MAX WEBER
AND THE PROTESTANT ETHIC

TWIN HISTORIES

Peter Ghosh
MAX WEBER AND *THE PROTESTANT ETHIC*: TWIN HISTORIES
Max Weber and
*The Protestant Ethic:*
Twin Histories

PETER GHOSH
This book is for
Helen
Olivia
William

and all those who, in spirit at least, have been with Max Weber at Portree
Preface

Max Weber is without doubt the most prestigious thinker in the social sciences today in Western Europe, North America and East Asia. His works are used by innumerable people in many disciplines, with the result that everyone knows “Max Weber” in their own particular way. Yet there is no Max Weber, an identifiable person with a clear intellectual identity, nor a sense of the inner unity and interconnection of his ideas. There are two principal reasons for this. First, Weber was an undoubted polymath (or, as he sometimes put it, dilettante), who committed himself explicitly to working on an inter- and multidisciplinary basis. At the same time, he had a ferocious aversion to discussing or reflecting on himself and his work. Clues to the underlying meaning of what he thought he was doing are extremely scarce and there is nothing like the sort of guidance one gets in a work such as J. S. Mill’s Autobiography. We are thus confronted by an immense, plural œuvre that few persons can survey, while the personal presence behind it remains the same spectral “Myth of Heidelberg” that it was in Weber’s own lifetime. Yet the integrity of his personality, of his mind and thought, was self-evident to contemporaries. Here then is a great challenge: to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

Meanwhile the resources for such a project have been transformed out of all recognition by the publication of the Max Weber Gesamtausgabe (the collected edition of his works)—especially in the new millennium, when publication, at first slow, has become rapid. In 2014 the edition will be three-quarters complete (and full completion is projected for two to three years after that). The full range of Weber’s printed œuvre is now clear; the letters for the second half of his life (1906–20) have been published, as have his most important lecture manuscripts. Taken as a whole, this is like a vast virgin terrain, which presents a unique opportunity that will never recur. In particular it is an opportunity for the historian of ideas, when the vast majority of those who read and use Weber are social scientists and disciplinary specialists, not historians with their omnivorous commitment to “the past” in its totality. For the way in which the materials are read is at least as important as the fact of their availability. This is not to say (of course) that the historian of ideas is a better reader than the economist, social scientist, theologian or whoever. Nonetheless, the historian of ideas is the only one whose sole commitment is to understanding Max Weber “as he really was” and in his totality; s/he is not simultaneously seeking some Weberian input for the benefit of current thinking in a particular field of study. One cannot complain at the alternative viewpoint—Weber himself was eminently present-minded; but it proves time and again to introduce a distorting element, if what concerns us is to understand the man in his historical actuality.

In this book I propose to meet the challenge Weber poses and to exploit the opportunity offered by the Gesamtausgabe, by presenting an intellectual biography
framed along strictly historical lines—something that, despite occasional suggestions to the contrary, has not been done before. However, this will not be done on a conventional narrative principle, taking the reader through Weber’s life and works more or less in sequence. Instead I wish to use his most famous text, ‘The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism’ (1904–5), as a focal point. In preparing an edition of this text, it became clear to me that it is not just the familiar work with a hackneyed “thesis”, that is taught in schools and universities. On the contrary, it is a kind of compact summa, which exploits the full resources of Weber’s interdisciplinary commitments (in law, economics, theology, politics and sociology), and contains his views on practically all subjects, albeit they are sometimes hermetically compressed or squirreled away in footnote-essays. Not for nothing did he describe it as his Hauptwerk or chef d’œuvre in 1905. So to explain where the ‘Protestant Ethic’ came from requires a survey of the principal themes in Weber’s career prior to 1904, as well as an estimate of the great hiatus and additional puzzle presented by the nervous collapse that preceded its composition. This is Part I of the book.

The ‘Protestant Ethic’ also has a second history, that of charting its legacy for the rest of Weber’s life (from 1905 to 1920)—and this is Part II. Its one rival as a summation of his views is ‘Economy and Society’ (1910–20), which might be described as a macrocosm in contrast to the microcosm of the ‘Protestant Ethic’. But however different their organizing principles may be, they share a comprehensive ambition. Thus there are deep and strong lines connecting the ‘Protestant Ethic’ to all the major sociologies within ‘Economy and Society’ on law, religion, and Herrschaft (rule). Here is a classic terrain for the intellectual historian, and yet it is a history that has not been told before. Surprising though it may sound, the idea that there might be connections—or even a need to chart the interrelation—between Weber’s two most famous works has not been broached. The second most important project of Weber’s later years, the ‘Economic Ethics of the World Religions’ (1912–20), was much more obviously an extension of the ‘Protestant Ethic’ (although even this has been brought into question), and such forward connections can be multiplied many times over. In short, the intellectual legacy of the ‘Protestant Ethic’ takes in the principal works of Weber’s later life, and the text operates as a kind of axial point about which his career revolves. So while the portrait that follows does not observe systematic completeness, it seeks to compensate for this by enhanced coherence, so as to yield a clearer picture of the thinker as an individual—someone who is more than just a set of fragments parcelled out across a range of disciplines. Even so, the intellectual biography of Max Weber and the history of the ‘Protestant Ethic’ are to a remarkable degree twin histories, and there is a symbolic aptness in the fact that republication of a revised edition of the ‘Protestant Ethic’ in 1920 was also the moment of Weber’s death.
Acknowledgements

After the dedicatees and their sparkling offerings of bracing scepticism, time-management counsel, and Pauline caritas, my first thanks go to Hubert Treiber and Guenther Roth. Besides reading the text, they have been my constant partners in scholarly dialogue, offering advice and assistance of every kind. Second is my indebtedness to MWG: to Wolfgang Schluchter who most generously sent me the draft of his forthcoming introduction to MWG I/9 (the edition of the 1904–5 ‘Protestant Ethic’); and to Edith Hanke, Ursula Bube, and Prof. Rainer Lepsius, who have been equally and unfailingly generous in giving me documentary assistance. My thanks too to Friedrich Wilhelm Graf and Hans Henrik Bruun for their documentary assistance. Nearer home, I thank Ross McKibbin, the first reader of much of the text and for many years a kind of scholarly conscience. Forgive me if I mention by name only those who have been directly connected with this book, and not all those who have helped me with Max Weber over the years. They know who they are and will I trust accept a comprehensive expression of thanks here. Finally, a general reflection: the community of Weber scholars is genuinely international, multidisciplinary and collegial, a successor in microcosm to the Republic of Letters of early modern Europe. It is a privilege to be a member of it.

Plurimi pertransibunt et multiplex erit scientia.
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Textual Symbols and Conventions

[XX.1], [XXI.1] ‘Die protestantische Ethik und der „Geist“ des Kapitalismus’ (‘The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism’) [PE], Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, XX.1–54 (1904), XXI.1–110.

[i.100]* Text added to the PE in Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionsoziologie [GARS] (Tübingen, 1920), i. 17–206.

[i.1] References to ‘Vorbemerkung’, ‘Die protestantischen Sekten und der Geist des Kapitalismus . . .’ in GARS i. 1–16; i. 207–36.


(I.1) Cross-references to other chapters in this book
[c] Points where further material is expounded in the commentary to my edition of the PE (forthcoming, OUP)

Arial font Foreign words (usually English) in Weber’s “German”, which are here untranslated
Ideas/ideas ‘Ideas’ translates the German word Ideen, meaning great, leading, or world-historical Ideas, in contrast to more humdrum, everyday ‘ideas’ or ‘thoughts’ (Gedanken)
All translation from German is my own, unless otherwise indicated.
Dates attached to Weberian texts are dates of composition, and not necessarily of publication.
Four German Words

These few words are central to any discussion of Weberian themes but are untranslatable by any simple equivalent.

Herrschaft: ‘rule’ is an approximate equivalent. This must always be understood as ‘legitimate rule’ (not ‘domination’), but even so this is an inadequate translation because Herrschaft is not merely the act of political governance, but a continuing process of creating mass legitimacy for forms of rule within a social context.

Kultur: a truly untranslatable word, hence its presence in OED. It is not mere artistic or literary ‘culture’ (Bildung), but the realm of fundamental values, the entire ethical and ideal make-up of a person or society. As such it offers a kind of alternative to religion, and its extreme elevation in late-nineteenth-century German language discourse is the obvious product of a secularizing era. Adjective: kulturell.

Täufer: radical sectarians in religion who, in the eyes of Weber and others, made up a continuous tradition running from the Anabaptists of the early German Reformation through to the English Independents and Quakers of the seventeenth century. ‘Baptists’ might seem an obvious translation, but the broadly conceived movement of the Täufer is not to be confused with the specific sect of English Baptists (Baptisten), while Quakers did not believe in any sacrament of baptism.

