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Max Weber's Theory and Practice of German *Bürgerlichkeit*[2]

This essay aims to present Max Weber, probably the most widely known German sociologist and social thinker, as more than simply a scholar with a marvellous academic output.[3] Beyond his achievements in these fields, he was also a quintessential representative of a rather specific way of life and tradition, that of the German *Bürger* (burgher). As he put it in his famous Inaugural Address: 'I am a member of the bourgeois (*bürgerlich*) classes. I feel myself to be a bourgeois, and I have been brought up to share their views and ideals.' It is important to add, however, that this straightforward self-confession and self-identification is followed by a rather serious critical remark as to the failure of the German bourgeoisie: 'Yet it is precisely the vocation of our science to say things people do not like to hear – to those above us, to those below us, and also to our own class, – and if I ask myself whether the German bourgeoisie has the maturity today to be the leading political class of the nation, I cannot answer this question in the affirmative *today*.'[4]

Now the question arises: what is the relationship between Weber's scholarly and bourgeois ways of thinking? Weber gave two famous lectures, one about the ideal scholar and one about the ideal politician. He characterised the modern

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[3] I would like to extend my thanks to Stephen Patrick for revising the English of this essay and to Andrea Robotka for her help with the text and footnotes.

[4] Max Weber, 'The Nation State and Economic Policy', (Inaugural lecture, 1–28), in *Political Writings*, ed. by Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 23.

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scholar as possessing a certain detachment. Science, he advised, should distance itself from everyday concerns and personal interests. Yet the fact that he tried to define the ideal type of politician in a similar work reminds the reader of the author's wish to try his hand at politics as well – an effort which did not meet with great success. As one of his interpreters claimed: 'His strenuous political and scholarly activities for agricultural and commercial reforms in the national interest had come to naught.'[5] Weber also had a third interest: through his family's business ventures, he was also interested in international business, as the family had English, German and Belgian business connections. One may suspect that it was perhaps due to these family business connections that he developed an interest in commercial law and in particular, in the law regulating the stock exchange (or bourse). Clearly, Weber had rather divergent interests, then: those of the scholar, of the political influencer and of the economic player. This essay will focus less on his scholarly output, and more on the personality who found a way to express himself through all these diverging interests: Weber, the German burgher.

A burgher, in the original, medieval European sense, is someone who is attached to a particular political community, usually to a city, with a mutual bond: although his own life is subordinated to the life of the community, the community is able and ready to defend him from any external threats, and if he works hard, provides him with the necessities for his life. The German *Bürger* was above all an inhabitant of an urban community: this primary identification with the city can be explained in the German context by the lack of a well-organised centralised state. The German burghers had serious responsibilities for the running of their own businesses (as craftsmen or merchants), as well as participating in the administration of their city, while they had no role to play in the life of the state. *Bürgerlichkeit*, the social sphere of the burghers, is often translated into English by the term: the middle class. German burghers, however, were different from the French *citoyens* and the British middle classes, always ready and able to rise and defend their political interests on the national level. German burghers were associated with commerce and self-governance and with a specific way of life, but much less with participating in managing the affairs of the state (except as civil servants). The social stratum which recruited the burghers was – unlike the French – not progressivist, but more tradition-based, and their activity was mostly confined to the non-political civil sphere.

[5] Guenther Roth, 'Max Weber: Family History, Economic Policy, Exchange Reform', in *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 15 (2002), 509–520. I used the reprint in *Sociedade e estado* 17, no 1 (2002), 64–78.

The main thesis of this paper is that the work and life of Max Weber expresses this traditional German *Bürgerlichkeit*. The initial focus will be on a specific work by Weber which deals with this tradition of the European city: his essay on the city, a part of his 'unfinished project of a comparative study of the European Bürgertum'.[6] I will then attempt to reconstruct the specific way of life which characterises Weber and his family. Finally, the essay will attempt to connect the two levels, his theoretical work and his practical lifestyle, in an analysis of the three faces of Weber we are concerned with here.

