



# WEBERIANISM, MODERNITY AND THE FALL OF THE WALL

## WEBERIANISMO, MODERNIDADE E A QUEDA DO MURO

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## RESUMO

O autor trata da sempre presente e crescente atração exercida pelo pensamento de Weber, especialmente em seu *A ética protestante e o espírito do capitalismo*. O escritor é guiado pela hipótese de que essa atração é menos uma consequência das descrições e análises que do programa de sociedade implicitamente formulado nos trabalhos de Weber. Em outras palavras, resulta da concepção de modernidade alternativa tanto para o materialismo histórico quanto para um reacionarismo impregnado com o catolicismo romano, o qual recusa o completo desdobramento do processo de racionalização, compreendendo a abstração e impersonalidade de praticamente todo tipo de relações sociais. Os argumentos resultam de cuidadosa referência a vasta bibliografia sobre Weber bem como de referências ao próprio Max Weber. O trabalho discute as diversas frentes favoráveis e críticas do sistema weberiano, especialmente em períodos de crise política e social em diferentes situações políticas e históricas, examinando alguns argumentos dos pensadores dessas frentes. Conclui que a sociologia histórica de Weber tem um encantamento que aprisiona mesmo quando tentamos nos libertar dele. Assim se faz necessário que seus conceitos e postulados sejam constantemente revistos a partir de pesquisas empíricas, evitando que sejam reduzidos a uma coleção de considerações especulativas sobre a essência da modernidade.

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## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Ascetismo intramundo; espírito do capitalismo; racionalidade, capitalismo moderno.

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## ABSTRACT

The author deals with the always present and growing attraction exerted by Weber's thought, especially as expressed in his *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. The writer is guided by the hypothesis that this attraction derives less from Weber's descriptions and analyses than from the program of society he implicitly formulates, that is, from a conception of modernity alternative to both historical materialism and a reactio-

nism impregnated with Roman Catholicism, which refuses the full deployment of the process of rationalization, comprising the abstraction and impersonality of social relationships of nearly all kinds. The arguments result of careful reference to a vast bibliography on Weber, as well as reference to Max Weber himself. The paper discusses the different fronts pro and critical of Weberian system, specially in periods of social and political crisis in different political and historical situations, concluding that “[...] if Weber’s historical sociology, placed, whether or not one wants to agree with it, *am Spitze der Geschichte*, these theories whose spell binds us even as we try to struggle against it, are not be reduced to a collection of some certainly exciting, but purely speculative considerations about the essence of modernity, then they should constantly be challenged by empirical research trying to test, indeed to falsify, its most cherished and established notions and postulates.”

## KEYWORDS

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Inner-worldly asceticism; spirit of capitalism; rationality; modern capitalism.

Der Massstab also, mit dem Weber gemessen sein wird und den der Spezialist gerecheweise an seine Forschungen wird anlegen müssen, ist nicht derjenige der Richtigkeit im einzelnen, sondern die Fruchtbarkeit seiner Fragestellungen und Deutungen. (Abramowsk, 1966, p. 12.)

## 1. HEGEL, WEBER AND THE THEME OF RATIONALITY

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The literature on Max Weber’s interpretation of society and history keeps increasing, in many countries and languages, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the so-called “end of history”, which implied the failure of Marxism, once considered as the “unsurpassable philosophy of our century” (SARTRE, 1960). Weber is now being used as a kind of second line of defense of a certain conception of modernity and progress that had been threatened not only by the so-called “end of history” but also by the rise of the theories of postmodernism, which seemed to imply the exhaustion of the historical project that resulted from the Enlightenment.

It is largely (but certainly not only) his latent, perhaps even unconscious, Hegelianism that accounts for the increasing acceptance at this moment of his model of historical interpretation.

Yet, the very existence of a close relationship between our sociologist and G. W. F. Hegel is not altogether clear. Hegel is not mentioned in *The Protestant ethic* and Weber never admits to any kind of intellectual debt vis-à-vis the author of *Lessons on the philosophy of history*. To the contrary, he criticizes Roscher and the so-called German Historical School for what he considers their Hegelianism and deductivism (WEBER, 1968). Yet it is undeniable that, Weber, like Hegel, places rationality at the summit of history.

Concerning Weber, we have only to be reminded of the opening paragraphs of the Introduction to the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (1972), in which he asks himself “To what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having universal significance and value” (WEBER, 1958, p. 13)<sup>1</sup>. And he goes on to make it clear that, at least according to himself, it is the rationality of science, systematic theology, astronomy, medicine, chemistry, music, architecture, administration, and, finally, economy, that gives properly universal value to Western civilization. For Hegel, it is also in the West, and in the West only, that the spirit reaches rationality, by becoming conscious of itself in clarity, reflexion and freedom, which is but the consequence of the coincidence of its existing in itself and for itself “What makes the grandeur of our time is the recognition of freedom, the possession of the spirit by itself, that fact that it is in itself and for itself” (Hegel in HABERMAS 1988, p. 3).

