happiness' (1920: 54), from the standpoint of what 'we may designate as a "natural" way of being human (36), of what 'human beings will "by nature"' (44):¹⁹ in so doing, in ensuring *Eingestelltheit* towards these materially irrational behaviours, they also create a frame of mind and a way of life which can become entrenched and turn into ends in themselves rather than remain subordinated to economic rationality, as is evidenced in the way in which the reserve shown in the exercise of power by the ideal-typical entrepreneur has given way to enjoyment of power as such (the former tends to be more emphasised in *PE*, the latter in *ES*).

Justification and regulation in contemporary capitalism

What, then, is the status of justification and its role in mobilisation for contemporary capitalism? For Boltanski and Chiapello, capitalism requires 'engagement' and such engagement is dependent on the capacity of capitalism to 'incorporate a moral dimension', that is to say on its amenability to evaluation according to negotiated standards of justice and thus on the possibility both of justification and critique (2005: 485-87).

In Weber's analysis, as I have shown, contemporary capitalism rests on adaptation, and it is *Eingestelltheit* that generally ensures, for workers and entrepreneurs alike, the continued orientation of 'economic subjects' to work and rational money-making for their own sake, by setting individuals to such pursuits and the 'form of life' or 'lifestyle' associated with them, and by attuning their interests and affects. In the same way as the regulations of capitalism need not, indeed cannot, be grounded in any ethics anymore, no ethical foundations are needed for the mobilisation of individuals:

Still less, naturally, can it be contended that the subjective appropriation of these ethical maxims on the part of its individual carriers, as for example the entrepreneurs or workers of modern capitalistic firms, is a condition of the further existence of present-day capitalism. The capitalistic economy of the present day is an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which is given to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable casing (*Gehäuse*) in which he must live. It

19. Weber's references to the idea of nature in these contexts are always between inverted commas – thus pointing to what is generally understood as a way of life close to natural cycles rather than to Weber's own concept of nature.

imposes the norms of economic action on the individual, in so far as he is entangled in the system of market relationships (1920: 36-37).

As emerges from Weber's Vocation lectures, particularly 'Politics as vocation and profession', to conduct one's life in an ethical sense in the contemporary age demands that we should 'stretch beyond', towards a cause or personal creation that challenges the everyday, whilst facing up to the conditions for that striving in the life order of its deployment (1994a: 88). Such conduct of life is an impossibility in the contemporary capitalist sphere, which but commands adaptation to its conditions.

This does not mean that economic participation merely takes place through dull unconscious habit. Weber made this very explicit for the third key (and rising) figure of the economic sphere, as well as key actor of the governmental sphere, namely the *Fachmensch*, the specialist type of human being. The *Fachmensch* is characterised by his specialist training and has a position as administrative employee or official. He is the carrier of the rationality of 'objectivation', in the sense of calculation and de-personalisation, initially in the 'state cosmos', but increasingly also in the 'cosmos of the modern rationalised capitalist economy' (1991: 214, 230) and that of modern science. However the *Fachmensch* is far from being a mere product and bearer of the rationalisation processes of the depersonalised orders. He is not content with abiding by the logic of objectivation of the orders in which his action is inscribed, but rather 'transfigures' this ratio into a value:

This objective purpose is of course usually underpinned by 'cultural value ideas' thought of as realised in a community – 'State', 'Church', 'Commune', 'Party', 'Firm' – which, as surrogates for this-worldly or even other-worldly personal rulers, transfigure it ideologically (*ihn ideologisch verklärend*) (2009b: 14).

This, as well as the more general diffusion of the 'value of good administration' (1988b: 221, 1994: 158) in the 'public' at large, infuses him with energy, and even relative initiative and autonomy within the boundaries set by orders and procedures (1988b: 223). Yet all the energy, initiative and autonomy are directed to the reproduction and further extension of the rationalised everyday: as orders can very much be 'actively carried out' (1988a: 472), the dynamics of the de-personalised orders creates what could be called figures of active adaptation, who, in the manner of Nietzsche's last men, believe that they have 'discovered happiness'.

The impossibility of ethics and vocational life conduct in the economic sphere does not mean either that there does not arise a need

for individuals to justify themselves as economic subjects taking part in the capitalist system, especially in front of 'the pathetic anti-chrematistic protest from artistic, ethical and above all simply human points of view' against the spirit of capitalism. These 'protests' are echoed by the two main currents of critique distinguished by Boltanski and Chiapello, namely the artist and social critique (though Weber set them against a background of wider 'human protest'). But, Weber very clearly stated in a crucial passage of the 'Final Rebuttal', such justification lacks all trace of that 'consistent unity of ethical self-justification' that had characterised Protestant early capitalists, 'even amongst the sternest men'. Weber radically questioned the status of justification in a sphere resting on adaptation: it could only amount to the 'legitimation' of one's participation in the capitalist economy, and resorted to discourses – such as 'modern-style liberal' claims that capitalism is 'a somehow relatively optimal means of making the relative best of the relative best of worlds' – which could only be 'surrogates, easily recognisable as such', for the ethics once held (1910b: 574; 2001: 102). It is 'the interests underpinning commercial and social policies [that] tend to determine conceptions of the world (*Weltanschauungen*)' (1920: 56), not the reverse.

The interplay between rationality and irrationality set out by Weber nevertheless also points to the crucial role of material rationalities for the regulation of advanced capitalism, and, in that sense, the interplay unravelled between capitalist formal rationality and substantive rationalities is not dissimilar from the dialectic of critique and justification/regulation exposed in *The new spirit. Eingestelltheit* does not only secure adaptation: it also creates renewed tensions between formal and material rationalities which in turn fuel the crises and the struggles that make up the dynamic of capitalism.