In his review of the turn of the century development of research into the ancient city, Moses Finley gives a rather convincing list of genealogy, from Fustel de Coulanges's *La Cité Antique* (1864), to Weber.[7] The list naturally includes Durkheim, but some more interesting names follow his. Finley mentions Main and Morgan's topic of kinship in social anthropology, Gustave Clotz's *La Cité grecque* (1928), Karl Bücher's *Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft* (1893), Werner Sombart's *Der moderne Kapitalismus* (1902), with its focus on the 'economic theory of town formation (*Städtebildung*)', as well as Henri Pirenne's *L'origine des constitutions urbaines au Moyen Age* (1895), and finally, Georg von Below. It is against this background of French, British and German intellectuals that we should view Weber's own scholarly pursuits and achievements.

Finley's reconstruction is important here, because I argue that Weber was not simply an ideal social scientist. Rather, it is important to realise that his scholarly interests were embedded in his cultural background and social status. As a typical example of the German citizen, it is not surprising that the city (*Die Stadt*) was a rather important research topic for him. The claim of this paper is that this interest is closely related to his own identity as a burgher: he sought to reveal the historical and theoretical background of being a German Burgher. The text of his famous *Die Stadt*, arguably written or at least started in 1913, before the war, was published only much later, 'as an article in the 1920–21 volume of the Archiv für Sozialpolitik and then incorporated into the first posthumous edition of Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft in 1921'.[8]

Importantly, Weber's approach to the European or Western city, which he envisaged in this work to be as universalist as possible, is fundamentally historical. Although this text can be seen as urban history, it is perhaps more accurate to consider it historical sociology. This is because Weber is not concerned with

[6] Wilfried Nippel, 'Introductory Remarks: Max Weber's "The City" Revisited', in *City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, ed. by Anthony Molho, Kurt Raaflaub and Julia Emlen (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), 30.

[7] Moses I Finley, 'The Ancient City: From Fustel de Coulanges to Max Weber and Beyond', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19, no 3 (1977), 305–327.

[8] Nippel, 'Introductory Remarks', 24.

distinguishing the historical particularities which distinguish individual cities, but rather, with trying to define general principles which apply to a specific phenomenon: the European city. 'Fustel de Coulanges, Max Weber and Lewis Mumford were quintessential historical sociologists of the city' according to Isin, who was himself the primary theorist of the historical sociology of the city.'[9] 'What makes them so […] is the specific ways in which they attempted […] to focus on the essence of the city in different historical moments and the elements that constituted these differences rather than either specific cities by themselves or developing stagist or evolutionist schemes.'[10] In other words, Weber's historical analysis did not lose itself in nuances, but attempted to condense a common essence from the historical narratives, which may be used to describe the whole phenomenon in general, disregarding individual details. It is this notion of the ideal type that is crucial here: Weber made history-based generalisations, which in each case of modelling reality necessarily simplify individual variety to capture the overlap between the particular manifestations of the genus. This is the price to be paid to access the essence of the particular genus.

The best known of the general claims Weber made about the European city in *Die Stadt* is of course his distinction between the ancient polis and the medieval urban communes. He famously called the ancient citizen *homo politicus*, while the burgher of the medieval commune he dubbed *homo oeconomicus*. It would seem that the author's idea is to firmly separate the two realms. However, Weber's intention is rather to let the reader understand that the one grew out of the other, and therefore it is not possible to comprehend the second type, if its interpretation is divorced from that of the other. So while economic activity indeed seemed crucial in the early Weberian understanding of the urban community in medieval times, by the time his reflections on urban development were incorporated into the manuscript of *Economy and Society*, 'he had moved toward a broader and more comprehensive conception of the city embodying political and constitutional aspects'.[11]

