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## RETHINKING MAX WEBER. PREMODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF WEBER IN CRITICAL FOCUS

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*This study examines criticisms of Max Weber by Leo Strauss and Mihály Polányi. When we claim that we act on the basis of moral considerations, the same is true for the case when we judge others on a moral basis, and in these cases, we also refer to generally recognised moral standards that we consider to be valid. Are these premodern interpretations of Weber critiques or indictments? Namely: the criticism of objectivity, criticism of historicism and criticism of positivism. Analysing Max Weber, we cannot go beyond Rudolph Sohm's concept of charisma and Weber's charisma. Weber was greatly influenced by Sohm, from whom the concept of charisma comes. Indeed, Weber perfected Sohm's concept of charisma, but also adapted it to his own. Neither Polányi nor Strauss find the theory developed by Weber to be completely consistent. The Weberian system of ideas requires renewal, the steps of which are embodied in the criticism of the two authors Mihály Polányi and Leo Strauss. In this study, I undertake to give the body an understanding soul in which both criticism and the Weberian system of ideas meet.*

### KEYWORDS:

Mihály Polányi, political and state theory, political philosophy, political science, Leo Strauss, the criticisms of the Weberian theory, Max Weber

## CRITICISM OF WEBER BY LEO STRAUSS

“...what is called the whole is actually never complete, therefore it is not really the whole, the whole essentially changes in such a way that its future is unpredictable, the whole can never be grasped as a thing in itself or understood, human thinking is essentially something depends on something that cannot be foreseen, or that can never become its object, or that the subject cannot control, ‘to be’ in the highest sense never, or at least not necessarily, to ‘always be’”<sup>1</sup>

Leo Strauss

Strauss elaborates on Weber’s criticism in his book, *Natural Law and History*<sup>2</sup> written in 1953. In this work, Strauss devoted an independent chapter to criticising Weber’s doctrines in chapter 2 entitled *Natural law and the distinction between facts and values*. At the beginning of his critical analysis of Weber, Strauss writes about the German social scientist: “Since Weber, no one has devoted as much attention, work and almost fanatical devotion to the basic questions of the social sciences as he has. Whatever mistakes he made, he is the greatest social scientist of our century.”<sup>3</sup>

Weber’s assumption that the unique can arise from the general itself or from the whole and which is seen through the lens of Strauss “exclusively as the effects of other unique or partial phenomena”<sup>4</sup> is certainly applicable, but Weber’s idea will never be valid for our knowledge of the whole. Weber considers himself a student of the historical school, but Strauss believes that Weber did not fully accept the doctrines of historicism, as he absolutely believes in the progressiveness of the idea of science, and the influence of this idealism can also be seen in Weber’s work. Strauss did not have a problem with German thought although, to put it in simple terms, he objected to its distorted, almost dogmatic form which he called historicism.

In Weber’s sense, the social sciences are only objective and universally acceptable (both for Western and Eastern people) if they are – in Strauss’s formulation – “consisting of true propositions”. However, Strauss goes beyond this and emphasises the determining nature of questioning and of the direction of interest, which arise from our individual viewpoints – which are unique to us – and these individually constructed systems of views are also related to our individual (separate content) value concepts. Strauss refers to the fact that the work of social science practitioners is both determined and guided by their value concepts and their field of interest (forming a kind of framework for keeping “research” in

<sup>1</sup> STRAUSS 1999: 29.

<sup>2</sup> Based on Joseph Cropsey’s typology, Strauss’s book can be placed at the end of the first phase of Strauss’s oeuvre. The second phase lasted from 1958 until Strauss’s death in 1973.

<sup>3</sup> STRAUSS 1999: 34.

<sup>4</sup> STRAUSS 1999: 34.

the desired direction). At this point, Strauss claims, in contrast to Weber's thesis, that the value-neutral social science criterion is only a utopian illusion, since the main questions of a given field of research and the selection of the methods themselves have a "value-saturated character", and these value concepts are "historically relative" in Strauss's theory.<sup>5</sup>