Wissenschaft: literally ‘science’ as in the Latin scientia, meaning the totality of ‘organized knowledge’, the corporate undertaking of disciplined ‘learning’ within a university context. This is in contrast to the vague English word ‘science’, which if it has a precise meaning suggests only ‘natural science’ and empirical certainty. Wissenschaft remains a significant part of German identity to this day.
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Abriff</td>
<td>Abriff der universal Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte [1919–20]</td>
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<td>ADB</td>
<td>Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie, ed. R. von Liliencron et al., 56 vols (Leipzig, 1875–1912)</td>
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<td>AfGS</td>
<td>Archiv für soziale Gesetzgebung und Statistik</td>
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<td>AfSS</td>
<td>Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik</td>
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<td>‘Agrarverhältnisse’</td>
<td>‘Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum’, 18971, 18982, 19093</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asketischer Protestantismus</td>
<td>Asketischer Protestantismus und der „Geist“ des modernen Kapitalismus, ed. Wolfgang Schluchter and Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (Tübingen, 2005)</td>
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<td>‘Bemerkungen’</td>
<td>‘Bemerkungen zu den vorstehenden „Replik“’, AfSS 26 (1908), 275–83</td>
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<td>Briefe</td>
<td>Max Weber Gesamtausgabe, Abteilung II Briefe</td>
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<td>Dreijmanis, Vollständige Schriften</td>
<td>John Dreijmanis (ed.), Max Webers vollständige Schriften zu Akademischen und politischen Berufen (Bremen, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freiburg Inaugural</td>
<td>Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik. Akademische Antrittsrede (Freiburg, 1895)</td>
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<td>GARS</td>
<td>Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie (Tübingen, 1920–1)</td>
</tr>
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<td>GASS</td>
<td>Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik, ed. Marianne Weber (Tübingen, 1924)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grundriss</td>
<td>Grundriss zu den Vorlesungen über Allgemeine („theoretical“) National-ökonomie [1989]</td>
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<td>GdSÖ</td>
<td>Grundriss der Sozialökonomik (Tübingen, 1914–)</td>
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<td>GSG</td>
<td>Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe (Frankfurt a.M., 1989–)</td>
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<td>HZ</td>
<td>Historische Zeitschrift</td>
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Abbreviations

Jugendbriefe Jugendbriefe, ed. Marianne Weber (Tübingen [1936])

KGA Ernst Troeltsch Kritische Gesamtausgabe, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf et al. (Berlin and New York, 1998–)

Kritiken und Antikritiken Die protestantische Ethik II. Kritiken und Antikritiken, ed. J. Winckelmann (Gütersloh, 1978)

‘Kritische Bemerkungen’ ‘Kritische Bemerkungen zu den vorstehenden „Kritischen Beiträgen“’, AfSS 25 (1907), 243–9

‘Kritische Studien’ ‘Kritische Studien auf dem Gebiet der kulturwissenschaftlichen Logik’ (1906)

KZSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie


Lenger, Sombart Friedrich Lenger, Werner Sombart 1863–1941. Eine Biographie (Munich, 1994)


MK Werner Sombart, Der moderne Kapitalismus (Leipzig, 1902)

MWG Max Weber Gesamtausgabe, ed. Horst Baier et al. (Mohr [Siebeck] Tübingen, 1984–)

MWS Max Weber Studies

Nachlaß Max Weber Unpublished letters from the Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Berlin- Dahlem, GStA PK, VI. HA Nachlaß Max Weber

NDB Neue deutsche Biographie (Berlin, 1953–) hrsg. von der Historischen Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften

»Objektivität« ‘Die „Objektivität“ sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozial-politischer Erkenntnis’ (1904)

Parlament und Regierung Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland

PE ‘The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism’ ('Die protestantische Ethik und der „Geist“ des Kapitalismus')

PJb Preußische Jahrbücher

PRE Realeencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche, ed. A. Hauck (Leipzig, 1896–1913)

Abbreviations

PS
‘The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism’ (‘Die protestantischen Sekten und der Geist des Kapitalismus’, GARS i. 207–36)

Radkau, Max Weber
Joachim Radkau, Max Weber: Die Leidenschaft des Denkens (Munich and Vienna, 2005)

RGG
Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, ed. F. M. Schiele et al. (Tübingen, 1908–13)

Roth, Familiengeschichte
Guenther Roth, Max Webers deutsch-englische Familiengeschichte 1800–1950 (Tübingen, 2001)

‘The Rural Community’

‘Schlusswort’
‘Anti-kritisches Schlusswort zum „Geist des Kapitalismus”, AfSS 31 (1910), 554–99

Schmollers Jb
Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft

‘Stoffverteilungsplan’
‘Stoffverteilungsplan’ for the Handbuch der politischen Ökonomie, May 1910. Fascimile with marginalia in Johannes Winckelmann, Max Webers hinterlassenes Hauptwerk (Tübingen, 1986), 150–5. The facsimile text alone is frequently reprinted (e.g. MWG II/6.766–74–76), and is to be preferred to that in MWG I/24.164–73.

‘Soziallehren’
Ernst Troeltsch, ‘Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen’, AfSS 26–30 (1908–10)

Soziallehren
Ernst Troeltsch, Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen (Tübingen, 1912)

Sociology of Herrschaft*

Sociology of Law*

Sociology of Religion*

* Note. I retain the conventional titles for these texts that make up the bulk of the pre-war drafts of ‘Economy and Society’, since they are transparent and readily understood. They are not purely historical, but nor are they entirely artificial, since from 1913–14 on Weber was employing titles of precisely this kind. I have therefore ignored the different titles coined by MWG (Religiöse Gemeinschaften, Die Entwicklungsbedingungen des Rechts), which arise primarily from the structure and needs of that edition. These are at least as artificial as the established alternatives; where they are different, they are less transparent; and in one case, Religiöse Gemeinschaften, the new title is demonstrably misleading, since the surviving text of the Sociology of Religion contains no discussion of religious sects, the form of ‘religious community’ of most interest and importance to Weber.
Vorbemerkung

‘Vorbemerkung’ (1919–20), *GARS* i. 1–16; literally ‘Preliminary Remarks’; translated by Talcott Parsons as ‘Author’s Introduction’

**WL**

*Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. J. Winckelmann (Tübingen, 1968); *WL* 1–359 is identical with the 1st edn (1922), and 1–474 with the 2nd edn (1951)

**WuG**

PART I

1

A Problem

The central problem of Max Weber’s intellectual biography is practically the same as that of the genesis of ‘The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism’ (PE) and its emergence as if from nowhere. The five years from March 1898 to April 1903, when he was aged between 34 and 39, mark out an immense hiatus in his life, framed at one end by the onset of nervous collapse and at the other by the abandonment of the salary and duties of his university chair (though not his professorial title). For the first four of these years there was no intellectual production at all; between April 1902 and July 1903 Weber wrote just two book reviews and what proved to be the first part of an essay pairing (‘Roscher and Knies’). But after this painfully slow resumption he became, if not prolific, fecund, and from late 1903 onwards works that we now value as great masterpieces began to issue from his pen, even if the sense of nervous strain never went away. Within the essayistic œuvre of the years 1903–9 the PE was the undoubted centrepiece: in Weber’s own words, it was his ‘Hauptarbeit’ or principal work at this time. Here was what Marianne Weber called ‘the new phase of production’, one that she supposed was of a ‘completely different character’ from his previous work. In fact Weber had begun two new streams of work. Besides the PE, a substantive historical statement about the nature of modernity, there was a series of essays on questions of method in history and social science. The essay on ‘The “Objectivity” of Knowledge in Social Science’, also from 1904, is a parallel moment of blazing intellectual ambition and assertion, as Weber settles his theoretical account with the immense burden imposed by encyclopaedic knowledge of the past. This was followed by the second and major half of ‘Roscher and Knies’ (1905–6), which laid down the foundations of what we now know as the sociology of Verstehen (social science based on the attempt to understand the conduct of individuals as in some degree meaningful), even if in a literary sense this was much less successful. But if one were to ask where these unprecedented works and ideas had come from, then from that day to this there has been no direct answer to this question, and the only rational prediction is that there never will be. This is not to say that future archival work will make no difference to our understanding. A good deal of our knowledge of what Weber was up to depends upon stray trifles of information; there is still some combing of sources to be done

1 WL 1–42.
2 Weber to Rickert, 14.6.04, Nachlaß Max Weber 30/4 Bl. 94.
3 Lebensbild, 272.
and who knows what may turn up. But what we shall not find is a direct statement by Weber outlining his intellectual trajectory or major purposes in life, because autobiographical reflection of this kind was something he refused to indulge. There is, for example, no equivalent in his work to Marx’s 1859 Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, with its brief sketch of the evolution of his thought—yet no one would describe Marx as self-indulgent in this respect.

Weber’s detestation of the confessional mode was absolute. Like the Puritans, he shunned “idle talk”, and their ‘command to keep silent’ was one he passed on to his students as a maxim of conduct [XXI.77 & n. 7]. On the rare occasions when he might have wished to be more forthcoming, he found he could not. When his youngest sister suffered a double bereavement during the Great War, he wanted to help her, but was driven to this admission: ‘It must be said that I will probably always remain a more closed and perhaps lonely person than it may seem [outwardly], and not easily accessible: this was something nature did not grant me.’

The very category of the ‘personal’ [XX.30] was for him a suspect one. In the modern world what was ‘personal’ should remain private, a realm standing outside the cool sobriety of rational social interaction; in the public arena, it took on a ‘vegetative meaning’, laden with ‘irrationalities’ of a degradingly emotional and sentimental variety [cf. XXI.14 n. 21]. In the academic sphere such thinking led to a doctrine of near complete self-effacement. Indeed effacement was the best, and only proper, outlet for the ‘personality’, a concept that in Weber’s view was, or ought to be, the very antithesis of the merely “personal” and ostentatious. As he told the all too showy Werner Sombart: ‘You want to write “personal” books. I am convinced that personal character (of which you certainly have a good deal) always comes to the surface when it is unintended, but only then, when it hides behind the book and its objective character, and this is what all the great masters have done from behind their works.’ So when in his mid-fifties Weber launched an attack on

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4 We must await publication of the relevant correspondence volumes in MWG for a tolerably comprehensive record of Weber’s life prior to 1906. However, publication of the principal lecture manuscripts from the 1890s has removed one of the most important areas of documentary uncertainty for this period. Another possible source may lie in the notes of any reading he did in the years 1901–3, and MWG I/9 will cast light on this.