In fact, a recent account of his achievements in this field repeatedly emphasises that he joined the largely legal discourse in understanding the specificity of the European city.[12] This fits well into the German tradition, mainly associated with Gierke, which stressed the central importance of the community in medieval political thought. The German concept of community was defined by legal categories of corporate identity. 'Weber concentrated fully on the Stadt

[9] Engin F Isin, 'Historical Sociology of the City', in *Handbook of Historical Sociology*, ed. by Gerard Delanty and Engin F Isin (London: Sage, 2003), 314.
[10] Isin, 'Historical Sociology'.
[11] Isin, 'Historical Sociology', 314.
[12] Nippel, 'Introductory Remarks'.

im *Rechtssinne*, the city as a unit with a distinct political-administrative status, that is, *die Gemeinde*, the commune, as a self-governing body.'[13] The concept is not merely a formal definition of a legal entity, however, but a category with real substance. It belongs to 'a terminology borrowed from the medieval materials: *Verbrüderung, Gemeinde, Genossenschaft, Zunft*',[14] Weber presents the community as a network of somewhat closed human relationships. In words reminiscent of Plato's description of the polis in the *Politeia*, he reminds us that a city was a 'confraternity, *Verbrüderung*, the constitution of an association with a common cult, equality before the law, *connubium*, common meals, and solidarity against non-members'.[15] Yet his own reconstruction of the Western city tried to convey the remarkable complexity of the phenomenon, defining five independent criteria, along with two further aspects. His list of the major factors which define a 'full urban community' comprised:

> [A] relative predominance of trade-commercial relations with the settlement as a whole displaying the following features: (1) a fortification, (2) a market, (3) a court of its own and at least partially autonomous law, (4) a related form of association; and (5) at least partial autonomy and autocephaly, thus also an administration by authorities in the election of whom the burghers participated.[16]

While this list distinguishes the military, the economic, the juridical and the political functions which played a part in the birth of the European city, it leaves out two crucial aspects. One of them is, of course, the religious dimension, which is all important for Weber. One may suspect that its obviousness is the reason why it is left unmentioned here. The second missing link is the cultural aspect. Both of them (the religious and the cultural function) were, in fact, crucial for Weber, independently as well as taken together:

> The contributions of the city in the whole field of culture are extensive. […] The city and it alone has brought forth the phenomena of the history of art. […] So also the city produced science in the modern sense. […] Furthermore, the city is the basis of specific religious institutions. […]. Finally, the city alone produced theological thought, and on the other hand again, it alone harboured thought untrammelled by priestcraft…[17]

Certainly, the aforementioned dimensions are easier to formalise than culture in its close cohabitation with religion, and its complex institutional matrix, although

[13] Nippel, 'Introductory Remarks', 25.
[14] Nippel, 'Introductory Remarks', 27.
[15] Nippel, 'Introductory Remarks', 26.
[16] Max Weber, *The City*, trans. and ed. by Don Martindale and Gertrud Neuwirth (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 80–81.
[17] Max Weber, *General Economic History* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003), 360–361.

without giving an account of the way of life of a certain community and its constituent parts, it is hard to make sense of their specific mode of interconnection.

At this point it is worth discussing three basic concepts Weber makes use of to discuss cultural determinants. These will also be relevant in making sense of his own personal life-choices. These are *Lebensstil* (lifestyle), *Lebenschancen* (life chances) and *Lebensführung* (conduct of life). As the English translators, Abel and Cockerham explain, they easily became confused when rendering these terms, although they were used more or less terminologically by Weber.[18] The essence of how he employed and distinguished between the three terms is as follows: Lifestyle (*Lebensstil)* is the general term, which breaks up into two constituents: life chances and conduct of life. Life style, the umbrella term, means the ordinary way of life characterising an individual or a group. The real interest lies in the other two terms: 'lifestyles are based on choices (*Lebensführung*), but these choices are dependent upon the individual's potential (*Lebenschancen*) for realizing them.'[19] In other words, life chances are the objective conditions which will define the circle within which choices of a particular conduct of life will take place. The term *Lebensführung* means the set of choices as actually realised. The term lifestyle includes both these aspects: the predetermined objective conditions and the personally made choices of the individual or the group.