In Weber's thesis, according to which the complete heterogeneity of facts and values necessitates the standard of ethical neutrality that provides a basis for the social sciences, social science can only reflect on the facts and the reasons that can be discovered in them and attempt to provide answers. Weber believed that the correctness of the criterion of value neutrality was fully justified by the pair of opposites "Is" and "Be". The correctness of this was criticised by Strauss when he argued – unlike in Weber's approach – that neutral social science (in contrast to Weber's irresolvable conflict between Being and Consciousness) is rooted in the fact that it is impossible to gain true knowledge of Being. Weber's thesis that "every value choice, no matter how evil, vile or insane, must be brought before the judgment seat of reason, which is just as legitimate as any other value choice"<sup>6</sup> can result in nihilism in the Straussian sense (including noble nihilism). According to Strauss, in order for someone to call Weber's view noble nihilism, one must move away from Weber's position. At this point, Strauss recalls Weber's classic quote: "Be what you are!" – from which Strauss concludes that Weber himself rejected objective norms because these norms would have been incompatible with human freedom and action. Strauss believes that many social scientists today perceive nihilism only as a minor inconvenience, and they are also satisfied with all kinds of scientific results, which cannot be more than barren truths, the revelations of which truths "arise as a result of subjective value judgments and arbitrary value choices".<sup>7</sup>

Strauss also criticises Weber's "legitimate types of domination"<sup>8</sup> because Strauss believes that Weber identified (these types) only with what he claimed to be legitimate types of authority. This restriction in the Straussian sense carries with it the danger that Strauss himself describes as follows: "the person falls victim to all mirages and all the self-deception of the studied people." Strauss emphasises the ability to understand (social conditions) as the main characteristic of the social scientist, where the basis of understanding is a kind of (necessary) conceptual or reference framework which facilitates the understanding process. Strauss came to the conclusion that Weber's principles had a harmful effect on his work, because the rejection of value judgments is a threat to historical objectivity. What does this dangerous situation mean? On the one hand, by accepting Weber's basic idea of value neutrality, we cannot – in Straussian terms – "call things by their names".<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the rejection of value judgments (standing on the basis of Weberian value

<sup>5</sup> STRAUSS 1999: 35.

<sup>6</sup> STRAUSS 1999: 37.

<sup>7</sup> STRAUSS 1999: 41.

<sup>8</sup> For Strauss, the Weberian system of criteria, which contains the requirements for selecting a charismatic leader, in which the important thing is how the person of the "charismatic leader" is judged by those who live under his power and charisma (i.e. the leader's followers or disciples) is based on "convenient" criteria theory.

<sup>9</sup> STRAUSS 1999: 46.

neutrality) also threatens the objectivity of the interpretation. The following quotation from Strauss also testifies to his critical approach to Weber's perception:

“So it appears that what Weber really meant when rejecting value judgments should have been formulated as follows: The objects of the social sciences include value references. The reference to values presupposes respect for values. This appreciation enables and compels the social scientist to evaluate social phenomena, i.e. to distinguish between true and false, high and low: true and false religion, true leaders and charlatans, true knowledge and mere knowledge or sophistry, virtue and sin, moral sensibility and moral obtuseness, art and senseless nonsense, vitality and degeneracy, etc. between.”<sup>10</sup>

I consider it important to emphasise here that the “lack of neutrality” did not mean either approval or rejection. Strauss notes (in connection with the criticism of Weber's value neutrality) that since values that are separate from each other are incompatible, the acceptance of any value implies the immediate rejection of the opposite values. Strauss's argument further criticises the basic concept of Weber's value neutrality, including its thesis, which Weber himself accepted as self-evident, according to which all values are of the same rank as the others, so in this sense there is no such thing as a hierarchy of values. However, the essence of Strauss's argument (his critique of Weber) is revealed to us precisely in the fact that the main error of Weber's basic concept stems from the unconditional acceptance of Weber's basic concept itself – the thesis of the identity of values. Strauss's criticism of Weber is summarised in the following lines: “However reasonable Weber was as a practicing politician, however horrified by the spirit of narrow-minded party fanaticism, Weber as a social scientist approached social problems in a spirit that had nothing to do with the art of state management and no it served no other practical purpose than to encourage narrow-minded obstinacy.”<sup>11</sup>

Although Weber pointed out that social science aims to understand social processes based on worldly aspects, the light of this is natural light, which offers rational answers (solutions) to society's many problems. Weber was able to reach a point in his theory whereby the goal of science is clarity, that is, the ability to see clearly when addressing big questions, with the ultimate goal being clarity regarding man. Science and philosophy are a way to dispel delusions and eradicate narrow-minded stubbornness. They are a way to live a life that dares to face reality, even if that is grim and only interested in the letter of the truth, regardless of whether we like it or not – nevertheless it is valid. Strauss argued in relation to the Weberian methodology that it is based on a very specific view of reality. In the Straussian critique, Weber is depicted as a social scientist who is less concerned with the characteristics of reality but is influenced and analysed more by countless abstract elements (e.g. types

<sup>10</sup> STRAUSS 1999: 50.