The relationship between Weber and Hegel has been commented upon by several major commentators, the likes of Jürgen Habermas, Karl Loewith, Günter Abramowski, A. Müller-Armack, D. Henrich, Wolfgang Schluchter, Catherine

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from the *Protestant ethic* are drawn from this edition.

Colliot-Thélène, and many others<sup>2</sup>. At least at this stage there is but little to be added to their conclusions. Let us now turn to a problem which at first sight is quite a different one. It concerns the attraction Weber's thought – mainly as expressed in his essay on *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* – continues to exert, indeed that it more than ever before exerts nowadays. The guiding hypothesis of this paper is that this attraction derives less from Weber's descriptions and analyses than from the program of society he implicitly formulates, that is, from a conception of modernity alternative to both historical materialism and a reactionism impregnated with Roman Catholicism, which refuses the full deployment of the process of rationalization, comprising the abstraction and impersonality of social relationships of nearly all kinds<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. WEBER'S TWO-FRONT WAR

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In order to understand the birth of Weber's sociology of religion, one should adopt a methodology not really unlike that adopted by Weber himself in the sixth chapter, "Sociology of Religion", of *Economy and society*. One should look for the concrete interests, of a social and political kind, that can hardly fail to leave their imprint on all kinds of religious and philosophical preferences, although one needs not in the least imply that the latter are but mere epiphenomena of the former. One therefore should first of all study the *Sitz im Leben*<sup>4</sup> of Max Weber himself, his social, political, and historical context, which will certainly help us understand why

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<sup>2</sup> Habermas, 1988; Loewith, Weber, Marx, 1960, p. 1-67; Abramowski, 1966, p. 12; Müller-Armack, 1959; D. Henrich, 1952; Schluchter, 1979; Colliot-Thélène, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning this point, see Paul Ladrière, La Fonction Rationalisatrice de l'Éthique Religieuse dans la Théorie Wéberienne de la Modernité, *Archives des Sciences Sociales de la Religion*, 1986, 61/1. p. 105-125.

<sup>4</sup> Using this expression with the meaning it has in R. Bultmann's essays on New Testament theology. "This task supposes the idea that the literature in which the life of a community is expressed [...] has its source in the manifestations and in the needs of this community" (quoted from Rudolf Bultman. *L'histoire de la tradition synoptique*. Paris: Seuil, 1979, p. 18-19).

the great sociologist and historian veered toward certain theoretical choices rather than to others. It is well known that Weber was linked to a certain tradition that, during the heyday of Wilhelmine Germany, that is, during approximately the three decades previous to World War One, was threatened by pressures coming from both left and right.

Let us simplify by saying that to the left that threat was represented by the rise of the Social Democratic party, which, in spite of its internal disputes, based its program on the tenets of Marxist historical materialism. To the right, it was what can well be termed the counteroffensive of Roman Catholicism, with all it had of abhorrent, indeed of very abhorrent, to a liberal who, like Weber, had his deepest roots in the Protestant tradition. Let us not forget the *Kulturkampf* with all of its implications. That counteroffensive was well represented by the growth of the *Zentrum* (Catholic party) in the *Reichstag*<sup>5</sup>.

Wolfgang Mommsen (1985), in his well known book on *Max Weber und die Deutsche Politik, 1890-1920*, deals in several passages with the influence of the *Kulturkampf* on Weber. I will here limit myself to a single, if long, quotation, that sums up almost all that is necessary to say on this topic (MOMMSEN, 1985, p. 164):

[Germany's] internal political situation during the 90s gave Weber an extremely pessimistic vision of the future. Liberalism was in bad shape, with many divisions and dominated by an outdated ideology. The left was disunited and largely dominated by a severe dogmatism, the National-Liberals, obsessed by the problem of military security, became, in Prussia at least, the allies of the Conservatives headed by Miquel. The Reichstag was dominated by the Zentrum, but Weber, faithful to his liberal origins, was clearly opposed to this tendency. For Weber never forswore the spirit of the *Kulturkampf*, the fight against Ultramontanism, a fight to which he had passionately adhered in his youth.

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<sup>5</sup> For a somewhat similar approach to some concepts of Weber's sociology of religion, see Abraham, 1992.

To this Mommsen (1985, p. 165) adds the following passage from one of Weber's own letters:

According to my estimation, two powers, the State bureaucracy and the virtuous machinery of the Catholic Church [...] have the clearest chances to stamp all the rest under their feet. However limited the strength (but even so and just because of this) I may still have, I hold it as a command of human dignity to engage in the fight against those powers.

Weber, above all in *The Protestant ethic*, was thus engaged in a two-front war. Against historical materialism, he wanted to show how rationality and, as one of its consequences, economic rationalism, actually preceded the development of capitalism as an economic system. According to him, the spirit of capitalism, which, in spite of some qualifications, derives from the Protestant ethic, would be, as everyone knows, a necessary condition (altogether different from a sufficient condition) for the rise of modern capitalism, that is, of capitalism in the proper sense of the word, different, as he claims in his polemical point against the Werner Sombart of *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (LEIPZIG; DUNCKER; HUMBLLOT, 1911), from the vulgar capitalism based on no other motivation but "the impulse to acquisition, pursuit of gain, of money, of the greatest possible amount of money [...] common to all sorts and conditions of men at all times and in all countries of the earth" (WEBER, 1958, p. 17) leading straight to "the capitalism of promoters, large-scale speculators, concession hunters, and much modern financial capitalism even in peace time [...] and some, but only some, parts of large-scale international trade are closely related to it, today as always" (WEBER, 1958, p. 21).