In the second part of this paper, I will examine the lifestyle, life chances and conduct of life of Max Weber, himself. In particular, I will be interested in the connection between his chances of becoming a politician, a businessman and an academic, and the way that his conduct of his life as an academic embodies the lifestyle of the German bourgeois at the turn of the century, in the Germany of the post-Bismarck period.

Before that, however we should consider how this topic relates to Weber's own research into the Western city. As we have seen, he distinguished two paradigms of the Western city: the polis of the antiquity, with its primacy of the political man, and the town of the flourishing and late medieval period, which he identified with the *homo oeconomicus*. As we have noted, this is only an apparent opposition, and was not meant to be a genuine contrast, but two phases of the development of the same thing. Weber was later to add another phase to this process: modernity. While the writings and figure of Cato served as the representative of the first paradigm, it was Alberti who embodied late medieval ways of urban thinking. Finally, he added Franklin as a key exponent of the age (and culture) of modernity. It is rather remarkable the way in which

[18] Thomas Abel and William C Cockerham, 'Lifestyle or Lebensführung? Critical Remarks on the Mistranslation of Weber's "Class, Status, Party"', *The Sociological Quarterly* 34, no 3 (1993), 551–556.

[19] Abel and Cockerham, 'Lifestyle or Lebensführung?', 554.

Weber compared the medieval and the modern period. While the medieval city was governed along the lines of 'traditional law', often by a 'patriarchal' ecclesiastical and royal power, its spirituality was connected to the Catholic dogma. In contrast, the modern age prefers 'formal-rational' law, which is characteristic of the bureaucratic state, and saw the emergence of a reformed, protesting denomination. He relies on two general terms, to identify these systems: feudalism and capitalism. However, the relevancy of this scheme is that although Weber finds the changes inevitable, he is surprisingly critical of the modern phenomena. His criticism is mostly aimed at what he regards as the individualistic tendencies of his age, a criticism which reveals his stance, which Donald Kelly termed associationism,[20] who claims that 'we find the promotion of a vigorous associationalism in Weber', adding that this topic seems to be close to what we usually associate with Tocqueville, a 'pronounced critique of apoliticism and the lack of political maturity under modern conditions'.[21] If we accept Kelly's suggestion of reading Weber's notion of the modern era together with Tocqueville, it is easy to conclude that his criticism is not so far from the wider cultural criticism of his age, especially in Germany. There is a tendency to lament the passing of a kind of golden age, while also accepting the fact that its decline was unavoidable and indeed necessary. Yet, there is a basic difference between his nostalgia for the community of the city in the feudal context, and Tocqueville's kind of mourning of American townships, which is notable because Weber belonged to the upper middle class, while Tocqueville, of course, was a member of the declining caste of the aristocracy. In this respect, Tocqueville's historical fate was, in fact, much more tragic than Weber's, even if Tocqueville succeeded in holding a political position for a short time while Weber was unable to join the political elite of his home country.

Yet another topic also needs to be taken into account here, in connection with the missing element of culture in Weber's theory of the city: the spatial aspect, beside the temporal one. In this respect, too, he made use of a polarity: contrasting, as Thomas Mann had in his great novel, *Buddenbrooks*, published in 1901, the Southern and the Northern type of the medieval city. Unlike Jacob Burckhardt, who concentrated on the Southern type in his research into the Renaissance, Weber found German urban development more relevant: for him the ideal type of Western city was the Northern variant, in particular the German city. One can certainly understand this as a manifestation of German nationalism, a hot topic in the days of Weber. There are good reasons to call him a sort

[20] Duncan Kelly, 'Max Weber and the Rights of Citizens', *Max Weber Studies* 4, no 1 (2004), 23–49.