<sup>11</sup> STRAUSS 1999: 52.

of science, methodology, typology of rule) that reshape and shape reality. However, Weber's methodological theses – as Strauss puts it: “remain meaningless, or at least irrelevant, until someone translates these theses into theses expressing the nature of reality.”<sup>12</sup>

Strauss never accepted Weber's concept of value neutrality, and criticised both Weber's typology of dominance (especially with regard to the selection of a charismatic leader) and the idea of modern science which Strauss regarded Weber to be a pioneer of. From this critical opposition comes Strauss's opposition to modern political science (which means scientific opposition): political scientists deal with useless things while Rome (that is, the support of liberal democracy) burns – this is how Strauss formulates his unique system of views. This conception of the task of political science built on Straussian foundations can also be seen as the Straussian argumentation of the conception of the task of political philosophy. As Strauss saw it, political philosophy must be freed from the crisis mechanisms of modernity (its unshakable belief in positivism and historicism), which pervades the conception of science that has developed since the 17<sup>th</sup> century and has conquered space for itself in the field of sciences. As a result of this conquest, philosophy (including political philosophy) has become value-laden, and thus cannot be regarded as a science in the modern sense of the word. The essence of Strauss's conception of tasks therefore constitutes an attempt to rehabilitate political philosophy – which would involve a return to the basic questions, approach and methodology of classical political philosophy in Strauss's conception of tasks. Strauss stands for the validity of classical political philosophy – this is how Weber's criticism becomes interpretable which comes to the defence of classical political philosophy, as if questioning the doctrines brought to life by modern positivist science or the truths of the doctrines which emerge during the Straussian interpretation of Weber's theses (they collapse and blend into each other like a house of cards).

In *What is Political Philosophy?* which Strauss published in 1959, he identifies “the topics of political philosophy”<sup>13</sup> as “the great goals of humanity: freedom and government, and power are goals that are suitable for raising all people above their poor self”.<sup>14</sup> This framing of the tasks of the discipline continues three paragraphs below: “Political philosophy is the attempt to replace belief in the nature of political things by knowledge of the nature of political things.”<sup>15</sup>

Political philosophy is a continuous attempt to understand political phenomena. Strauss's understanding of the task of political science (political philosophy) is based on the following assumptions: a) the examination of social phenomena and their study is impossible without dealing with value judgments; b) the assumption behind the rejection of value judgments, according to which the conflict between different values or value systems cannot be resolved for human reasons (which Weber himself accepted) according to

<sup>12</sup> STRAUSS 1999: 58.

<sup>13</sup> Strauss' political philosophy is also related to the relationship between man and country, which he emphasises in the introduction to *The City and Man*.

<sup>14</sup> STRAUSS 1994: 21.

<sup>15</sup> STRAUSS 1994.

Strauss, this is just a proposition that has never been proven; c) scientific knowledge, which is applied and accepted by modern science as a standard, in Strauss's thinking only seeks to neglect, discredit and devalue pre-scientific knowledge – in Strauss's critique of positivism – and historicism reappears at this point. Furthermore d) positivism transforms into historicism, which runs the risk that historical works will become unrepeatable, against which Strauss brings up the concept of historical understanding, the principle of close reading and the necessity of repeatability. Finally, e) the answers considered objective and thought out are articulated from subjective questions. By making these five propositions, Strauss shook the pulpit of modernity to its foundations and showed that what modern science believed to be a clean, value-judgment-free understanding of science in the narrow sense was nothing more than a fiction based on subjective facts, which did nothing other than encourage narrow-minded stubbornness. Going beyond Spengler, Strauss not only regarded it as justified that the decline or twilight of modernity would one day occur, but he also took it as read that modernity is currently in a crisis, and that the only way to alleviate the symptoms of this crisis is to revive the much-maligned classical political philosophy and elevate it back to its rightful place. "Strauss's political program set out to preserve philosophy in the 'strict' or 'classical' sense" – Rosen argues.