Against the right, Weber renews an old theme of Protestant apologetics, concerning the beneficial impact of the Protestant churches on the economic, social, and intellectual progress of some nations and regions. In Brazil (or concerning Brazil), a most interesting polemical literature had been produced, on this subject, even prior to the publication or the diffusion of Max Weber's essays<sup>6</sup>. The hypothesis, not only of

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<sup>6</sup> For a somewhat similar approach to some concepts of Weber's sociology of religion, see Abraham, 1992.



a correlation or “affinity”, but, squarely, of the generation of modernity, with its economic, social, cultural, and political concomitants, by the “Protestant ethic” or by its secularized equivalents, also looms very large in Brazilian social science, whose basic query, although seldom given an explicit formulation, is “why are we not the United States?” Prominent authors such as Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1956), Vianna Moog (1955) and Roberto da Matta (1979), thinking that the Protestant ethic lies right at the source of American greatness<sup>7</sup>, have urged the need for a kind of cultural conversion if Brazil is ever to become a fully modern country.

### **3. BEFORE AND AFTER THE FALL OF THE WALL**

To the extent that Weber has been made to function as the standard-bearer of a certain moral community<sup>8</sup>, French sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1985) may be right in claiming that Weber’s ideal types, among them such basic concepts as inner-worldly asceticism, rationality, modern capitalism, etc, would but be equivalent to totemic symbols in that they express the identity and the interests of certain groups. Or, to put it in a different vocabulary, suggested by an earlier French interpreter, Augustin Cochin (1979), some of whose ideas were later adopted by the historian of the French Revolution François Furet (1978), Max Weber’s sociological system, in spite of all its valid claims to constitute the description and the interpretation of a concrete historical reality, could also be used as a *fiction nécessaire*, the expression, that is, of a certain community of thought (*société de pensée*).

Whether or not one agrees with this reading of Weberianism, it is nonetheless of great interest, for the history of

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<sup>7</sup> This should take the form of a “liquidation of roots”, such as suggested by Antônio Cândido commenting on Sérgio Buarque de Holanda: “considering that our past is an obstacle [...] the liquidation of roots is an imperative of our historical development [...] entailing an increasing loss of Iberian characteristics to the benefit of the paths open by the urban and cosmopolitan culture” Antônio Cândido, O significado de raízes do Brasil, in Buarque de Holanda, 1994, p. xlix.

<sup>8</sup> The author of this paper wishes to make it clear that he is very far from thinking that Max Weber can be reduced or interpreted only as the standard-bearer of a moral community.

social science, to study the process of “reception” of Weber in different countries and by different groups – often in conflict with one another – in the same countries<sup>9</sup>. Let us remember, in this context, the writings of Talcott Parsons, who among other things was the first translator of the *Protestant ethic* to English and who more than anyone else seems to have contributed to the diffusion of Weber’s ideas in the United States. Let us also remember the work of some of his disciples, like Everett Hagen, David McClelland, and others, who explicitly applied concepts of Weberian inspiration to the field of Sociology of Development<sup>10</sup>. It is well known that great importance was attributed, after World War Two, to the issue of the modernization of the so-called underdeveloped countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and even Southern Europe. Once again, Weber supplied the weapons for the fight against the reactionary right, including, at least in Latin America, the fight against “feudalism” and “traditionalism” intertwined with certain aspects of Catholicism. But he also supplied the intellectual weapons needed for the fight against the competing ideology of historical materialism, fully supported by the parties of the extreme left.

Yet, by the end of the 1960s Weberianism was increasingly viewed as out of fashion in this field of study, as shown, among others, by the devastating critique of Andre Gunder Frank (1969). Can we associate this latter trend to the actual failure of the model of modernization, allegedly deduced from Weber’s writings and believed to apply to practically all the countries of the Third World?

But whatever did happen, or did not happen, in the countries of the Third World, whether or not they developed according to principles and recipes claiming descent from *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, the Weberian

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<sup>9</sup> Concerning Weber’s reception in France, see Michael Pollak, *Max Weber en France: L’itinéraire d’une Oeuvre*, cahier no 3 de l’Institut d’Histoire du Temps Présent, Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1986; Monique Hirschhom, *Max Weber et la Sociologie Française*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Talcott Parsons, *The structure of social action*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1938; *Societies: Evolutionary and comparative perspectives*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1966; *The system of modern societies*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971; Everett Hagen, *On the theory of social change*, Homewood: Dorset, 1962; David McClelland, *The achieving society*, Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1961.

paradigm seems to have won the day due to events that took place right in the heart of Europe: that is, all that has been represented by, and associated with, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of “real-existing socialism” and the breakup of the Soviet Union and its empire, which could not, and did not fail to, entail a radical loss of credibility in the rival Marxist paradigm.