[21] Kelly, 'Max Weber and the Rights of Citizens', 42.

of nationalist, as he seems to argue in favour of a strong German state. But this is only one side of the coin. Both his academic aspirations and his own family background and upbringing encouraged him to have a wider vista than that which was allowed by the German politics of the day. But politics remained crucial for this venture, even so.

At this point, we can turn to Weber, the individual. I would like to argue that Weber's message can only be properly understood if we realise that even in his scholarly output he remains an upper middle class burgher, a member of his family and his closer social grouping. It was Guenther Roth who drew the attention of the Weber scholarship to the fact that we cannot properly decipher Weber's intentions without considering his family background, together with the policies he supported – not only in agrarian law, but also in commercial law, and in the field of securities and commodities exchanges.[22] Largely in agreement with Roth, this essay wishes to make another point: that a part of what Weber means encompasses his middle class way of life and way of thought, where these two ways cannot be separated easily. In order to assess this coincidence, we need to look at Weber's family background, non-academic interests and strivings as well as at the characteristics of his specifically 'bürgerlich' mentality. Thus, he does not simply teach us through his writings about the best achievements and some of the failures of the German middle classes, but also embodies some of them.

It is of course well-known that Weber was born into a very well placed upper middle class family. His father, Max Senior was both a member of a family of merchants with interests in the textile industry and a lawyer who became involved in politics as a liberal nationalist. His mother was of foreign origin, 'from the Fallenstein and Souchay families, both of the long illustrious Huguenot line, which had for generations produced public servants and academicians'.[23] It is no exaggeration to call this background cosmopolitan: he had French Huguenot and English connections, while some members of the family did business in Antwerp and South America. His father was well connected in the U.S., transferring some of his social connections to his son. It was this family network which encouraged Weber to think beyond national borders even if he did not abandon the liberal nationalist position of his father, who as a politician, was a champion of the liberal nationalist cause supporting Bismarck.

No matter what he wrote about the specific attitude of the scholar, one has to realise that in fact Weber, the scholar, was indeed influenced by that family

[22] For a short overview of his position see Roth, 'Max Weber: Family History'. For a book length analysis of it, see Guenther Roth, *Max Webers deutschen–englische Familiengeschichte 1800–1950* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2001).

[23] Sung Ho Kim, 'Max Weber', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N Zalta, 2019.

background. As Roth dramatically puts it: 'Weber was a scion of the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie that created the capitalist world economy of the 19th century.'[24] While most accounts of Weber start with his efforts in the field of agrarian law, Roth emphasises his early interest in commercial law. After futile efforts 'to learn the practice of the import/export trade for several years',[25] and an early break in his academic career, Weber made a difficult decision concerning his conduct of life, and repositioned himself, 'taking the option of living as a capitalist rentier and gentleman scholar'.[26] This was made possible by the wealth of his wife, which allowed Weber the time to research and publish. This lifestyle cannot be left out of the picture when examining Weber's position.

The problem is not the well-known Marxist one, that his social position determined his academic conclusions. Rather, it should be seen within the conceptual triangle outlined above, explaining Weber's views on lifestyle. Being a capitalist rentier and a gentleman scholar is itself a choice, made by Weber himself, and therefore worthy of further consideration. Clearly, his options were limited, largely due to social constraints, but also as a result of his health problems. Weber consciously and intentionally kept on living the life of a German bourgeois, even in the academic sphere. Furthermore, his academic interests mirrored this orientation, which is why Roth is able to claim that the 'connections between family background, economic policy views and scholarly writings are partly direct, partly indirect'.[27]

Take the example of Weber's views on the U.S., as presented by Roth.[28] At the age of 11, a paternal mentor brought him a German language version of Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. Later, both his father and Weber got invitations and support for travels to and in America, from the German–American businessman, the 'railroad tycoon' Henry Villard (Heinrich Hilgard). This invitation was, of course, not unrelated to Weber's investment in railroad shares. What is more, Villard resurfaces in the writings of Weber, but as a negative example, 'an instance of grandiose robber capitalism', a judgement which might have been influenced by the third bankruptcy of the Northern Pacific, Villard's enterprise, in 1893. This is a rather telling coincidence of childhood impressions, personal connections, financial investments and academic research, which is quite exceptional of its kind, even in Weber's life, but which illustrates in a telling way how his bourgeois identity persists in both his lifestyle and his writings and deeds.