Strauss believed that the accurate interpretation of modern political phenomena is impossible without traditional political thinking. It is important to note at this point, however, that in Strauss's interpretation: "all political philosophy is also political thought, but not all political thought is political philosophy."<sup>16</sup> In Strauss's criticism, what is required is to guide the world of philosophy, which in the modern age has merged with the idealism of history, into a separate channel again, freeing philosophy from the distortions and beliefs imposed on it. Strauss's originality does not lie in the fact that he recognised the symptoms of the crisis of modernity or the escalation of this crisis, as this had already been illustrated by Spengler's guiding work. Instead, the novelty is that the results of Strauss's thoughts became relevant in political thought, hence Strauss's unique conclusion is as follows: in our time, classical political thought (classical political philosophy) can gain a current and decisive effect. Since neither historicism nor the interpretation of positivism could solve what Strauss termed "the eternal conflict between society and philosophy" – see the Socratic turn in Strauss's theory – the classical argument itself remained valid. The crisis of modern political philosophy (which is also the crisis of modern natural law) could only become a philosophical crisis because philosophy was completely permeated by politics, notes Strauss, and this politicisation created an atmosphere in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in which philosophy became a weapon. Strauss stands on the foundations of classical natural law and classical political thought – in the words of András Láncki: "the rationalism of classical thought made him a 'progressive conservative'" –, this is how Strauss's criticism of Weber can be described.

<sup>16</sup> STRAUSS 1994: 22.

At the beginning of our cruise, we were introduced to the Straussian critique of Weber's thoughts. If we continue on our boat trip, we can come across another criticism of Weber at the next coral reef, and it is none other than Mihály Polányi's system of ideas and his criticism of Weber.

## MIHÁLY POLÁNYI'S CRITIQUE OF WEBER

1. "He finds himself asserting the truth of his knowledge, and this assertion and this belief is an action that adds something to the world to which his knowledge applies."<sup>17</sup> Polányi's approach to objectivism has been raised. But what is the point of this? What solution does Polányi offer to objectivity as a distorting problem? The crux of the solution is in Polányi's identification of two types of knowledge. One half of our knowledge is explicit knowledge which in Polányi's definition includes that which is usually called knowledge, which can appear in countless ways (in maps, mathematical formulas, and written words). On the other hand, another component of our knowledge is tacit knowledge, which has not taken on a specific form but which is the knowledge used during action. For Polányi, tacit knowledge is the main element of all knowledge. The difference between these two typologies of knowledge outlined by Polányi is striking, because while an expression or thought thread obtained through explicit knowledge can be reflected upon (see Strauss and Polányi's critique of Weber), we cannot do the same in the case of tacit knowledge based on experience. In our case, therefore, explicit knowledge provides a specific space for critical statements.

2. "The emergence of the historical method known as historicism transformed our concepts of history, as the norms of the examined age began to be applied to past actions. This method, in an extreme case, would represent a perfect adaptation, and would make any overriding of the norms of an age pointless. The consequence of this is an extreme, completely mistaken relativism."<sup>18</sup> Polányi criticises historicism to point out that if the norms of the examined era were to be the guiding principle for a past era or action in all eventualities, then the studied era would cease to be the subject of critical reflections. In the critique of historicism, I would like to briefly mention Polányi's modern nihilism which in his theory "can be understood as one of the components of an unprecedentedly extensive moral protest in history".<sup>19</sup> (Opposed to it is the noble nihilism inherent in Straussian idealism.)

The next port of call for Polányi is the critical attitude inherent in positivism. 3. "Some philosophers of the last century were so influenced by this kind of tangible achievement that they wanted to abolish philosophy completely, dividing its subject among different disciplines."<sup>20</sup> It is worth recalling that Strauss wanted to save political philosophy in the classical sense from this liquidation.

<sup>17</sup> POLÁNYI 1997: 106.

<sup>18</sup> POLÁNYI 1997: 153.

<sup>19</sup> POLÁNYI 1997: 70.

<sup>20</sup> POLÁNYI 1992: 139.

Polányi calls this philosophical trend that ends philosophy positivism. The main direction of positivism created in modernity is that in its interpretative framework, truth can only be identified with scientific truth. Polányi's critique of positivism confronts positivism with the fact that since science itself is "positive", it cannot include the preservation of personal beliefs (personal knowledge). Through the lens of Polányi, this criticism could be formulated as follows: "My own main thesis, which I developed in *Personal Knowledge* – and the essence of which lies in the doubled meaning of knowledge, is, as it were, outside the borderline of positivism, and thus it is not science in the modern sense of the word." Elsewhere, Polányi states that: "The ultimate goal of modern science is the establishment of strictly impartial objective knowledge."<sup>21</sup>

Polányi's argument pulls the rug out from under the modern positivist understanding of science. Polányi considers his argument about positivism to be a closed issue since a positivist and unbiased science is not possible. After all, in every single human act lies the mode of action unique to that particular person, the individual's own line of questioning. The systems of views formed in this way become defined by scientific freedom, which is realised through the articulation of subjective facts.