5 Karl Loewenstein, ‘Persönliche Erinnerungen an Max Weber’, in Gedächtnisschrift der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München zur 100. Wiederkehr seines Geburtstags (Berlin, 1964), 27–38, here 35. Loewenstein thought that Weber failed to keep his own command, citing as evidence his combative wartime political engagement. Yet the wartime writings contain frequent exhortations to silence (MWG I/15.165–6, 244, 374, 433, 593), and Weber’s actual silence amidst the jingoism of 1914–15 is one of the most important acts of his life: below II.4. In fact Loewenstein mistakes Weber’s command for silence on matters personal as a command for silence on contentious subjects.

6 To Lili Schäfer, 27.9.15, Briefe. First Lili’s husband died, then her brother Karl, and she later committed suicide. Compare identical statements from thirty years before: to Fritz Baumgarten, 19.1.79, to Helene Weber, 3/7.5.84, Jugendbriefe, 21, 114.

7 Kritische Studien I [1906], WL 227. There are obvious echoes of Hegel here, and an equally obvious contrast to the J. S. Mill of On Liberty.


9 To Sombart, 16.7.08, Briefe.
the false cult of academic “personality”, he meant every word he said. Not only was an academic author’s work necessarily superseded by the work of those who came after, but the true servant of a necessarily impersonal academic science or Wissenschaft ‘wanted to be superseded and to become obsolete’. Anyone who did not share this assumption simply did not understand the academic vocation. In the words of Marianne Weber (who admired but could not altogether share his viewpoint), a ‘sovereign composure full of self-denial regarding his own personal fate was part of his being’—an assessment that recalls the ‘ideal of “reserve”’ and ‘self-mastery’ that Weber admired in the Puritans [XXI.29 & n. 82]. So it is that a deep and deliberate silence lies at the heart of our researches—whether into the intellectual biography of the man or the genesis of a major text such as the PE.

In this enquiry there has been no path-finder. The only intellectual estimate of Weber by a contemporary that went any further than obituary tribute lay in the successive profiles by Karl Jaspers. However, these are snapshots only, and despite their undoubted value Jaspers was no impartial expositor but was explicitly advancing his own intellectual concerns: ‘One honours a great man by making his works one’s own’. At first sight this absence of reflection seems odd, for there was no want of contemporary appreciation of Weber’s gifts. However, even if we set aside the handicap imposed by his self-concealment, there were obvious reasons for this deficiency, which were frequently noted. One was the simple physical dispersion of his work. Apart from two early dissertations required for academic promotion, he wrote no books, and so his œuvre was ‘all fragments . . . hiding in journals, archives, newspapers’. This was a reflection of something more fundamental and, so far as intellectual appreciation was concerned, quite as forbidding. Weber understood that academic specialization was both indispensable and the greatest single threat to the collective enterprise of Wissenschaft, the pursuit of a unified body of knowledge, and he fought a lifelong battle against it. Hence (as Jaspers observed) it was ‘not appropriate for this great man to be claimed for a . . . single discipline’. On the contrary: ‘One could, depending on the occasion, think that everything was his true profession or vocation [Beruf].’ However, none of Weber’s contemporaries could accept his commitment to inter- and multidisciplinary enquiry unless it was
surmounted by a single master discipline—and here the philosopher Jaspers was no exception. So in their eyes Weber’s work remained that of a ‘fragmentarian’, even though such a judgement epitomized the very state of specialized disintegration that he opposed.14 While there was no want of detailed engagement with the seminal fragments of that work after 1920, the identity of the mind behind them disappeared, leaving only ‘a huge field strewn with blocks of lava, after a terrific volcanic eruption’—and this has been the overriding history of Weberian tradition and reception ever since.15

But what, then, of Marianne Weber, whose services to the perpetuation of her husband’s name and work are indisputable? After Weber himself, Marianne was the person with the best chance of knowing what he was up to, at least in the literal sense of usually being physically present alongside him until 1918, while our debt to her in assembling his fragmentary, essayistic œuvre in book form is inestimable. Yet we cannot rely on her as an interpreter of Weber’s ideas, none of which she dared to engage with during his lifetime, and hardly thereafter. Her Life Portrait (Lebensbild, 1926) of Weber was precisely that: a portrait of his life, not his mind. In her own words, it was ‘außerwissenschaftlich’: it stood ‘outside the academic sphere’, and should rather be read as a ‘popular book’.16 However, regardless of this winning modesty, she had tenacious prejudices of her own, and her apparently authoritative and unforced assumptions would give rise to a number of fundamental misconceptions about the contours of Max’s life and work as a whole. So the implicit reliance that almost all commentators have placed on Marianne hitherto, must be abandoned. The Life Portrait will always be the first of posthumous biographical sources on Max Weber; but the idea that it is ‘reliable as a rule’ in what it says about his thought is untenable.17

The Webers’ marriage was one of shared assumptions about intellectual development, personal autonomy and gender equality. Max Weber was explicit that the ideal marriage for a man was to ‘a woman equal in worth or status’,18 but equality

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14 Jaspers, Max Weber: Rede, 15. Although Jaspers claimed to find unity in the fact of Weber’s life, his Existenz, he still broke it down into three components: the politician, the scholar or researcher, and the philosophic embodiment of Existenz, as in the title of his 1932 book. Below II.6.iv.
16 Marianne Weber to Oskar Siebeck, 22.10.25, cit. Edith Hanke, ‘“Max Webers Schreibtisch ist nun mein Altar”. Marianne Weber und das geistige Erbe ihres Mannes’, in Karl-Ludwig Ay and Knut Borchardt (eds), Das Faszinosum Max Weber (Konstanz, 2006), 29–51, here 45. The only sections in the Lebensbild devoted to exposition of Weber’s intellectual work (chs 10, 20 & II) were added at a late stage—the subject could hardly be omitted entirely—but even so their modest aims are explicit, since both are addressed to the academic ‘layman’ (Lebensbild, 318, 687). They are undoubtedly the dullest parts of an otherwise fascinating book. The only piece Marianne ever wrote about Weber in a formally academic context was a brief introductory survey in a lecture series on Gründer der Soziologie (Jena, 1932), 141–58. This, however, adds nothing to the Lebensbild and has deservedly languished in obscurity.
18 To Walter Jellinek, 30.12.13, Briefe.
did not imply or require identity of view. On the contrary: it signified autonomy and allowed for difference. At their silver wedding celebration in September 1918, Marianne thanked Max, quite precisely, for ‘having placed her beside him in full freedom, and allowing her to develop according to her own law.’ The most salient difference between them was that, whereas Weber was religiously “unmusical”, Marianne was at heart ‘a pious being’ (ein frommer Mensch) like her mother-in-law and surrogate mother, Helene Weber. Furthermore, although there was a presumption of equality in principle, there was evident inequality in fact. Marianne was both a ‘high-minded comrade’ and a ‘child’, who married Max, above all, to gain access to the precious goods of intellect that were the basis of personal autonomy. Yet these were goods that she already had in immense, even fabulous, quantities and she did not. Her only higher education had been two and half years at a boarding school in Hannover. This placed its chief emphasis on the traditional female accomplishments of music, dancing, and foreign languages, and these, because they were traditional, she seems to have discounted. So while he was unstintingly generous in promoting her higher education (down to 1907), this could only be a one-way transfer.

This was bound to have consequences for the way in which she approached his work, both before and after his death in 1920. Weber’s creative work represented the very apex of the inequality between husband and wife. In the early years of their marriage, besides his supervision of her two major pieces of academic work, which served as informal equivalents to the theses submitted for doctoral promotion and post-doctoral habilitation, it gave her access to his work in the capacity of ‘copying secretary or calculating machine’ (for agrarian statistics). He was still using her as a copyist when drafting the first part of the essay on ‘Roscher and Knies’ in late 1902—a carryover from the first years of marriage and from the close community enforced upon them when on their travels in Italy in the two previous years—but ‘Roscher’ was the end of the road: ‘he [did] not like

19 Lebensbild, 628; cf. 241 for the working of this idea in the 1890s.
20 Resp. Weber to Ferdinand Tönnies, 19.2.09, Briefe; Else Jaffé, ‘Marianne Weber: Zu ihrem 80. Geburtstag’ [1950], in Bärbel Meurer (ed.), Marianne Weber: Beiträge zu Werk und Person (Tübingen, 2004), 266. Marianne’s religiosity is a fundamental point but one that, apart from brief reportage of incidents from later life, her biographer evades so far as possible: Meurer, Marianne Weber, 510, 551–3, 555. Lebensbild, 20–1, 105, gives quite a good idea of her views as of 1926, where piety is far more important than specific tenets of belief.
21 Max to Marianne Weber, n.d. [? end 1892], pr. Lebensbild, 190.
22 Marianne Weber, Lebenserinnerungen (Bremen, 1948), 43–8. One should not underestime the “accomplishments”, but even the valuable things Marianne was taught seem to have left little mark on her. For example, much time was devoted to teaching music, which took in Wagner and visits to the opera: Meurer, Marianne Weber, 34. On the face of it, this might have been of some relevance to the future wife of Max Weber, yet it was not she but Mina Tobler who was Max Weber’s principal female companion in his musical explorations after 1910.
23 Max to Marianne Weber, 13.8.98, cit. MWG III/5.35 n. 81; cf. ‘Die deutschen Landarbeiter’ [1894], MWG I/4.313, 317. Marianne’s equivalent to a doctoral promotion thesis was Fichte’s Sozialismus (Tübingen, 1900); her “habilitation” was Mutter und Ehefrau in der Rechtsentwicklung (Tübingen, 1907). 1907 was thus the crucial point at which her education-within-marriage ended and she attained full autonomy. Thereafter she was able to live more and more independently of Max, intellectually and physically.
to say what he was doing; she made mistakes when trying to decipher his ‘cuneiform script’; and in any case it was a chore that got in the way of her work.\textsuperscript{24} Thereafter what she knew about his work, and the occasional copying she was still asked to do, were absolutely at his discretion, and, in the case of projects that were not yet completed, it normally suited him to say nothing. His ‘work desk . . . was taboo’.\textsuperscript{25}