[24] Roth, 'Max Weber: Family History', 64.

[25] Quoted by Roth, 'Max Weber: Family History', 64, from a letter of 3 January 1891 to Hermann Baumgarten, Max Weber, *Jugendbriefe* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1936), 326.

[26] Roth, 'Max Weber: Family History', 64.

[27] Roth, 'Max Weber: Family History', 66.

[28] This reconstruction of the story follows Roth, 'Max Weber: Family History', 68.

Another example of his actions can be found in the debates on German exchange reform where he took a position which was in line with his mother's 'very large fortune'[29] 'on the Manchester cotton exchange and in London merchant banking', as well as with the Hamburg branch of the Weber family's trade on the local exchange.[30] All in all, there is no doubt that there is a continuity between the personal financial interests of the autobiographical Weber, his academic research and his political aspirations. Once again, this is not the claim of social determinism, but the result of individual choices on his part, as well as the acceptance and affirmation of German bourgeois culture.

In other words, we are not stretching the point when we emphasise the connection between Weber's work and his own lifestyle. Rather, we have a different agenda here: to show that in fact family tradition, and the experience of being brought up in a bourgeois environment helped Weber to identify his own scholarly direction. Another consequence of this insight is that we can better understand his sometimes rather vexing theoretical findings.

If all this is true, Weber was not simply a neutral and detached academic observer, but also a passionate and motivated politician and also someone embedded in a very particular lifestyle, that of the German bourgeois. These parallel engagements help us to interpret his academic message, as for instance when he describes the *homo oeconomicus* and his achievements. Weber's choice of lifestyle will also be helpful in interpreting the specific phenomenon of the German bourgeois.

In this last part of the essay, I would like to offer a description of the German bourgeois, taking the personal example of Max Weber, in his different roles as academic observer, budding politician and capitalist rentier. A single example, of course, cannot be taken as proof of a social phenomenon. This effort, therefore, would be absolutely futile, if not for the fact that he was one of the major voices of his age, a thinker of the primary importance in his patria, but also in the whole Western world. As soon as we assume that his lifestyle was the result of his own decisions it becomes worthy of interest, and supplies raw material for further considerations. Even so, this whole effort to make sense of Weber, as the embodiment of the German bourgeois still preserves something of the characteristics of an intellectual game. What follows, then, is not a scientific exploration but is, in fact, more of a thought-experiment. Since it is based on the figure of Weber, it will hopefully have some significance.

[29] Max Weber, *MWG,* II/6, *Briefe 1909–1910.* Published by M. Rainer Lepsius and Wolfgang J. Mommsen in cooperation with Birgit Rudhard and Manfred Schön. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994, 763.

[30] Roth, 'Max Weber: Family History', 69.

My starting points are the following three character traits of the figure of Weber as reconstructed above: he was a capitalist rentier, a political actor and a gentleman scholar. Let us trace how these roles were related to each other, reminding ourselves of the way Hegel distinguished between the French terms of the *citoyen* and the bourgeois: 'The French make a distinction between *bourgeois* and *citoyen*; the first is the relationship of the individual to a community concerning the satisfaction of need. It has no political reference; this occurs first with the *citoyen*.'[31]