"With the publication of the announcement, it will be possible for all those scientists who will form an opinion on its value to become familiar with it, and possibly even express their opinion. They can doubt or reject the claims of a statement, and their author can come to their defense."<sup>22</sup> This summarises Polányi's opinion on the question. At this point it is worth asking: In which aspects does Polányi question Weber's ideas?

Polányi was critical of positivism on the one hand and historicism on the other hand, as well as scientific objectivity, which supposedly banished value judgments from the process of scientific knowledge. Polányi does not find the theory set up by Weber to be completely consistent. He describes Weber's thesis as inconsistent, arguing that "the science that claims to be able to explain all human actions without value judgments, yet admits that the scientist, as a private person, is often motivated by motives".

Science, which seeks to provide a value-free explanation for every single human action, and strives to do so, calls into question both the moral motives and goals of the people fighting for their freedom. Modern political science supports the theory that human ideas are not independent influencing factors of public life. Polányi's interpretation of this modern political science comes into direct conflict (not only at an abstract level) with the objectives of the Hungarian revolution ("the aspects of truth and justice should be re-established in the field of public affairs"),<sup>23</sup> which he himself considers to be similar to Polányi's idealism of 1848. Polányi does not consider scientific Max Weber's methodological position regarding the binding of knowledge to assumptions and value judgments and the separation of value judgments and factual judgments.

<sup>21</sup> POLÁNYI 1997: 182–183.

<sup>22</sup> POLÁNYI 1997: 50.

<sup>23</sup> POLÁNYI 1992: 131.

Polányi formulates seven critical counter-arguments against Weber’s position: a) Every person makes a moral judgment, regardless of their profession (referring to Weber’s description of politics as a profession). b) When we claim that we act from our moral considerations, the same is true in the case when we judge others on a moral basis, and in these cases we also make reference to generally recognised moral standards that we consider to be valid. c) We must necessarily make a conceptual separation between moral illusion and moral truth. While the “awareness” of d) moral truth is based on the recognition of the validity of a requirement, the moral illusion e) is compulsive, like the illusion of the senses. f) In other words, if we accept the fact that there are valid moral judgments, as a result we must admit that there are moral human values, and if people are motivated by the knowledge of these values – and this is where Polányi’s argument reaches its peak – due to the existence of this motivation, all claims that human actions can be explained based on moral judgments can thus be dismissed. g) Finally, Polányi states that political science, as a behavioural science, cannot be free from value judgments if it studies the behaviour of rebels (revolutionaries). A science that seeks to provide a value-free explanation of every single human action, calls into question from the outset the moral motives and goals of people fighting for their freedom. On the basis of his critique of Weber, Polányi concludes that political science must be re-established on new foundations, starting from the irrevocable moral value of human actions and drawing upon the political experiences of modernity in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## MAX WEBER AND RUDOLF SOHM: TWO CONCEPTUAL SEPARATIONS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHARISMA

Max Weber is often considered to be one of the founding fathers of sociology (and is especially regarded as the father of bureaucratic organisation theory) alongside Marx and Durkheim, despite the fact that Weber himself resisted this title.

There is no doubt that Rudolph Sohm<sup>24</sup> was the source of Weber’s concept of charisma. Sohm had a great influence on Weber’s thinking in general. Weber borrowed the concept of charisma from Sohm. For Sohm, charisma was an important but relatively minor weapon in his theological battle over the origins and doctrine of Roman Catholicism. Sohm focuses primarily on anonymous early Christian leaders. In contrast, Weber focuses primarily on political and ethical leaders.<sup>25</sup>

In the chapter on “Religiöse Gemeinschaften” [Religious Communities], in Weber’s major work *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* [Economy and Society] Weber contends that “Under ‘prophet’ we will here understand a pure(ly) personal bearer of charisma” [“Wir wollen hier unter einem ‘Propheten’ verstehen einen rein persönlichen Charismaträger...”].<sup>26</sup> Weber drew on many of Sohm’s legal writings, beginning with Sohm’s 1880 essay “Fränkisches

<sup>24</sup> SOHM 1892; SOHM 1912.

<sup>25</sup> ADAIR-TÖTEFF 2014.

<sup>26</sup> WEBER 2001: 177.