For example, it was not until after Weber’s death that she first confronted the manuscripts of ‘Economy and Society’—previously all she knew was what she had gathered from listening to selected portions in the lecture hall, like any other student. Yet given the intellectual centrality they enjoyed in his mind in the decade after 1910, this is an immense lacuna. Without underestimating the scale of Marianne’s intellectual achievements, she always lacked self-confidence in an academic context. After her education under Max’s tutelage was completed, she did not pursue an academic path but that of the public policy activist, and it was predictable she should decide that she could not cope with this extraordinary manuscript bequest on her own. Within a fortnight of Weber’s death she had called in ‘a young scholar’, Dr Melchior Palyi, as a co-worker in her editorial labours, simply because he had been attending Weber’s last, post-doctoral “Dozentenseminar” and possessed the formal academic qualifications that she lacked. Yet his personal knowledge of Weber was as nothing compared to hers.\textsuperscript{26}

Equally surprising is the fact that she seems to have been entirely unaware of the short series of perhaps four or five talks on the ‘Economic Ethics of the World Religions’ that Weber gave to friends in 1913—talks that supplied the new comparative setting whereby the PE was recalled to life after being set aside in 1907–8. Yet were they not given at home, and should she not have known about them? No doubt there is a simple explanation of this oddity. Perhaps she was away at the time? Perhaps (and this seems the most likely case) the arrangements for their delivery were so informal that she overlooked their significance? But in any event the facts of his silence and her ignorance are confirmed.\textsuperscript{27} In the case of the PE, the most she could say about


\textsuperscript{25} Marianne Weber memo. [post-June 1920], pr. Radkau, \textit{Max Weber}, 181. Marianne’s desire to tidy up Max’s horrible chaos of papers was a bone of marital contention; but though she occasionally braved his wrath and did so (e.g. Max Weber to Siebeck, 3.7.14, \textit{Briefe}), this did not mean she actually read or inspected the papers being tidied. Again, she certainly handled some of the manuscripts of ‘Economy and Society’ within their physical containers (folders, holders), as well as attending lectures culled from it (e.g. \textit{Lebensbild}, 617–18); but she had no intellectual conception of the project’s shape or composition. When, after Weber’s death, Marianne consciously made the writing desk and indeed the workroom or ‘cell’ (\textit{Arbeitsklause (Lebensbild, 681)}) into a shrine or ‘altar’, this was an echo of their formerly unapproachable quality: \textit{Lebenserinnerungen} (Bremen, 1948), 115; cf. 116, 133–4.

\textsuperscript{26} Marianne Weber to Siebeck Verlag, 30.6.20, pr. W. Schluchter, ‘Max Webers Beitrag zum “Grundriss der Sozialökonomik”’, \textit{KZSS} 50 (1998), 329 n. 5; cf. G. Hübinger, ‘Editorischer Bericht’, \textit{MWG III/7.50}. Marianne received a well-deserved honorary doctorate at Heidelberg in 1926 on the strength of the \textit{Lebensbild}.

\textsuperscript{27} We only know of these lectures through Weber—‘Einleitung’, \textit{WEWR, AfSS} 41 (1915), 1 n. 1—and Georg Lukács: to Weber [mid-December 1915], \textit{Briefwechsel 1902–1917}, ed. Éva Karádi and Éva Fekete (Stuttgart, 1982). Cf. \textit{Lebensbild}, 561, where Marianne simply borrows from Weber’s note. Otherwise her vagueness on this subject is of a very high order; the studies of comparative religion were
it in 1926, after the diligent assembly of an extensive body of Weber’s correspondence, was this: ‘It was in 1903, presumably in the second half of the year . . . that he began what was until then his most famous piece of writing.’ At the time Marianne had been quite unable to see the point of Weber writing essays at the helm of a learned journal, the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft, because of a determinedly conventional idea of the way academics should operate. In her eyes journal work, with the PE at its centre, was ‘after all only a surrogate’. What she wanted for Max was an orthodox professorial career and the big books that, according to her conventional view, would bring him fame. He, it appears, called her a ‘silly goose’, for though the writing of books would indeed bring her a degree of fame, the ‘big book’ was a genre that Weber himself despised, and one that the article format of the PE explicitly contradicted [XXI.110 n. 86].

Now the problems that the PE poses are not unique. Between 1909 and 1914 Weber’s academic publications, aside from the stenographic records of conference speeches, fall almost to zero once more. In this period by far his most important and sustained work was on the drafts of ‘Economy and Society’. But though all his extant correspondence for the period is now in print, a systematic intellectual reconstruction of the genesis of ‘Economy and Society’ prior to 1914 has not been attempted hitherto (an astounding index of the primitive state of historical enquiry into Max Weber); and even when it is—as we shall see below (II.3)—it necessarily remains somewhat speculative owing to the absence of precise information. So there was always secrecy and silence on Weber’s part—and yet the PE is begun ‘around 1911’ and finished ‘around 1913’: ibid. 346, 350. A plausible scenario is that Lukács felt he could drop into the Weber house at any time; that Weber perpetually carried on a great deal of apparently informal academic conversation, of which Marianne was only obliquely aware; and that, since the original texts of the ‘Economic Ethics’ were very short, Weber’s ‘lectures’ appeared analogous to the long monologues that he produced spontaneously on other occasions, as, for example, the Sunday jours. For an indication of how this might have worked: Weber to Lukács, 29.1.13, Briefe.

28 Lebensbild, 340, emphasis added. Meurer, Marianne Weber, adds nothing. Marianne was allowed to fair copy Weber’s self-analysis of his nervous illness because this was a subject to which she had been privy all along, and it was a document no copyist could be shown: ‘Bericht über pathologische Veranlagung, Entstehen, Verlauf und Art der Krankheit’ (1907); cf. Briefe, II/5.393; Radkau, Max Weber, 297.

30 Marianne to Helene Weber, 6.12.01, pr. Radkau, Max Weber, 255; cf. same to same, 10.12.05, pr. ibid. 183.—Emile Durkheim reviewed Marianne’s book Ehefrau und Mutter in der Rechtsentwicklung (Tübingen, 1907), but knew nothing of the PE owing to its article format: Marcel Fournier, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) (Paris, 2007), 741.

31 Between completing ‘Zur Psychophysik der industriellen Arbeit’ in June 1909 (to Siebeck, 23.5.09, Briefe) and the outbreak of war in August 1914, Weber’s only important written publication was the essay ‘Über einige Kategorien verstehenden Soziologie’ in 1913 (WL 427–74), designed as a trailer for ‘Economy and Society’. His contribution to the ‘Äußerungen zur Werturteilsdiskussion im Ausschuss des Vereins für Sozialpolitik’ (1913) was a semi-public but still unpublished statement: Der Werturteilsstreit, ed. H. H. Nau (Marburg, 1996), 147–86.

32 Wolfgang Schluchter’s history of ‘Economy and Society’ down to 1914 in MWG I/24.1–131 is a valuable restatement of his long-established (though now contested) views, but still this is Werkgeschichte only: the history of a text, not an examination of the text within Max Weber’s intellectual history.
an aggravated case. Though Weber would remain a lifelong ‘neurasthenic’, there was no later repetition of the complete nervous collapse of the years after 1898, and so no comparable extraneous hiatus. Again, whatever the deficiencies of our knowledge regarding ‘Economy and Society’, intellectual precedents for its central concepts do exist in one form or another, and this is a trail that goes back to the PE above all (as we shall see). By contrast there is so much in the PE for which there appears to be no precedent. Hence the central problem of Max Weber’s intellectual biography: how to connect the first thirty-four years of his life to 1898 with the last seventeen from 1903? And in the first instance, this problem is almost identical with the difficulties confronting any attempt to understand the genesis of the PE. Adequate historical explanation of the text is the kernel of an adequate history of the man.