But the question arises, then, as to the status of the 'moral dimension' allegedly incorporated by capitalism. For Weber, as is well known, the peculiarity of capitalist objectivation lies precisely in its 'neither ethical, nor anti-ethical, but simply non-ethical' character (2009b: 196). The regulations set up as a result of 'ordered struggle' are subordinated to the rationality of the market, they are introduced to the extent that they ultimately uphold such logic: indeed this could not be otherwise in a capitalist system.²⁰ The 'moral' – or

20. Weber very much supported such 'ordered struggles' and considered it a matter for social policy to uphold their possibility, as shown for example in a letter sent out as part of his attempt to create a working group stemming from the left wing of the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*: he denounced 'the increasing pointlessness of orderly

material – checks on capitalism are indeed brought about by human beings acting upon the dynamic set off by capitalism itself, but that does not make capitalism a contributor to the common good. The capitalist economy is simply ‘the most rational form for procuring the material goods indispensable to all inner-worldly culture’, as Weber indicated in his recapitulation of the accomplishments of the inner-worldly value spheres towards the end of the ‘Intermediate Reflection’ (1991: 230).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to explain Weber’s view of the modalities through which ‘today’s capitalism, which has succeeded in ruling over economic life’, selects ‘for itself the economic subjects – entrepreneurs and workers – that it needs’. Such selection amounts to ‘educat[ing] and shap[ing]’ (1920: 37): Weber’s reluctant use of the notion of selection points to the need to look at the wider conditions of production of patterns of conduct. Indeed, as in the music sphere, it is the dynamic of interplay between ‘ratio’ and the irrationalities it raises, but also the interplay between ‘ratio’ and ‘life’ (an overlapping but not equivalent relation), which shapes types of ‘economic subjects’ – even in such an objectivated, de-personalised sphere as the modern capitalist economy: this is why even the rational capitalist economy constitutes a ‘life order’.

Weber did not contend that all spirit had vanished from the ‘carapace, as hard as steel’ of rationalised capitalism: only the ascetic spirit had fled from it, but its heir, demanding dedication to work and money-making ‘as if’ through vocation, was, and still is, necessary (from the point of view of capitalist rationality). This spirit, like the inner-worldly ascetic spirit, develops in the interplay between

strikes, which results from the increasing predominance/superiority of the entrepreneurial organisations of all sorts in connection with judicial and police bullying; and the systematic formation of subsidised troops for the protection of employers within the workforce [NB this is how trade unions used to refer to the workers’ committees set up with the support of employers]; and he pledged to ‘fight without reservation the conditions of capitalist rule in the model of Pittsburg, the Saar region, of the heavy industry in Westphalia and Silesia and the help it receives from state power (Staatsgewalt), because we want to live in a country of citizens, not serfs’ (1998c: 750). This contest around the conditions of strikes can be said to constitute a ‘test’ in Boltanski and Chiapello’s sense, i.e. a ‘privileged moment of judgement, of evaluation and hence selection, of remuneration, of positive or negative sanction’ – from which ‘the order derived’ must be ‘held to be just’ (2005: 489-90).

the rational and the irrational. As the example of the shaping of the worker has shown, adaptation mobilises affects, e.g. worry, attachment, as well as bonding and meaning. Furthermore Weber's analysis of the *Fachmensch* suggested that adaptation takes energy, drive, even initiative; and that it is facilitated by 'transfigurations' of rationality into values which self-justify ourselves in our own eyes. Unless this is recognised, and unless the antagonism between such forms of active adaptation and the liberty at the heart of Weber's notion of 'life conduct' is acknowledged, we are bound to fail to see that our own age is an age of fundamental repetition, rather than one of any 'new spirit'. We are also bound to confuse new forms of mobilisation of the workforce (through new forms of discipline) with the enhanced possibility for conduct, and thus to be blind to the need of nurturing spheres of human accomplishment as spheres of vocation and to fight against their trivialisation through the ever extending market logic.

Finally, so long as the adjustments and changes in capitalist forms and regulation resulting from the settling of capitalist crises and struggles abide by the formal calculative rationality of capitalism, and so long as adaptation to such rationality prevails, it may be contended with Weber that it is the same capitalist system and capitalist spirit which are thus perpetuated: without any new economic rationality, there is no 'new spirit of capitalism'. But although refusing to risk any prognosis, Weber also cautioned that the absence of the possibility of any rooting of capitalism in the 'personality as a whole' was not innocuous for capitalism itself:

And it would be a serious mistake to believe that this circumstance remains irrelevant to the position of capitalism in culture as a whole, including first its cultural effects but equally its inner essence and finally its fate (1910b: 574; 2001: 102; translation altered).

The rise of the 'last human beings' evoked at the end of *PE* undoubtedly counted as the kind of 'cultural effects' which Weber had in view. The 'forms of life', 'lifestyles' succeeding to *Lebensführung*, the attuning succeeding to *Gesinnung*, the transfiguration and legitimation of interests succeeding the calling, make advanced capitalism more amenable to challenges to its rationality. And what, if not a change of rationality, could affect the 'inner essence' and finally the 'fate' of capitalism? We may wonder whether the place assigned to speculative interests and the 'unfettered quest for gain' in present day capitalism are just one more instance of the tensions inherent in the momentum of the capitalist sphere or whether they point to

a displacement of formal economic rationality and thus to a real change of 'spirit'. Weber's teaching had sought to instil change from other quarters, and to ground challenges to the capitalist rule in terrains of vocation subtracted from the capitalist spirit, that is, in radical opposition to adaptation.

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