Recht und Römisches Recht” and his 1888 article in “Die Deutsche Genossenschaft” [The German Confederation]. Weber quotes Sohm, who was the source of the concept of charisma, at least seven times in four different works: twice in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, once in *Probleme der Staatssoziologie* [The Sociological Problem of the State], twice in *Die Drei reinen Typen der Herrschaften* [The Three Pure Types of Authority], and twice in *Allgemeine Staatssoziologie* [General State Sociology].<sup>27</sup> He praises Sohm for being the first scholar to consider charisma from a purely historical perspective, and calls Sohm’s a “brilliantly developed” concept of charisma.<sup>28</sup>

For Sohm, charisma is important, but for him it was primarily in support of his claim that ecclesiastical authority based on canon law cannot be theologically justified. The only true Christian “authority” is God-given charisma, and this has nothing to do with political, legal or religious orders. In contrast, Weber’s conception of charisma is essentially political, and this is manifested in his use of prophets as examples of “charismatic carriers”.<sup>29</sup>

However, it should be recalled that extraordinary times call for extraordinary people. People who appear to be charismatic authorities appear primarily in times of great unrest and upheaval. In times of crisis, special leaders are needed – charismatic leaders. In Weber’s view, charisma is a radical and even a revolutionary power. In *Drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft* Weber calls charisma “one of the greatest revolutionary powers in history”, and in his last work entitled *Staatssoziologie* (Sociology of the State), he claims that charisma is a “revolutionary power from above”. In that work he identifies charisma along with rationality as the “two great revolutionary powers”.<sup>30</sup> Charisma is revolutionary in part because it is the opposite of legal authority. In contrast to “rational” legal authority, charisma is “irrational”. Legal authority is impersonal and regular, while charismatic authority is personal and exceptional. Charismatic authority is also anti-traditional because it breaks with what has always been. Not only does it defy any traditional or rational norm, it actually reverses all values. Weber cites Jesus’ insistence that: “It is written, but I say unto you.”<sup>31</sup> Weber insists that “the old law is broken by the new revelation” and hence the charismatic leader “gives new orders”.<sup>32</sup> Charisma is also revolutionary because it is “eternally new” [*Das ewig Neue*].<sup>33</sup> It is radical because of its extraordinariness. Weber constantly emphasises the “extraordinary quality” (*außertägliche Qualität*) and “extraordinary character” (*außeralltägliche Charakter*) of charisma.<sup>34</sup> It is also referred to as “*außeralltägliche Kraft*”<sup>35</sup> [extraordinary power].

<sup>27</sup> WEBER 1922: 124; 2005: 735, 755; 2009: 78–79.

<sup>28</sup> WEBER 2005: 462.

<sup>29</sup> ADAIR-TOTTEFF 2014.

<sup>30</sup> WEBER 2009; see further WEBER 1976: 142.

<sup>31</sup> WEBER 1976: 141; WEBER 2005: 468.

<sup>32</sup> WEBER 2009: 141.

<sup>33</sup> WEBER 2005: 735.

<sup>34</sup> WEBER 2001: 740; WEBER 1922: 122.

<sup>35</sup> WEBER 2009.

The extraordinary nature of charisma is also based on its almost exclusively personal nature. Weber constantly calls it personal: it is “personal authority” and “personally effective”.<sup>36</sup>

Weber’s contribution to the discipline of sociology is not in doubt, as he dealt with the big questions of his own and our time: the emergence and challenges of modern capitalist societies from a comparative and historical perspective. He not only established sociology as a new field, but also broke new ground in the fields of anthropology, economics, history, political science, religious science, law, media and culture.<sup>37</sup>

Some scholars argue that his work covers four main areas of social reality: 1. the ideal-typical regularities of action and the meaning actors assign to their actions; 2. the vehicles and contexts of social action – that is, the role of strata, classes, organisations, and social domains such as economics, religion, and politics; 3. the role of ideas, interests, values, norms and cultural practices that explain the grouping (*Vergesellschaftung*) and community building (*Vergemeinschaftung*) of people; and 4. actors’ lifestyles (*Lebensstil*) and life conduct (*Lebensführung*), which help us understand how individuals are shaped by different types of rationalities and express their habitual, mental, and ethical dispositions. Weber’s influence is evident in the enduring concepts and terms he coined or defined for the mainstream social sciences: charisma, bureaucracy, dominance, status, prestige, power, objectivity, ideal types, rationalisation and alienation, the Protestant ethic, the purpose of the social sciences. A critique of scientific life and the so-called iron cage that confines individuals to arrangements based solely on teleological efficiency, rational calculation and control.<sup>38</sup>