It is hard to find an English equivalent for the German term *Bürger*.[32] This is because it means much more than simply a burgher, or city dweller. The concept of the Bürger was explained by Christian Garve, in an essay he wrote in 1792, as follows: the term means 'a member of civil society – that is, the French citoyen' but also 'the non-noble city-dweller who lives off a certain business – and that is the Bourgeois.'[33] In other words, the *citoyen* equates with the *Bürger* in a political sense, while the bourgeois is the *Bürger* in an economic (and increasingly) in a cultural sense. Before continuing in this vein, it is worth noting another way of distinguishing between the two terms. Immanuel Kant argued that the *Bürger*, who was a partner in the social contract, was a 'citoyen, i.e. a citizen of a state (*Staatsbürger*), not a citizen of a town (*Stadtbürger*), a bourgeois'.[34]

Hegel did not adopt this Kantian aspect of the distinction, but instead distinguished between two aspects of the community – either as a political unit, a *Gemeinde*, or in the sense of an economic unit – as an enlarged *oikos* or household. As well as rejecting the Kantian republican interpretation of the *Bürger*, Hegel also eschewed Justus Möser's more traditionalist understanding of the *Bürger*, which attributed citizenship to one's position in society. Hegel, it is sometimes claimed, presented the bourgeois as 'a private individual engaged in competitive struggles in the market'.[35] This interpretation may be rather far-fetched however, as seems to project a Spencerian dimension into the Hegelian scheme. I would argue that in fact Weber's own perception of the bourgeois still

[31] Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Vol. 4, 472. For this quote see James Schmidt, 'A "Paideia" for the "Bürger als Bourgeois": The Concept of "Civil Society" in Hegel's Political Thought'. *History of Political Thought* 2, no 3 (1981), 469–493.

[32] For the classic detailed analysis of the concept of the *Bürger* (in German), see Manfred Riedel, 'Bürger, Staatsbürger, Bürgertum', *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* 1 (1972), 672.

[33] Christian Garve, *Versuche über verschiedene Gegenstände aus der Moral, der Litteratur und dem gesellschaftlichen Leben* (Breslau: Korn, 1792), 302–303. Garve's term of civil society does not mean the same thing as in Hegel. With Garve it is only equivalent with political community.

[34] Immanuel Kant, 'On the Common Saying: "This May Be True in Theory, but It Does Not Apply in Practice"', in *Kant's Political Writings*, trans. by H B Nisbet, ed. by Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 61–92, 77–78.

[35] Schmidt, 'A "Paideia"', 475.

preserved something of Möser's point of view. Or, to put it a bit more cautiously, Weber himself must have recognised the sort of criticism Möser made of the marketplace of the emerging capitalist economy, at least as understood by one of his recent interpreters: 'New forms of capitalist economic organisation, he observes, have led to the disappearance of the link between ownership of property and civic responsibility. Men are so involved in acquisition, he laments, that they no longer have time for political concerns and public life. He sees an eclipse of civic virtue, a diminishing willingness to sacrifice private concerns for the public good.'[36]

If we take this context as our reference point, we can draw rather interesting conclusions about the three public roles of Weber. He turns out to be a German *Bürger* in the full sense of the term. Having inherited a specific way of life which enabled him both to profit from the investments of his family and to participate in local politics, as part of his family inheritance, if he decided to do so. His father, Max Weber Sr was an active politician, and as such, a man of earthly pleasures, enjoying the fruits of his labours. As a lawyer, he was a leading member of the Bismarck-supporting National Liberal Party, representing it at different levels of the institutional structure of his home country, at a time of rapid political changes. He was a local magistrate in Erfurt and in Berlin, where he was a member of the Berlin City Council. In fulfilling these roles, he illustrated the political virtues of the *Stadtbürger*. During the process which led to the birth of a united Germany, he became an elected member of first the Prussian House of Representatives, and then of the *Reichstag* of the German Empire. In other words, he personally embodied and worked towards the opening up of constitutional politics in Germany. As a politician, however, he was also specifically concerned with economic issues, becoming an active member of both the Prussian and the National Debt Commission. He thus connected the two sides of the *Bürger*, by being politically active and as such by taking care of the (economic) common good. Finally, as a lawyer, Weber's father was also open to the academic life, earning a doctorate in law and writing journal articles on politics and statistics.