Very much in the same way that, after the fall of the Wall and subsequent events, only one superpower was left, of the two previously contending paradigms of development only the Weberian<sup>11</sup> was left, at least for those who did not want to accept the idea of the “end of history”, such as expressed, for instance, in Jean-François Lyotard’s (1979) analysis concerning “la fin des grands récits”, leading ultimately to the meaninglessness of history and to the collapse of the notion of progress. This is why adhesion to Weberianism may be considered as a second line of defense of progressive thought, such as derived or influenced by Hegel, who is at least latently or unavowedly present in Weber’s treatment of rationality as the summit of history.

This tendency seems to affect scholars and researchers of many countries and to deal with it in detail is of course a task well beyond the possibilities of this paper, which will be limited to a few examples and suggestions. The author of this paper remembers how much he was impressed, in September 1994, by the international conference “Religion, Civilization and Modernity,” organized by the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania<sup>12</sup>. Just a few years after the official end of socialism, it was possible to realize, even among some people who had apparently ranked high in the intellectual nomenclatura of the previous regime, an anxious quest for new solutions of development problems and new theoretical principles of historical interpretation.

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<sup>11</sup> This term understood in a very broad sense.

<sup>12</sup> The proceedings of this conference were published as *Studi Weberiene*, Traian Rotaru, Andrei Roth, Rudolf Poledna, eds., Cluj-Napoca (Romania), Clusium, 1995. My contribution (originally delivered in English) was included as “Note asupra Conceptului de Vocatione Ia Weber si Sfântul François de Sales”, p. 149-160.

Only specialized research would be able to follow the process of “Weberianization” that has apparently been happening in Eastern Europe, the Cluj-Napoca conference of 1994 and its proceedings being presumably only one among many events of a similar kind<sup>13</sup>. Brazil did not change from socialism to capitalism, but the events of Eastern Europe and the near demise of Marxism did not fail to deeply affect its intellectuals. The Weberian paradigm (concerning the religious and ethical origins of the spirit of capitalism) had already been influential, as previously mentioned in this paper, among some of the most respected interpreters of Brazilian history and society. However, it was rather Marxism (in more than one variety) that used to dominate departments of social sciences all over the country in the 1960s and 70s. After the fall of the Wall one witnesses a multiplication of conferences and collections of essays bearing on Max Weber and his ideas. In Brazil, not wholly unlike Eastern Europe, Weberianism also replaced Marxism among leading sectors of the intelligentsia<sup>14</sup>.

Besides being prone to include papers by Wolfgang Schluchter, the collections from Eastern Europe and Brazil have a few other things in common<sup>15</sup>. Their full analysis lies, as previously stated, beyond the scope of this paper. Let us

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<sup>13</sup> Let us here be limited to pointing to just another collection of essays on the theme (beside the proceedings of Cluj-Napoca): Ivaylo Znepolski (Ed.), *Max Weber: relectures à l'ouest. relectures à l'Est-actes du colloques de Sofia. 28-30 novembre 1998*, Sofia, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société, 1999. Another collection, Richard H. Roberts (Ed.) *Religion and the transformations of Capitalism: comparative approaches*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, though it does not bear only, nor even mainly, on Eastern Europe or Latin America, is nevertheless a good example of post-W all revivalist Weberianism.

<sup>14</sup> The following essays or collections of essays are good examples of this tendency: Edmundo Lima de Arruda Jr. (Org.), *Max Weber: direito e modernidade*, Florianópolis: Letras Contemporâneas, 1996; Maria Francisca Pinheiro Coelho, Lourdes Bandeira e Maria Loiola de Menezes (Orgs.), *Política, ciência e cultura em Max Weber*, Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 2000; Jessé Souza (Org.), *A atualidade de Max Weber*, Brasília: Editora da Universidade de Brasília, 2000; Jessé Souza, *A modernização seletiva: uma reinterpretação do dilema brasileiro*, Brasília: Editora da Universidade de Brasília, 2000; Jessé Souza (Org.), *O malandro e o protestante*, Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Religion et conduite de vie (p. 186-202), in Znepolski, M. W. : *Relectures...*; As origens do racionalismo ocidental (p. 85-120) and A origem do modo de vida burguês (p. 55-120) in Souza's *O malandro e o protestante*; Politeísmo dos valores” (p. 13-48) in Souza's *A atualidade de Max Weber*.

just remark, as illustrations, some striking similarities and parallelisms (in spite of different terminologies) between the Brazilian Jessé Souza and the Bulgarian Dimitri Guinev. To the former:

*The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* mirrors the attempt to understand the genesis of this revolution of conscience, this genesis that would be tantamount to the greatest transformation of human history. The reader who conceives of the Protestant ethic as interfering only in the work ethic, that is, as restricted to the economic sphere of society, does not grasp the full dimension of the Weberian oeuvre. For it implies a “recreation” of the world in the strongest, widest and deepest meaning of the term: it is the production of a new rationalism. A cultural rationalism for Weber means that all spheres of society, as well as all individual actions that take place in the context of those spheres, will follow a new frame of reference. [...] The Protestant ethic favors not only a “spirit of capitalism”, but, in a broader way, it leads to a “spirit of reification”<sup>16</sup>.