Weber’s ideas have been used for many, sometimes contradictory, purposes, such as the theory of social action – as a model of rational action and as a guideline for structural functionalist analysis – and as a basis for modernisation and systems theories. As a result, the meaning of Weber’s perceived contribution has changed over time, indicating that his work is not a closed system but an open book from which different perspectives and interpretations can and can be creatively derived and deduced.<sup>39</sup>

Two schools of thought representing Weber’s legacy emerged: Weberology<sup>40</sup> and Weberism.<sup>41</sup> Weberology mainly examines Weber’s historical, intellectual and political history, as well as his scientific development (*Werkgeschichte*). Weberology is not a form of advocacy for Weber, but interprets his concepts and methodology in relation to Weber’s position as a “classical” sociologist, his biographical and editorial

<sup>36</sup> WEBER 2005: 469, 467.

<sup>37</sup> KURTHEN 2021.

<sup>38</sup> SCAFF 2015.

<sup>39</sup> KURTHEN 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Some representatives of weberology: Eliaeson, Chalcraft, Collins, Gerhardt, Hanke, Hennis, Kaelber, Kalberg, Lash, Lehmann, Löwith, Merton, Mommsen, Morcillo Laiz, Parsons, Poggi, Radkau, Riesebrodt, Rossi, Roth, Scaff, Schluchter, Tilly, Sica, Swedberg, Tenbruck, Tribe, Turner, von Schelting, Weisz, Whimster and Winkelmann. KURTHEN 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Some representatives of Weberism: Albert, Albrow, Bendix, Bruun, Chalcraft, Gerth, Giddens, Gunderson, Habermas, Hennis, Joas, Joosse, Kaelber, Kalberg, Lepsius, Mills, Müller, Parsons, Prisching, Roth, Scaff, Schluchter, Schneider, Schwinn, Swedberg, Tenbruck, Turner and Whimster. KURTHEN 2021.

reinterpretations and revisions. It is about “what Weber said, when, what, under what conditions and for what purpose”.<sup>42</sup>

Weberology confirms that there is a lack of consistent and unified consensus on the meaning and content of Weberian theory. Instead, the contingent and contextual nature of his work becomes visible, emphasising the unique rather than the universal.<sup>43</sup> There is an eclectic abundance of interpretations, commentaries, and applications for a wide variety of subjects and research topics, or as Caldwell wrote, “there are as many Webers as there are interpreters of his work”.<sup>44</sup>

## SUMMARY

Weber’s interpretation depends on time, place and question. So far, there has not been a comprehensive consensus on where, when and how to use the Weberian toolbox. Depending on the way Weber is atomised and contextualised, as well as the availability of translations, we can distinguish between Weberian, neo-Weberian and post-Weberian, “old” and “new” Weberian approaches. For example, Weberian studies have applied Weberian thought to such far-reaching topics as the trajectory of global capitalism, Eastern European and Middle Eastern transformations, rising inequality, religious conflicts, great power competition and foreign policy, new pandemic conflicts, ethics of the world, life, religion and science, nuclear weapons, and culture and consumerism in modern capitalism. Some argue that the application of Weberian concepts and expressions to contemporary issues may lead to new insights into current autocratic or direct referendum trends; charismatic strong leaders and the resurgence of nationalism,<sup>45</sup> sovereignty and legitimacy issues of supranational entities and institutions; failed states and increased migration; sectarian religious movements in the Middle East in connection with the dispersion of power and state authority; and the fragmentation of beliefs, lifestyles and behaviour in a world increasingly influenced by social media, fake facts and artificial intelligence.<sup>46</sup>

Like Weberology, Weberian scholarship proves the continuous applicability of Weber’s thought across time and space.<sup>47</sup>

The constant acceptance of Weber’s ideas and their popularisation in scientific education and scholarship also started trivialisation trends, which can be considered the inevitable consequence of all long-term, widely applied conceptual and methodological innovations. Weber shares this fate with other “classicists” such as Marx. Weber has often been borrowed

<sup>42</sup> BRUUN 2011: 145.

<sup>43</sup> GORDON 2020.

<sup>44</sup> CALDWELL 2016. 215.

<sup>45</sup> JOOSSE 2018.

<sup>46</sup> STRAZZERI 2016.