His son, Max Weber Jr shared all these interests, but embodied them in a somewhat different fashion. As he was unable to become successful either as a financial investor or as a politician, he turned directly towards the academic life. His academic research was not confined to science for its own sake, nor was it narrowed down to a single discipline. Rather, he tried to exercise social and political influence through his work, which he was able to do for some

[36] Jerzy Z Muller, 'Justus Möser and the Conservative Critique of Early Modern Capitalism', *Central European History* 23, nos 2–3 (1990), 153.

time and with varying degrees of success. Educated at the best universities of Germany, including Heidelberg, Strasbourg, Berlin and Göttingen (at a time when German universities were at the forefront of academic excellence), he was trained in law, but also studied its humanistic background, including history, philosophy and economics. After graduation he had 'some flirtation with legal practice and public service', as was general for members of the German middle classes. It was finally through the political debates occasioned by his writing commissioned by an influential social science association on the 'displacement of the German agrarian workers in East Prussia by Polish migrant labours', that he gained a national reputation, which was followed by an appointment at Freiburg, and later by a professorship at Heidelberg. At Heidelberg, together with his wife, Marianne, herself a political activist, they became the centre of a group of bright minds, the so-called Weber Circle, attracting such figures as Georg Jellinek, Ernst Troeltsch, Werner Sombart, and later, a number of younger and more radical scholars, including Ernst Bloch and even György Lukács. He also remained active in the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, and had close contact with the liberal *Evangelische-soziale Kongress*. He gradually became one of the best-known public intellectuals in Germany. Even after his mental breakdown he was able to maintain his public reputation, leading to the foundation of the *Deutsche Gesellshaft für Soziologie*, with such eminent scholars as Tönnies, Simmel and Sombart. It was during this period of his life that his major academic works, including *The Protestant Ethic* and the *Spirit of Capitalism*, a major contribution to understanding the rise of the middle classes, and the writings which were posthumously published as *Economy and Society*, were written.

Certainly, it is an open question as to whether his writings succeeded in achieving the political aims Weber intended for them. But the shift from the actual field of practical politics to academia was in no sense apolitical. On the contrary, his writings always had a practical political (or social, or generally public) overtone – even if they also had a significance which was easily able to cross national (and for that matter, also disciplinary) borders. The shift itself, we have to emphasise, from business activity and political participation (which was characteristic of the earlier generation of his family) to academia (which was, incidentally, not new on his mother's side) is a manifestation of the phenomenon what in Germany is called *Bildungsbürgertum*, which can be translated as citizenry with a cultural affinity. German historical sociology often compares the models of the *Bildungsbürger* and that of the *Wirtschafts-* or *Besitzbürger*, as represented in the volume edited by Jürgen Kocka.[37] The important aspect for us here is

[37] Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*. Vol. 2. *Wirtschaftsbürger und Bildungsbürger* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1995).

that, unlike in France or Britain, the middle classes were not independent from the state in Germany, and as civil servants they often held public functions. It is also important that it took a longer amount of time in Germany for the middle classes to achieve the freedom of the press and academic freedom. Weber turned out to be an archetypical example of the public intellectual who used his cultural capital to gain recognition and public support for his agenda, which was closely linked to his bourgeois self-identification. Even if these efforts were doomed to failure in practical politics, through his lack of the ability to compromise, but met with success in the academic world, he provides perhaps the most successful example how to represent the bourgeois way of life in academia and in public debate, and how to use one's influence to support one's agenda. This agenda remained for him the common good of the community, as it used to be in the *Gemeinde* of the medieval City, and as he learnt from the ascetic-pietist religious teachings and ordinary behaviour of his beloved mother.

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