When confronted by such questions we should not try to dispel mystery where we cannot. To omit, or to try to overcome, what Paul Celan called ‘the resistance of the incommunicable’ is a betrayal of reality which, in Weber’s view, was symptomatic only of a debased ‘intellectualism’. Keeping silent is the true record of his intentions, and in any case the greatest element of mystery—or in another perspective, the “free” element at work—lies in the extraordinary nature of his intellectual creativity when composing the PE. The idea that historical method consists only in the assembly of sufficient number of bibliographical precedents, so that ‘there is scarcely a position of Max Weber’s which has not already been formulated in the…thought of his day’, is wholly misconceived. This is not simply because there was some irrational quantum of “originality” present in his work, though Weber did not deny that “scientific” or academic (wissenschaftlich) work was ultimately indebted to such an unanalysable residuum. The central point is that, in his academic as in his social relations, he was like the Calvinist he portrays in the PE: a man dominated by his ‘sense of the unprecedented inner isolation of the single individual’ [XXI.11]. In this isolation he, analogous to the Calvinist, construed political and intellectual tradition as carrying ‘a peculiarly objective and impersonal character’ [XXI.17]. The obverse of this was a vehement refusal to acknowledge any form of individual or personal dependency. As Jaspers understood, ‘he never felt, either in his youth or later, that a single person, whether dead or living, was his leader or hero’. So there is no equivalent in his case to the relationship between Marx and Hegel, let alone that of the younger Mill to Bentham, and any attempt to posit a seminal authorial influence of this kind is necessarily false. What stands in place of persons is the liberal and public heritage

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33 Such was the language of the day. In May 1900 Weber was certified by a Heidelberg doctor as suffering from ‘severe and persistent neurasthenia’: cit. Radkau, Max Weber, 258.
35 Andreas Anter, Max Webers Theorie des modernen Staates (Berlin, 1996), 233. Curiously Anter accepts that Weber refused to align himself with intellectual forebears or ‘specific lines of tradition’ (16), but is determined to locate him in this way all the same.
36 e.g. ‘Science as a Vocation’ [1917/19], MWG I/17.81–3.
38 The only study Weber ever wrote that was in any way directed at academic predecessors, ‘Roscher and Knies’ (1903–6), has no element of personality in it. Insofar as there is any attention
of rationalism, *Wissenschaft*, and law: a set of impersonal structures of immense power, the defining yet constraining ‘steel housing’ [XXI.108] of modern rationality, which Weber would always carry with him, like a modern Atlas. But since they were impersonal, just how they were communicated by human agents was relatively inconsequential in his eyes. This, together with an accompanying desire for complete secrecy until he had worked out his views (though its correlative was a generous and expansive sharing of his ideas once they were established), is the root of our documentary and evidential problem. It is a comment on the historical subject, and not simply an accident produced by the destruction of data.\(^39\)

In tackling this problem our strategy will be (first) to delimit the realm of the “free” and unknown as accurately as possible, by examining Weber’s thinking immediately prior to his flight from university teaching and psychological collapse c.1898 (I.2). Next, to trace the documentary or “external” history of the *PE* forward from this notional point of origin to its publication in 1904–5 (I.3). Then we must consider its “inner” genesis: that is, the ways in which, despite all evidential lacunae, Weber developed his ideas according to the ordinary laws of historical causation and ‘vulgar psychology’\(^40\)—just as they would operate (and just as he supposed them to operate) in all human conduct (I.4–8). Here we shall strive to understand the mind of Max Weber, without, however, confining ourselves to the Weberian categories of understanding (*Verstehen*). Instead as historians we shall be ruthless in using every form of evidence available to us—not just intellectual and theoretical statements—so as to achieve the utmost inwardsness and sympathy with the mind of Max Weber as it gave expression to intellectual and theoretical statements. At the same time we shall not forget that inwardsness and sympathy are qualities he would have mistrusted; and that he would have regarded the tracing of his intellectual biography as an absurd elevation of personality and distraction from the collective, impersonal pursuit or service of *Wissenschaft* (academic ‘science’ and ‘knowledge’). But then the present enquiry is not a work of piety. It proceeds instead from the quite distinct assumptions that govern the study of intellectual history,\(^41\) and from that component in the Kultur of the twenty-first century Occident that places a value on the study of canonical authors. Our aim is only personal in that qualified sense, and the external data of Weber’s life are only important insofar as they serve the better understanding of Weberian ideas.\(^42\) If such an approach is conceived as standing in a relation of avowed difference to its subject, it is one that Weber could have acknowledged and understood, even if he could not have agreed with it. Mere piety he would have rejected with contempt.

39 All the same data have been lost, and this is deeply regrettable: Hanke, ‘“Max Webers Schreibtisch ist nun mein Altar”’, in *Das Faszinosum Max Weber*, 46–8.


41 For shorthand on this subject: *Historian*, ch. 1; below I.7, n. 35.

42 However, this is a proposition that needs to be justified, most obviously in regard to Weber’s political activities.
This chapter measures the gap between where Weber stood before the great hiatus in his life and where he was when he issued the *PE* in 1904–5. The full extent of his personal reflections on the composition of the *PE* runs to just two sentences, neither of which appears in the final text published in 1920. The second is marginally more informative than the first: ‘My work on these matters, *which I presented in part in lecture form fully 12 years ago*, was not first caused by Sombart’s “[Modern] Capitalism”’, published in 1902.¹ These words were written in December 1909, so ‘12 years ago’ takes us back to 1897,² and (most obviously) to the historical sections of the university lecture course that Weber gave in the years 1894–8 on ‘General (“Theoretical”) Economics’—which, as its ‘general’ title suggests, is the nearest thing we have to a comprehensive statement of his views during his brief period as a professor of economics. Here is a point of documentary surety, since both a published outline (*Grundriss*) and Weber’s manuscript notes for these lectures survive. We cannot date the notes within the years 1894–8,³ but it may be that, in directing our attention to 1897, Weber had in mind the point at which he arrived in Heidelberg, where he began to lecture in the summer semester of 1897. The time allotted to the lectures on ‘General Economics’ was expanded to its maximum of six hours weekly, and it is then that the course took on its final and most complete form.

‘General Economics’ was the undoubted centrepiece of Weber’s frustrated and strangled output from these years, but there are other, lesser sources that cast light on his views. Materials for the ‘early history of the *PE*’ can be found in the short lecture course Weber gave on the ‘History of Economics’ as a discipline, when he was still at Freiburg, and the occasional course in ‘Practical Economics’. Besides university lectures, there are press reports for a number of public lectures, and of these one in particular stands out: the course of four lectures Weber gave to a lay, commercial audience at Mannheim in November–December 1897, under the typically Weberian title ‘The Course of Economic Development’. How after all could one convey economics in a popular form except by considering the whole gamut of a very broadly defined “economic” history from beginning to end? As

¹ ‘Antikritisches’, 177; emphasis added. Cf. [XX.19 n. 1]: ‘the perspectives in the following studies [the *PE*] go back to much earlier works’ than Sombart’s.
such they offer a fair copy and synopsis of the historical scheme in the university lectures.\footnote{4} Overall, the virtue of these various lecture series is that they supply us with quite a sharply focused idea of the size of the intellectual leap performed by Weber in the \textit{PE}. To be sure, this clarity is in some sense artificial. The lectures will not tell us all that was in his mind before intellectual silence descended in the years 1898–1902. And, as he says with some bitterness, ‘only the econ[omic] perspective concerns us’, a perspective that (somewhat unusually for a professor of economics) he held was overrated;\footnote{5} but still they mark out with some precision the positions to which he was prepared to commit himself publicly prior to the divide marked out by his illness. So we begin with a snapshot of where he stood c.1897.

It is clear, first of all, that almost all the components of the conception of ‘modern capitalism’ presented to us in the \textit{PE} were in place by 1897–8. ‘The historical position of modern capitalism’ was the title of the fourth of his Mannheim lectures—preceding Werner Sombart’s \textit{Modern Capitalism} by five years.\footnote{6} Consider, for example, a set of elementary characteristics that appear in the lectures and then again in the \textit{PE}. The importance of ‘markets’ and exchange transactions, the very kernel of all capitalist behaviour (e.g. 461)\footnote{7} [cf. XX.18]; the wisdom of paying high wages to the modern capitalist labour force (529, 589) [cf. XX.22]; the need for that labour force to be ‘skilled’, educated, and ‘qualified’ (524, 527) [cf. XX.1–5]; the need to conserve fossil fuels (225, 532) [cf. XXI.108]; the identity of central socio-economic phenomena as necessarily ‘mass phenomena’, because it was only by such mass replication that ‘individual phenomena’ could take on social significance (e.g. 494) [cf. XX.20]; ‘the division between [the] household & acquisitive economy’ (489) [XXI.98 n. 64], i.e. the separation between personal and impersonal spheres that for Weber was a necessary condition of the “impersonal” behaviour that lay at the root of the modern economy [cf. XXI.17]; the identification of putting-out and domestic industry as the first stage in the rise of modern industrial organization, ‘e.g. in the textile trade’ (505) [cf. XX.26–9]; a consistent emphasis on the ‘intensive division of labour’ and the concomitant ‘progress of the formation of industrial occupations [Berufe]’, ‘specialization of free occupations’, ‘strength of the arrangement of occupations, division according to occupations’ (461, 472, 473; cf. 300–1), thereby identifying the divided and specialized structure of economy and society as essentially one and the same—all these ideas are clearly in evidence in the lectures.