The latter writes that

Weber begins his reflections on Luther stressing a philological fact: the specific meaning of the German word *Beruf* as well as of the English word *calling* derive from the Lutheran translation of the Bible. [...] The Reformation was able, by giving a positive value to everyday practice and to inner-wordly work, to beget a new language in agreement with a new social reality. The Reformation leads to a “philological reform”. The Reformation would not have been possible without the “philological act” constituted by Luther’s translation<sup>17</sup>.

Guinev, in other words, wishes, as says,

to emphasize a) the philosophical presuppositions of the development of the hermeneutics of old Protestantism as the cultu-

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<sup>16</sup> Jessé Souza, *A ética protestante e a ideologia do atraso Brasileiro*, in Jessé Souza, *O malandro e o protestante*, p. 43-44. Souza does not explain what he means by “reification” in this context, referring instead to Schluchter’s *Die Entwicklung des Okzidentalens Razionalismus*.

<sup>17</sup> Guinev, 1998, p. 105-106.

ral rationalization of the practical interpretation as the modern attitude toward the world; and b) the agreement between the sola fide principle with the consequences of the principle sola structura, whose solutions is the main task of the *hermeneutica generalis* (GUINEV, 1998, p. 115).

Let us remark that the reasoning of both the Brazilian and the Bulgarian, at times more explicitly, at times in a rather implicit way, hinges on the supposition of a Protestant “semantic” or, as Guinev puts it, “philological” revolution: the new concept of vocation *Beruf*, calling-introduced by Luther’s Bible and unique to Protestantism. The following and last section of this paper will be devoted to this issue.

## 4. CALLING AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

Max Weber’s ideas, which represent a grandiose moment in the evolution of historical and sociological thought, have not lost, in spite of all qualifications and restrictions that later research may have added to it, nothing of their youth and their strength. In fact, Max Weber is situated right at the summit of history, “*am Spitze der Geschichte*”, according to the felicitous expression of Nikolaus Sombart (in WEBER, 1958, p. 43). Or else, let us, following Jaspers<sup>18</sup>, see him as the clearest consciousness of our time by itself (ABRAMOWSKI, 1966, p. 9). As stressed, among others, by Günter Abramowski (1966, p. 12), “Weber is not to be judged by the details of his research, but by the fecundity of his questions and interpretations”. Following these commentators, it is also my view that Max Weber’s historical sociology is a supreme interpretation of our time. Weber seized perfectly that which is essential: the rationality, indeed even the iron cage of rationality that penetrates and permeates every aspect of the society, the culture and the economy of the leading countries of

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<sup>18</sup> Jaspers’s words seem to imply that Max Weber is the outstanding representative of Hegel’s Absolute Spirit in our time.

the Western world<sup>19</sup>, which have led, influenced, challenged and changed the rest of the world<sup>20</sup>.

However, granted the validity and the fecundity of Weber's general conception of historical development, some conditions, concerning the details of research should be met if studies on, and inspired by, Max Weber are not to remain part of the metaphysical or quasi religious attitude often associated with the problem of modernity. Here the only solution seems to be none other than that suggested by Karl Popper (1959). From Weber's questions and interpretations, from his "Fragestellungen und Deutungen," hypotheses susceptible to empirical verification or "falsification" should be deduced and tested. Let us try to illustrate this by a concrete example, concerning a concept which is generally viewed as central to the reasoning of *The Protestant ethic*: the concept of *calling*. We tend to accept with an almost religious awe Weber's statement on the matter. Thus he says that:

If we trace the history of the word through the civilized languages, it appears that neither the predominantly Catholic peoples nor those of classical antiquity have possessed any expression of similar connotation for what we know as a calling (in the sense of a life-task, a definite field in which to work), while one has existed for all predominantly Protestant peoples (WEBER, 1958, p. 79).

In the Romance languages only the Spanish *vocación* in the sense of an inner call to something, from the analogy of a clerical office, has a connotation partly corresponding to that of the German word, but it is never used to mean calling in the external sense (WEBER, 1958, p. 205).

All the languages which were fundamentally influenced by the Protestant Bible translation have the word, and all languages for

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<sup>19</sup> This is not tantamount to say that only Max Weber dealt with rationality. Even apart from earlier forms of this concept in the writings of Hegel and of Marx, it also plays leading roles, to give but two eminent examples, in Ferdinand Tönnies *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887) and Werner Sombart's *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* (1916-1927).

<sup>20</sup> This of course does not imply the successful westernization or modernization of the whole world, but it does imply that no country failed to be affected by the diffusion of rationality.

which this is not the case (like the Romance languages) do not, or at least not in its modern meaning (WEBER, 1958, p. 207)<sup>21</sup>.