<sup>47</sup> I would like to write more about some of the results of the recent international and domestic interpretation of Weber in another study.

as an honorific reference on the opening pages of journals and books on charisma, bureaucracy, status groups, and the Protestant ethic, sometimes in a clichéd and ritualised way as a quasi-cult object without serious application. At other times, with a conformist nod to sociological convention, Weber is referred to superficially to provide quasi-professional prestige and legitimacy, or to embellish current concepts without innovative content. The selective use of theories, concepts, expressions and quotations out of their original context often leads to over-interpretation or trivialisation, if not falsification.<sup>48</sup>

This is facilitated, as mentioned earlier, by Weber's rejection of the existence of a systematic theory. Moreover, his sometimes scattered or ambivalent expressions and conceptual frameworks open to multiple interpretations make his work an easily exploited "quarry".<sup>49</sup>

Max Weber stands out for his continued relevance in the social sciences. Weber's appeal for social science and political decision-makers is due to the broad comparative, multi-dimensional, multicausal, and transdisciplinary nature of many of his theoretical and methodological concepts. It provided critical insight into the rise of supposedly "modern" Western capitalism vis-à-vis non-Western civilizations and pointed to the importance that human agents attach to their social actions. Even as Weber's ideas have been rechristened, redefined, and rejected, they have created ripple effects in areas beyond mere sociological inquiry and beyond their original intent, leaving footprints that many do not recognise as Weberian. His work inspired a new understanding (*Verstehen*) of past and present societies because he was not a utopian realist who did not conceive of history as linear, teleological or accumulative progress, but understood its non-linear, unpredictable, contingent and unintended qualities.<sup>50</sup>

Empirically analysing societies and civilisations on their own terms, Weber pointed to the anti-utopian nature and weaknesses of modern capitalist societies, such as moral relativism, confused reason, and the ever-present spectre of authoritarianism. In this sense, Weber can be seen as the heroic liberal conscience of reason and individual freedom in the enchanted world of Western modernity.<sup>51</sup>

Since social science itself (as well as the societies it analysed) is determined by the limits of the socio-historical and biological development of the human species, and by the forces of change, continuity and selection, there is no guarantee that social theory and the 'reception' of the 'classical' authors continue as before. As societies and people change over time and space, it is inevitable that social science contributions and insights will lose their limited relevance, fade and become obsolete. While Weber's relevance remains that of most of his predecessors and many of his contemporaries and successors, his work can fade over time, as he himself wisely acknowledged. Yet, although it is eventually lost to the past, like other human creations, it remains in the history of human thought.

<sup>48</sup> ELIAESON 2002: 128.

<sup>49</sup> KÄSLER 1979: 228.

<sup>50</sup> KALBERG 2008: 284.

<sup>51</sup> CALDWELL 2016: 214.

“The choice between positions based on different kinds of presuppositions is thus more of an intuitive and ultimately a matter of conscience, rather than a choice between interpretations based on the same or similar presuppositions.”<sup>52</sup>

In connection with their clashes (conflicts and critical elements used), we can talk about the mutual influence of these two presented Weber critiques and their differences in viewpoints. The most observable features of mutual influence arise in connection with the discussion of Weber’s critical reflections in which both of our Weber critics: Strauss and Polányi attacked and crushed the same cornerstones of Weber’s theory with the help of their thought rhythms: these are none other than historicism, positivism, and the prominent role of value judgments in refuting scientific objectivity.

Further mutual influence can be observed in Strauss’s and Polányi’s understanding of science. According to Strauss: “We know more and more about less and less”,<sup>53</sup> while Polányi’s thesis reads as follows: “When rethinking human knowledge, I start from the fact that we know more than what we can say.”<sup>54</sup>

In my analysis in which I made a theoretical attempt to present the complexity of the connections inherent in the thought systems of Leo Strauss and Mihály Polányi, focusing in particular on the critical reflections of Weber’s ideas.

In the course of the research, it was revealed that 1. these critical reflections exert influence, counter-effect mechanisms on each other, according to which their critical viewpoints (in terms of positivism, historicism and progressivism) show agreement, while their unique systems of views point to marked differences.

Nevertheless, 2. despite the critical remarks made by Strauss and Polányi 3. the Weberian theory did not cease to exist and did not quietly disappear from the map of social science – it does not have to do so. Strauss and Polányi, through their criticism of Weber, instead of ignoring it, by fitting it into a deeper interpretive framework, they fully contributed to an understanding reading of Weber’s thoughts and theses as well as their uniqueness for social science.

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<sup>52</sup> POLÁNYI 1997: 70.

<sup>53</sup> LÁNCZI 1999: 21.

<sup>54</sup> POLÁNYI 1997: 170.

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