The long hours available for university lectures mean that they are fuller in detail than the public ones. Nonetheless, within the university context Weber felt obliged to give “responsible” formulations of problems—an accompaniment to his well-known...
principle that there should be no politics in the lecture hall—here is the probable explanation why the modish vocabulary of ‘capitalism’ is not used as a heading, though it is plainly in evidence (474, 506, 515, 525). In the public lectures, by contrast, the conventional academic designation of the ‘national economy’ (a unit defined by its size and political status) has been superseded by ‘modern capitalism’ (a qualitative definition), although this is a question of titles only, and Weber makes it clear to his university students that the area embraced by theoretical “national economics” is ‘international’ (195). Still, at Mannheim the all-embracing nature of Weber’s conception of capitalism is vividly captured. He is not interested in Marx’s materially defined ‘capitalist mode of production’ alone, but in the creation of ‘modern, Occidental man’ as a whole, just as in the PE, capitalism is a holistic construct that embraces the entirety of ‘modern Kultur’ [e.g. XXI.107]. (It should be stressed that neither the term ‘capitalism’ nor, more obviously, Weber’s totalizing conception thereof, is Marxist.) But such radical and general conceptions can also be found within the “text” of the university lectures if not in the headings, as, for example, when Weber speaks of the ‘Götterdämmerung of capitalism’, referring to the decline of a “free” Cobdenite, international capitalism in favour of rigid national and imperialistic blocs, a process that he takes to be currently under way (525; cf. 405, 545).

The inner kernel of this holistic ‘capitalism’ is the psychological make-up of the individual: what in 1904 would be called the “spirit” of capitalism was in the 1890s lectures ‘the capitalist character’ (506). So we cannot separate psychological from external phenomena in the features just listed. For example, when Weber repeatedly emphasizes ‘markets’, this is not just an economic commonplace, but suggests the characteristically Weberian idea of the market as an area of human conduct and ratiocination, of disciplined capitalist calculation subject to fierce penalties [XX.18, 29]. Again, persistent emphases on the Beruf—a term that in its meaning runs all the way from the dry listing of one’s census ‘occupation’ to a religious ‘vocation’ or ‘calling’—do not simply represent an external, Smithian description of the division of labour, though that is an undoubted point of origin (300) [XX.42–3]. They also imply that Weber has the ‘vocational Idea’ of the PE in view [XXI.1], where the narrowing of horizons implied by specialization and a total psychological or ethical commitment to one’s ‘job’ within that division run in parallel. Note too the identification of a positive component within the medieval city economy, where ‘Progress’ is reflected in a ‘different valuation of labour’—[as an] ethically normal task of life’. What was the ‘cause’ of this change (the lecture notes asks)? The answer is the cessation of a ‘purely pol. perspective’ on life (685). Here is another foundation of the idea of the Beruf: the ascription of an ethical quality to labour that in its totality constitutes a life-sphere standing outside politics. Hence its purposive and ethical description as a ‘task’ (Aufgabe), which directly anticipates the PE [XX.36], even if in his lectures Weber is tracing its historical origins to an earlier period than that of the PE (the late medieval city economy) and without any overtly religious

8 To Mina Tobler, [26.7.19], Briefe, cf. ‘Science as a Vocation’ [1917/19], MWG I/17.95.
9 MWG I/4.851. 10 Historian, 89.
source. Certainly the underlying theme noted here, the emergence of modern economic activity as ‘ethically normal’, propelled by a separate logic standing outside political imperatives and instruments—what Weber would later describe as the rationally grounded capitalism specific to the Occident as distinct from a ubiquitous ‘political’ or ‘adventure’ capitalism—is a direct precursor of much later thinking [i.4–8], [i.42–3,53–4].

The lectures also cover more pervasive psychological themes such as the importance of fixity and reliability to modern economic behaviour, which would later be highlighted as necessary foundations of rational conduct. Hence ‘fixed rules [for] labour in domestic industry’ (490), and ‘a certain volume of the exchange of goods as the ‘indispensable’ constant factor’ underlying the ‘economic existence’ of the national economy (503; cf. 404). One component of fixity was the need for steady [stetige] prices’ (531), an anticipation of the ‘fixed [feste] prices’ that Weber would later single out as of peculiar importance to rational economic behaviour in the case of the Quakers [PS i.219]. Another central theme is the distinction between ‘systematic’ exchange with the aim of making a profit and the far more limited pre-capitalist goal of ‘coverage of one’s own needs’ (484; cf. 485, 525). The transition between these two states and the concomitant rise of income from capital is only ‘to be established historically’ (307), and this same distinction (and same emphasis on historical method) is taken as an elementary starting point for discussion in the PE [XX.25, 53]. Similarly reference to the entrepreneur who is ‘working without tradition’ (504) is an anticipation of the psychological contrast between ‘traditionalist’ behaviour and its capitalist opposite [XX.20–29], and anticipation becomes literal equivalence when the lectures uphold the view that, for workers to maximize their wages when working on a piece-rate basis, ‘the breaking down of traditionalism [is] necessary’ (589) [cf. XX.20–24]. Consider more simply the dictum: ‘Tradition upset by money economy’ (498), which is practically a synopsis of the PE at this point. Finally there is this elementary yet emphatic statement: ‘man begins to calculate’ (489). At first sight this may seem bland and unoriginal, especially if calculation is measured in purely external terms, such as the introduction of double-entry book-keeping [i.5]. Yet seen as a central statement about capitalist psychology, as a trait immediately adjacent to Weberian conceptions of rationality, emphasis on the ‘propensity to calculate’ (Rechenhaftigkeit) [XXI.77 n. 7],11 or ‘calculating calculation’ (rechnerisches Kalkül) [XX.34], takes us to the heart of the capitalist “spirit” in the PE.

What then do the lectures have to say about ‘rational’ behaviour and rationality? In the great mass of notes for the lectures on ‘General Economics’, there are just two uses of the German word rational. The first carries the meaning that Weber would later call ‘materially rational’ (‘the purely rational distribution’ of goods),

11 At [XX.34] Weber signals a debt to Sombart as regards Rechenhaftigkeit, but, as usual, the debt is more verbal than substantive. Thus, for Sombart, Rechenhaftigkeit is not merely ‘calculating’ but ‘speculative’ (MK i. 198; cf. 207, 395), which points up a fundamental gap between Weber and Sombart regarding the capitalist “spirit”, since for Weber any speculative, i.e. random, gambling element is anathema.
whereas formal rationality is the focus of his later innovation (608). The second refers to ‘rational’ economic theory in the era of mercantilism (692), which as it stands looks like a borrowing from the established terminology of ‘rationalism’ as applied to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and on the previous page has also been described as ‘rationelle’ theory', which— unlike rational—is another established and traditional usage. So there is nothing here that immediately suggests rationality or rationalism in the revolutionary new form expounded in the PE: as formal and value-free.12 Besides the rarity of such usages and their indecisive nature, note here the complete silence regarding ‘rationalism’. This is linguistically important because, on the one hand, it was a long-established and available word (connoting eighteenth-century thought, usually in a somewhat pejorative or mechanical sense), yet Weber was not afraid to take it over wholesale in the PE, since in his eyes formally and technically rational twentieth-century behaviour did indeed have some affinity with the mechanical stereotype, with the difference that he perceived it as formidable and not to be dismissed as outdated or contemptible [XX.34–5]. So outwardly at least Weber’s focus in the 1890s lies with capitalism and not with rationality, and there are obvious reasons for this. ‘Capitalism’, even in its expansive Weberian definition, carries a specific identity, which at least starts with the economy—it is ‘the economic way of viewing things’13—and works outward from there; by contrast rationality represents a set of formal procedures that can in principle apply to all areas of human conduct [XX.35]. Again, while thinking about capitalism can at most trace itself back to Marx, rationality, and more obviously rationalism, however radically Weber may rework it, has a quite different and far deeper historical lineage, deriving from the immensely powerful European tradition of ideas concerning secular reason going back to the seventeenth century and symbolized in the PE by Descartes and Bacon [XXI.28, 53 n. 108]. In short, the epoch-making consideration of rationality that appears in the PE is a textual novelty, and one that by 1907–8 will supersede capitalism as a leading conceptual focus.

Yet Weber’s 1890s conception of ‘capitalism’ as an idea almost as comprehensive as his future conception of ‘rational’ behaviour may well be the beginning of that later history. As the example of capitalist calculation makes clear, he always saw a powerful rational component in capitalist behaviour. Given his personal secrecy coupled with the disciplinary constraint under which he was operating—being limited to ‘the economic perspective’—we cannot be certain as to the cause of his silence about what is rational. Were these ideas unavailable to him at this date, or was this a deliberate withholding of ideas he possessed? One small sign in the 1890s lectures that Weber was looking to attach a more universal label to economic activity may come when he invokes ‘Reflection [Reflexion] instead of accommodation with the traditional conditions of life. Reflection [is] nothing natural’ (525; cf. 528). Elsewhere it appears as the crucial commencement of the ‘separation of the individual from the group’, leading in the long term to modern individualism (679)

12 Other lectures from the 1890s tell a similar story: MWG III/4–5.
13 Freiburg Inaugural [1895], MWG I/4.561.
Another pointer is his use of the term *rationell*, which, although an old word and one he discards in 1904–5 in favour of *rational*, is attached to some recognizably post-1900 Weberian ideas in the lectures: thus the operation of abstract economic theory is described as ‘wholly *rationell*’ (245), and so is the capitalist enterprise (580, 652). *Rationell* here signifies *rational*. Furthermore, besides Weber’s interest in man as a calculator, another of the intellectual foundations of Weberian rationality is firmly in view in the lectures, when the ‘freedom’ of economic agents is described as ‘formal’. The property owner’s disposition over his goods is ‘*formally free*’ unless there is political intervention; economic exchange is ‘formally voluntary’; while modern socialist man is also ‘formally free’, even if he remains governed and constrained by impersonal and historical forces such as technical evolution (533, 302, 701). These references are legal in the first instance, because law is the source of Weber’s thinking here. It is clear that his conception of modern Occidental law as distinguished by formal perfection rather than any particular substantive content is already in place, and thinking along these lines points forward to the insistent reference to the ‘formal legality’ and ‘formal correctness’ of the Puritans in the *PE* [XXI.71,105; cf. 90, 102]. Now if ‘formal freedom’ is taken simply as a legal statement, there can be no surprise here, since Weber’s legal education and formation were complete by 1894. However, formalism is not just a legal idea for Weber. It lies at the root of his conception of a “value-free” rationality or disenchanted rationalism, which, in sharp contrast to the ideal reason (*Vernunft*) of classical German liberalism, is not normative. Instead, like law, it is defined by its formal, i.e. technical and logical, quality, with the result that one could ‘*rationalize*’ life according to the most varied ultimate perspectives and in very different directions’ [XX.35]—a statement of enormous importance for Max Weber and Western thought generally. So the ‘formal’ discourse of the lectures, along with other indications, strongly suggests that rationality was an idea “in waiting” in the 1890s, even if Weber was almost certainly impeded intellectually by his inability to work out his ideas publicly at that time.