Critiques have been addressed to Weber, bearing on this theme or closely related ones, by authors such as Lujo Brentano, Werner Sombart, H. M. Robertson, Kurt Samuelsson, Herbert Lüthy, and others<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, the more recent research by Tatsuro Hanyu (1994, p. 72-103) seems to have shown beyond a reasonable doubt that the concept of “vocation”, such as expressed by the word *Beruf*, with the meaning of “a religious conception, that of a task set by God” (WEBER, 1958, p. 79) – “eine religiöse Vorstellung: – die einer von Gott gestellten Aufgabe” (WEBER, 1972, p. 63) – is simply not found in Luther’s own translation of the Bible<sup>23</sup>. Hanyu’s criticism seems to be devastating<sup>24</sup>. He says that Luther, differently from Weber’s claim on the matter, never used *Beruf*, but rather *Ruff*, in the decisive passage of 1 Corinthians 7:20<sup>25</sup>. Luther, notwithstanding the adoption of *Beruf* in the translation of Sirach 11:20,21, did not attach to the word *Beruf* the meaning that Weber claims he did, since the far more decisive passage of Proverbs 22:29<sup>26</sup> revised by Luther, according to Hanyu’s detailed demonstration, *after* the last revision of Sirach that can be attributed to him or to the committee of translators which he chaired –, has not *Beruf*

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<sup>21</sup> I have slightly changed Parsons’ rather complex reading of this passage.

<sup>22</sup> Lujo Brentano, *Der wirtschaftende Mensch in der Geschichte*. Leipzig, F. Meiner, 1923; Werner Sombart, *Der Bourgeois: Zur Geistesgeschichte des modernen Wirtschaftsmenschen*, Leipzig, Duncker und Humblot, 1913; H. M. Robertson, *Aspects of the Rise of economic individualism: a criticism of Max Weber and his school*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1933; Kurt Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action*, New York: Basic Books, 1961; Herbert Lüthy, *Le Passé Présent*, Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1965.

<sup>23</sup> If Hanyu is right, the lofty considerations of the Brazilian Souza and of the Bulgarian Guinev, concerning a “revolution of conscience”, indeed a “philological reform”, are very much weakened in as much as they claim to be based on Luther’s use of *Beruf*.

<sup>24</sup> At least to one who is not a specialist in Biblical studies.

<sup>25</sup> “Let everyman abide in the same calling wherein he was called”, according to my copy of the King James Version, printed in 1934.

<sup>26</sup> “Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men”, according to my King James copy.



but *Geschefft* (“Geschäft” in a modernized spelling). Hanyu (1994, p. 101) claims that Weber’s failings in textual criticism and in the conclusions he tried to draw from it are due to

[...] the sheer fact that Weber did not use “the true Luther’s Bible” and, even more regrettably, he was aware that he did not [...]. The expression in the PE, “Bei Luther (in den üblichen modernen Ausgaben)” shows that he was aware that, in order to discuss Luther’s terminological usage, he did not use the original Luther Bible, but rather the “usual modern” edition, many times revised since Luther’s death, such as usually available around 1904.

Weber might have spared himself and his commentators this incursion on the slippery soil of philology and textual criticism, if he had stood on the far more solid historical, social and theological ground of the revolution that the Reformation *did indeed entail* simply by proscribing otherworldly asceticism<sup>27</sup>. He is aware of this when, for instance, he says that

[...] in the conception of *industria*, which comes from monastic asceticism and which was developed by monastic writers, lies the seed of the *ethos* which was fully developed later in the Protestant worldly asceticism (WEBER, 1958, p. 196).

Hence his conclusion at the end of chapter IV (WEBER, 1958, p. 154):

Christian asceticism, at first fleeing from the world into solitude, had already ruled the world which it had renounced from the monastery and through the Church. But it had, on the whole left the naturally spontaneous character of daily life in the world untouched. Now it strode into the market-place of life, slammed the door of the monastery behind it, and undertook to penetrate just that daily routine of life with its methodicalness to fashion it into a life in the world, but neither nor for this world.

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<sup>27</sup> Let us not, however, until further proof, draw from this statement the conclusion that only the Reformation, in the West itself or elsewhere, did entail an attitude of worldly asceticism.

Let us also remark that the concept of vocation, understood, as Weber himself puts it, if not always the same word (of course also considering the form it takes in each language), is clearly to be found, to name but two Romance languages, in Spanish and French, and under the pen of Catholic authors. In the *Spiritual Exercises* (first published in 1548) of Ignatius of Loyola<sup>28</sup> the concepts of divine calling and election (choice)<sup>29</sup> play essential roles. Indeed, the *Exercises* have no other aim but to lead the faithful “to become perfect in whatever state or condition God our Lord will inspire us to choose” (LOYOLA, 1982, p. 36). Teresa of Ávila uses the word *llamamiento* (calling) at least three times in the opening chapters of her *Camino de Perfección* (originally written in 1566)<sup>30</sup>, with exactly the meaning of “a religious conception, that of a task set by God”, but it is not clear whether she means to extend the scope of *llamamiento* to plain worldly, non-monastic asceticism.