To return to capitalism, note finally that perhaps the most elementary similarity between the perspective of the lecture courses of the 1890s and the later Weber is the assumption that capitalism, though capable of being construed in terms of ‘abstract theory’ in accordance with the contemporary presuppositions of marginalist economics, must also be viewed within the context of a long-term historical evolution (122). Yet here we shall find that, whatever their deficiencies relative to his later work, the perspective of the early lectures is in some respects *broader* than that of the *PE* because, as was conventional for all the historicist German academics of this generation—in any faculty—reference to ‘history’ assumed reference to the whole of recorded Occidental history, from biblical and classical antiquity onwards. This made for a sharp contrast with the essayistic *PE* and its primary focus on the

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14 Except where it is used in a consciously traditional sense: for example, in relation to agricultural production or as signifying self-interest and nothing more [XXI.103].

15 On the latter, see II.7, p. 303.

‘fateful epoch of the seventeenth century’, notwithstanding gross and obvious breaches of this limit [XXI.36].

A salient example of the lectures’ broad perspective lies in the explicit assumption that ‘the era of capital and interest on capital had arrived’ as early as the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, with the flowering of the medieval city economy.\(^{17}\) Promotion of the “city economy” as a conceptual category may be traced to Karl Bücher’s famous lecture ‘The Rise of the National Economy’ (1893); but, though Weber entertained a high regard for Bücher for this reason—on the strength of it he commissioned him in 1909–10 to write the opening article of the future \textit{Grundriss der Sozialökonomik} on ‘Periods and Stages of the Economy’\(^{18}\)—their specific conceptions of the city economy were different. For Bücher the trading operations of the city economy were in principle based on direct exchange; thus it remained ‘opposed to capital’, and a ‘capitalist economy’ arose only within the later, more extended, national economy.\(^{19}\) For Weber by contrast, capitalism originated in the city, leading to an eminently modern polarity between ‘entrepreneur and capital’ (on the one side) and the ‘journeyman stratum’ (on the other), where the latter was ‘the precursor of today’s labouring class’.\(^{20}\) However, this division was to be viewed as a ‘conflict of interests’ rather than of fundamental values or \textit{Kultur}, since the conflict between capital and labour was secondary to the primary reality of the city: the common identity of the ‘bourg[geois] classes’ (498–9) [cf. XX.32]. Here were the historical origins of the bourgeois ‘economic power’ that Weber profiled at Freiburg in 1895.\(^{21}\) Now it is much the greatest omission, even retrogression, in the \textit{PE} that, in the desire to highlight a religious argument from the seventeenth century, Weber should seem to relegate the pre-Reformation origins of capitalism to a matter of certain legal ‘forms’ [XX.54], where these forms are not even specified.\(^{22}\) There is a substantial (if somewhat inscrutable) apology on this account at the end of the text when Weber admits that the \textit{PE} has been too ‘one-sided’; that he has neglected ‘the totality of the conditions determining \textit{Kultur} in society, especially the economic ones’ that preceded ascetic Protestantism [XXI.110]. This means the city economy, and, when Weber began to retreat (as he did) from the titular capitalist focus of the \textit{PE} in 1907–8, one of the ways in which he did so was to return to an enhanced emphasis on ‘the specifically Occidental bourgeois “spirit”’ [\textit{PS} i.214]. This caused him to reopen the history of the medieval city in 1907–8, which would lead to the extended study of ‘The City’ (c.1908), and the proposal to include ‘a sketch of the historical evolution of the European bourgeoisie in antiquity and the middle ages’ alongside his studies of the \textit{PE} and the world religions in 1919.\(^{23}\) So, while the \textit{PE} said much that was not in the lectures of the 1890s, the balance of gain and loss was not all one way. As the dust settled after the revolutionary innovations of 1904–5, Weber realized the need to reconcile the

\(^{17}\) Mannheim lectures, \textit{MWG I}/4.848.

\(^{18}\) ‘Stoffverteilungsplan’ (1910), Bk I.i.

\(^{19}\) \textit{Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft} (Tübingen, 1898\(^2\)), 118; cf. 86–107.

\(^{20}\) This quotation only: \textit{MWG I}/4.847.

\(^{21}\) \textit{MWG I}/4.566.

\(^{22}\) Cf. ‘Agriculture in Antiquity’ [1907–8], \textit{MWG I}/6.711.

new matrix of ideas with elements from his earlier thinking—above all the comprehensive perspective on the past with which he had grown up. The modern orthodoxy that this expansion of view was a novelty after 1910 is quite mistaken.24

The creation of a great bourgeois and capitalist economic power such as the city then raised the question of its relations with the other ‘great world powers’ of the medieval world: that is, ‘the Emperor’, hence political rulers in general, and the ‘Church’ (498). From this it is clear that the Weberian history of capitalism needs to be understood in relation to two extraneous ‘powers’, politics and religion, and not just one. The mere mention of religion at this strategic juncture shows that a central strand in the problematic of the PE—the need to analyse the relationship between religion and capitalism—is clearly present in Weber’s mind. On the other hand, the ample coverage of politics in the lectures draws our attention to their exclusion from the PE. The focus of the latter on religion and capitalism sidelines not only the political impact of radical religiosity, where, however, a wealth of notes and fragments tells us much of what Weber thinks,25 but also the more conventional history of the relationship between the secular state and nascent capitalism. Of course, the omission of the political history of capitalism in 1904–5 was a formal exclusion only. It did not mean that Weber wished to discard or discount it. It would feature prominently (for example) within the pre-war Sociology of Herrschaft in ‘Economy and Society’,26 while its most recent history would have been covered in Book II of the Grundris der Sozialökonomik, where Weber elected in 1910 to cover the subject of ‘The modern state and capitalism’ (although the entry was never written).27 So he was simply being candid when he stated in the PE that he had sought ‘only’ to establish the causal contribution of religion to the shaping of ‘our modern material Kultur’, and that this omitted an immense amount, ‘especially purely political processes’ [XX.53–4]. Still the political history previously outlined at Mannheim and in the ‘General Economics’ lectures is an important supplement to the PE: the mercantilist alliance between capitalism and the state; the dissolution of that alliance in the nineteenth-century era of the ‘world economy’; and the incipient reassertion of political power over a free market capitalism liberated from the state that Weber anticipated in the near future (528–35).28 In the history of Kultur, religion, including the relation of religion to politics, was always of more interest and importance to Weber than politics per se; but, even so, complete understanding of the PE requires attention to both these contexts.

For example, it seems that secular political history provided one of the foundations for the detailed design of the PE, whereby Weber used components of the

24 Below II.5.
25 [XXI.14 n.21, 37 n. 74, 42 n. 78, 46 n. 83, 65 n. 130, 70–2, 77 n. 7, 83 n. 27, 93, 95 n. 54b].
26 See esp. MWG I/22–4.418–53. In the post-1918 scheme it looks as if it would have been transferred to the ‘Staatssoziologie’: MWG III/7.66, §§5, 6, 13, 14.
27 ‘Stoffverteilungsplan’ (May 1910), Bk II, II.2; cf. ‘Einteilung des Gesamtwerkes’ (June 1914), Bk II, III. See also Weber to Heinrich Sieveking, 29.6.13, Briefe.
28 Mannheim lectures, MWG I/4.848–51.
known political history of capitalism to create a previously unknown religious history in its image. The lectures (503, 515–18)\(^{29}\) insist that the support of the mercantilist state had been crucial to the genesis of early capitalism. This then gave rise to a form of reasoning outlined in the *PE*: ‘Just as [capitalism] once burst the old forms of medieval economic regulation only in alliance with the developing power of the modern state, the same might—as we may say provisionally—also have been the case in regard to its connections with religious powers’ [XX.32].\(^{30}\) Once this suggestion is noticed, some common features between Weber’s secular political and his newly created religious history emerge: the formative impact of ascetic Protestantism on capitalism described in the *PE* occurs in the ‘fateful epoch of the seventeenth century’ [XXI.36], which is simultaneously the first century of classical mercantilism and the epoch of the formative politico-religious encounters that were of such importance to Weber: the Synod of Dort in the Netherlands; the English Civil Wars, Commonwealth and Protectorate; and (on the negative side) the Thirty Years War in Germany. Indeed it is not too much to say that Oliver Cromwell is a living presence throughout the seventeenth-century portions of the text, whether *in propria persona* or through that of Richard Baxter, for, if we ask how and why Weber selected Baxter as his single most prominent religious source, then his historical location amidst the Puritan Revolution of mid-seventeenth-century England is an obvious, if inevitably speculative, answer.\(^{31}\) Again, the subsequent political movement from mercantilism to free trade, whereby nascent capitalism was freed from close ties to the state, is paralleled in the religious sphere by the capitalist ethic’s ‘switch’ [*Umschlag*] away from its original root in ascetic Protestantism into the secular and autonomous utilitarianism of the eighteenth century, devoid of a ‘religious root’ [XXI.75 n. 3, 104, 106]. However, the parallelism is only of the elementary kind that Weber suggests; and it would be futile to try to develop it more systematically. Large differences between the histories of religion and politics remain, and Weber never supposed that there was any principle in affinity between these spheres—quite the reverse. The political state, unlike the ‘religious root’ supplied by Christian theology, does not die out. On the contrary, as noted, Weber envisages an increase in state power in future, as an essentially international capitalism reverts to much closer political control within a renewed neo-mercantilism.