The concept and the very word of vocation – understood, let us reiterate, in the Weberian sense of “eine religiöse Vorstellung: – die einer von Gott gestellten Aufgabe” – are clearly found in the writings of François de Sales (1567-1622, canonized in 1665), some passages of which I shall quote. What I am trying to suggest here is that, if we trust François de Sales (and Bernard Groethuysen), even in Catholicism, “the naturally spontaneous character of daily life in the world” *was not left untouched* but was also subject, at least in some countries and periods, to a process of religious rationalization. These quotations are drawn from a chapter of François de Sales’ book *Introduction to a Devout Life*<sup>31</sup>, which has as its title nothing less than “How devotion is convenient

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<sup>28</sup> There are many editions of the *Spiritual Exercises*. I have here mainly used a recent French translation, edited, with an introduction, by Jean-Claude Guy. Paris, Seuil, 1982.

<sup>29</sup> Concerning election, see Mario Perniola, L’Elezione della Differenza in Ignazio di Loyola in *Conoscenza religiosa*, Milano: La Nuova Italia, 3. 1980, p. 217-245.

<sup>30</sup> A standard edition of *Camino de perfección* is found in Santa Teresa de Jesus. *Obras completas*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1962, p. 181-320.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted here according to the text of Saint François de Sales, *introduction à la vie dévote*, dans *Oeuvres*, textes présentés et annotés par André Ravier, Paris: Gallimard, 1969 (Bibliothèque de La Pléiade).

to all kinds of vocations and professions.” Indeed, it is the very notion of worldly asceticism which is upheld *avant la lettre* by François:

God commanded in the creation the plants to bear fruit, each according to its kind. On the same way he commanded the Christians, who are the living plant of his church, to bear fruits of devotion, each according to its quality and state [*vacation*]. Devotion should be differently exercised by the gentleman, the valet, the prince, the widow, the maid, the married woman (SALES, 1962, p. 36).

Devotion spoils nothing when it is authentic. If it becomes detrimental to the legitimate state of life of some person, then it is undoubtedly false. It is an error, indeed a heresy, to wish to exclude a devout life from the company of soldiers, from the shop of the artisan, from the court of the princes, and from the household of married people. It is true [...] that a purely contemplative, monastical or religious devotion [...] cannot be exercised in these occupations; yet, beside those three kinds of devotion, there are several other, appropriate to bring to perfection those who live in an worldly [*séculier*] state. [...] Wherever we are, we can and we must aspire to a perfect life (SALES, 1962, p. 37).

It is certainly to be regretted that even Bernard Groethuysen (1927), whose book *Les Origines de l'Esprit Bourgeois en France* represents one of the most pertinent critiques ever written of Weber's theory concerning the rise of capitalism, fails to mention, as he only purports to study the period comprised between the reign of Louis XIV and the French Revolution (1643-1789), François de Sales' concept of innerworldly devotion<sup>32</sup>. Yet he mentions Louis Bourdaloue's<sup>33</sup> *Sermon pour la fête de François de Sales* and quotes from it (GROETHUYSEN, 1927, p. 205)<sup>34</sup>:

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<sup>32</sup> I have previously dealt with some aspects of this issue in "l'ethique catholique et l'esprit du capitalisme: la vocation chez François de Sales", *Sociétés* (Paris), n. 49, 1995, p. 303-311.

<sup>33</sup> A prominent Jesuit preacher and writer (1632-1704).

<sup>34</sup> Quoted by Groethuysen, *Les origines de l'esprit bourgeois en France*, p. 205. The full text of Bourdaloue's sermon, the so-called "Panegyrique de Saint François de Sales", of a capital interest for students of the history of inner-worldly asceticism, can be found in Saint François de Sales, *Oeuvres complètes*, tome V (supplément), Paris: G. Martin, 1846, p. 399-414.

Do not think that in order to save us God requires from us great austerities or extraordinary deeds. Each of you, within your own state, can easily find salvation. The duties that you must fulfill, the obligations you must acquit, are enough to make you walk on the path of the saints.

Groethuysen is to be read with caution by Weberian-minded scholars, due to some tricky specificities in the meaning he attributes to some key words. He draws attention to the opposition of the Catholic Church “to the very spirit of rising capitalism, which disturbs the established order” (GROETHUYSEN, 1927, p. 234), this opposition, however, being specifically directed toward the impulse for acquisition, *la soif d’acquéri*. Now, according to Weber (1958, p. 17),

The impulse for acquisition, pursuit of gain, of money, of the greatest possible amount of money, has in itself nothing to do with capitalism. [...] Unlimited greed for gain is not the least identical with capitalism, and is still less its spirit. Capitalism may even be identical with the restraint, or at least a rational tempering [*Bändigung*], of this irrational impulse.

Thus Groethuysen uses the expression *spirit of capitalism* in quite a different sense than Weber’s. However, both authors fully share the idea that it is essentially through the principles of a *Berufsethik* that the churches – Protestant for Weber, Catholic<sup>35</sup> for Groethuysen (and at that both Jesuit and Jansenist)<sup>36</sup> – would have contributed to the ascent of capitalism.

The question can now be raised whether post-Reformation Catholic authors, like the ones mentioned in this paper, have not themselves been influenced by the Reforma-

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<sup>35</sup> It is not that Groethuysen denies the Protestant influence on the rise of Capitalism. But he deals only, at least explicitly, with the theme of “the [Catholic] Church and the Bourgeoisie”.

<sup>36</sup> The Duke of Saint-Simon (not mentioned by Groethuysen) bears witness, in his memoirs to this “éthique du devoir” in early XVIIIth century France. A Catholic, and at that neither a Jansenist nor a Jesuit, he says of the Duke of Burgundy (heir to the French crown) that [the Prince] “finally understood the meaning of leaving God for God and that one’s faithful practice of the duties of the state to which one has been assigned by God [nothing less, it seems, than “die von Gott gestellte Aufgabe”, so dear to Weber] is the solid piety that pleases Him most” (*Mémoires*, IV, Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1985 [originally written around 1750], p. 416).

tion in the matter that concerns us in this section, namely, in their conception of inner-worldly asceticism. The issue should be carefully examined and no conclusions can be reached prior to studying the evidence. Requiring monographic studies concerning each of those authors<sup>37</sup>, it cannot be elucidated within the limits of this paper, which has as its far more modest aim simply to show that vocation or similar words, with the meaning of the Weberian meaning of “eine von Gott gestellte Aufgabe,” are found under the pen of some relevant Catholic authors<sup>38</sup>.

In spite of these caveats, a few remarks can be safely made. Whereas Luther, Lutherans and other Protestants are hardly mentioned in Ignatius of Loyola’s exercises, Teresa of Ávila (who, however, hardly, if ever, deals with inner-worldly asceticism) had, as one of the stated aims of her monasteries a kind of Counter-Reformation consisting of prayer and penance. François de Sales – a titular bishop of Geneva – was certainly highly cognizant of the tenets of the Reformation, including the Calvinist Reformation, and his writings cannot be understood outside the context of the Catholic reaction against Protestantism. It is in his *Introduction à la vie dévote* that one of the first<sup>39</sup> full-fledged presentations of a doctrine of inner-worldly asceticism is to be found. But let us keep in mind a basic point. Whereas the idea of the priesthood of all believers – and hence the abolition of a clerical state in the Catholic sense of the term – is a basic aspect of the Reformation and whereas the Reformers very soon proscribed monasticism and all forms of non-worldly asceticism, it would, nevertheless, be a non sequitur to conclude, without further evidence, that the old forms were automatically replaced by a new, inner-worldly asceticism, which might be as detracting to the *sola fide* principle – salvation situated well beyond the

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<sup>37</sup> As, however, a large number of scholars, in many countries, often unbeknownst to one another, have been working on those topics, preliminary monographic research may as well consist in research about what has already been done.

<sup>38</sup> Let us not lose of sight that, when he speaks about the word vocation (precisely with the meaning of “einer von Gott gestellten Aufgabe”), in passages that have already been quoted, Weber is saying that, by the time of his (not Luther’s) writing, it is simply not found in Romance languages.

<sup>39</sup> If not the very first.

merits acquired by any human work and flowing only from the grace of God accepted through faith – as the old one<sup>40</sup>.

Let also take note of the fact that the issue of a Protestant *versus* a Catholic influence in connection with the growth of a work ethic compatible with the requirements of a “modern capitalism” (in the Weberian or, for that matter, Sombartian meaning of the term), only gains the urgency it has had for very nearly 140 years, after the publication of Émile de Laveleye’s *Le protestantisme et le catholicisme dans leurs rapports avec la liberté et la prospérité des peuples*, published in Belgium in 1875. In other words, it becomes a central issue for the social sciences after the defeat – soon interpreted as far more than simply military – of traditionally Catholic Austria and traditionally Catholic France by traditionally Protestant Prussia (leading to the foundation of the Wilhelmine Reich), soon to be followed by the defeat of another central Catholic country in the Spanish-American war<sup>41</sup>.

If any conclusion has been reached at the end of this paper, it is that the theses of *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* are not to be treated as self-evident or “objectively” valid, but, very much to the contrary, have to be empirically validated with the aid of methods of a sociological and historical character. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his *Critique de la raison dialectique*, used to say of Marxism that it represented the “unsurpassable philosophy of our century”. And, for him, that was all, the rest being reduced to the rank of mere commentary or “idéologie”, including, modestly, his own existentialism. Following the *Entzauberung* of Marxism as a viable political movement, this attitude has been transferred to Weberianism, however little of a “Weberian” Weber himself can be considered to have been. Now, if Weber’s historical sociology, placed, whether or not one wants to agree with it, *am*

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<sup>40</sup> Thus, to rehearse previous quotations, “the conception of *industria* [...] the *ethos*, which was fully developed later, now strode into the market-place of life [...] and undertook to penetrate just that daily routine of life with its methodicalness to fashion it into a life in the world,” would belong rather, to use another Weberianism, to the realm of the “unintended consequences of the Reformation”.

<sup>41</sup> The gap in overall social and economic development between Aglo-Saxon America and Latin America has also played a role in the awakening of this issue, as Herbt Lüthy points out in his book, mentioned earlier in this papers.

*Spitze der Geschichte*, these theories whose spell binds us even as we try to struggle against it, are not be reduced to a collection of some certainly exciting, but purely speculative considerations about the essence of modernity, then they should constantly be challenged by empirical research trying to test, indeed to falsify, its most cherished and established notions and postulates.

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