What then does the “early” Weber have to say about the other ‘world power’: religion and the ‘Church’? Alongside rationality, the second great absentee from the lectures is Protestantism; *a fortiori* ascetic Protestantism. Yet reference to religion, and the links between religion and capitalism, is not entirely wanting. We have a sense of Weber marking out a vacancy that he would like to fill, if only he were freed from the narrow departmental and specialized constraints imposed by having

\(^{29}\) Ibid. 849–50.

\(^{30}\) Cf. [XX.24], which refers to religion as ‘a mighty helper, who . . . stood by its [capitalism’s] side at the time of its emergence’.

\(^{31}\) This is not to overlook the religious and casuistical attractions of Baxter: Historian, 39–44.
to lecture on economics, the “spirit” of which condemned him to try to get at ‘people’ only by way of a ‘laboriously material detour’.\textsuperscript{32}

What Weber does discuss on a fairly regular basis is the pre-Reformation church.\textsuperscript{33} The ‘General Economics’ lectures summarize its position with schematic clarity (498–9; cf. 684):\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Church: . . . divided interests}
\item \begin{itemize}
\item \textit{politically}—against the Emperor—
\item \textit{so for the city}
\item \textit{ethically}: anti-capitalist
\item \textit{tradition} shaken by the \textit{money economy}
\item \textit{authority} [shaken] by the rule [\textit{Herrschaft}] of capital
\end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

So: against interest & capital

The divided nature of the Church’s interests (supportive of the capitalist city, but ethically anti-capitalist) explains why its position on usury and capital as described in the \textit{PE} is the Laodicean one of ‘accommodation’ [XX.33]—neither decisively for or against—and the general position set out here is one to which Weber would always adhere. The fullest later exposition of his views on the pre-Reformation Church, the treatment of hierocracy in the Sociology of \textit{Herrschaft} (c.1911–14), also picks up on the divided forces at work within the pre-Reformation Church. This differs in specifics, focusing on the tension between the official charisma of the papacy and its rational bureaucracy relative to the quite different ascetic rationalism of the monastic orders, but the conclusion is much the same: that the Catholic Church was far less of a “unified Kultur” than any of its comparators amongst the world religions, which in both cases suggests a significant new departure is in the offing.\textsuperscript{35}

Yet ordinarily the early lecture presentations posit the breakdown of the relationship between the Catholic Church and nascent capitalism at the end of the medieval period, but go no further. The history does not continue forward into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to see what resolution, if any, is achieved; instead attention is transposed onto the more conventional political context for capitalism. Now, to a contemporary Lutheran audience, the idea that the Reformation marked a fundamental caesura in this way would surely have seemed unremarkable. However, we can see that a space has been marked out for the post-Reformation history of the relationship between religion and capitalism, even if, as yet, Weber refuses to enter upon it.

\textsuperscript{32} To Carl Neumann, 14.3.98, Nachlaß Max Weber 30/4 Bl. 72.

\textsuperscript{33} Treatment of this subject is essentially the same at Mannheim and in the university, and we must not suppose that failure to fulfill an apparent promise to devote an entire lecture to this theme at Mannheim has deprived us of anything essential: \textit{MWG} I/4.848.

\textsuperscript{34} Cf. Mannheim lectures, \textit{MWG} I/4.848, 851–2.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{MWG} I/22–4.649. This is a striking example of how radically Weber’s view of religious history differed from the Christian–idealist conception of Ernst Troeltsch, regardless of the mutual intellectual respect and collaboration they sustained in the years 1905–12. For Troeltsch the distinguishing feature of the medieval church was that it was a unity, the integrated precursor to a dist integrated secular Kultur: e.g. ‘Protestantisches Christentum’ [1905–6], 256.
When he does go forward in time, the presentation is occasional, even fleeting, and the intellectual basis narrower. Because of his training in the history of commercial law and his connection with Levin Goldschmidt, in whose place he lectured in Berlin between 1892 and 1894, Weber was well schooled in the history of those subjects where the Protestant (as well as Catholic) churches pronounced on economic matters: this meant the history of canon law pronouncements on usury above all, a longstanding and conventional subject. So in the short lecture course on the ‘History of Economics’ as a science, given just once in 1896, he discusses the “pre-history” of the discipline, prior to its emergence as ‘mercantilism’ in the seventeenth century, and offers a brief, discussion of the ‘Reformat[ion] Period’. Here the contribution made by Lutheran thought to any “progressive” economic development appears to be either null or negative (685):

Reformers also [rest] on the standpoint of the [medieval] canon lawyers.
Luther—great step backwards.
Ag[ain]st all calculation—Providence
Sermon agst Usury—Fugger

Now the reader of the PE will have no difficulty in construing these remarks. There too Weber starts from Luther’s affinity with the medieval Catholic tradition of canon law represented by Thomas Aquinas [XX.41–2]; there too he notes the ‘ever more thorough-going belief in Providence’ of the later Luther [XX.47], just as he dismisses Luther’s attack on the Fugger in the Sermon on Usury as ‘peasant distrust of capital’, and the reverse of forward looking [XX.44 & n. 1]. When in the lectures he highlights Luther’s hostility to economic calculation (686), the thinking, if not the terminology, is the same as the comment in the PE that ‘it is hardly necessary to point out that Luther cannot be described as having any inner affinity with the “capitalist spirit”’, since calculation is essential to that spirit [XX.44]. There is, however, nothing in 1896 about the latent positive contribution Luther makes to the development of the Protestant ethic via the secular conception of the Beruf or calling—Weber’s only recorded comments from the 1890s focus on the negative, constraining aspects of the Lutheran Beruf. Still this view is also fully represented in the PE [XX.45–50], and the overall message is the same on each occasion: that one will not look to Lutheranism for a great modernizing impulse; even if the more refined distinction the PE makes between Luther (‘the religious genius’) and a dowdy Lutheranism is predictably missing [XXI.38].

But, while there are pointers to the future here, we should be aware of the limitation of what Weber was doing in 1896. Weber always insisted that the conventional insistence on the historical importance of doctrines of usury was quite mistaken: this was mere ‘doctrine’ or ‘church doctrine’ [XX.48; XXI.65] without (as in the case of predestination) that broader ethical impact that was so

37 This is regardless of Weber’s doubts about the status of the Fugger as representatives of a modern rationally grounded capitalism) [XX.14–15].
38 e.g. ‘Zur Rechtfertigung Göhres’ [1892], MWG I/4.117.
important to him [XXI.2–3]. Thus in 1920 Weber could describe the original PE as ‘a treatise which nowhere mentions the canonical prohibition on taking interest (apart from one incidental observation without any connection to the overall argument)’ [i.56 n. 1]. This was substantially if not quite literally true, since his general view was that what was required to establish modern capitalism was a psychological resource, ‘the capitalist “spirit” as a mass phenomenon’, and ‘not . . . the supplies of money’ [XX.20, 29] that might have been impeded by usury law.\footnote{39} Thus his one significant reference to the subject in 1904 was an acceptance of the self-evident fact ‘that the conception of monetary acquisition as an obligatory end in itself, as a “calling”, ran contrary to the ethical feeling of entire epochs’ regardless of the more economically realistic treatment of the subject by fifteenth-century Catholic theorists [XX.32]. In a word, usury theory told one nothing about the ethic of an epoch: it was not the case, as was conventionally assumed, that usury law was holding back capitalism, but that public opinion was much more hostile to usurious capitalist practices than the relaxed canon lawyers. So, while we can plainly see the hand of the author of the PE at work in 1896, he is not here offering a history of the relationship between religion and capitalism; he is only offering a set of remarks about the doctrinal history of usury, albeit from a novel, critical standpoint.

A similar limitation attaches to a brief discussion of the ‘reworking of canonist doctrines’ by Calvin in the lectures on ‘Practical National Economy’. It was a course he gave about two and a half times (1895, 1897–8, 1898–9, the third time much interrupted by bad health) and one that in principle he held in low esteem, because the requirement for practicality implied political engagement and the compromise of neutral Wissenschaft.\footnote{40} Drawing on the well-documented position that Calvin was more relaxed about the regulation of usury than Luther,\footnote{41} Weber suggested that this was significant not because it promoted the supply of capital, but because it was symptomatic of a more positive attitude to economic activity: it favoured an ‘ethical theory of economic meanness’, which ‘corresponded to the conception of life of the most competent elements of rising capitalism, under which gaining wealth was an ethical vocation’. In summary, there was an ‘unleashing & ethical sanctioning of the acquisitive drive, of economic self-interest; on the other hand, limitation of the pleasure drive’. Now this undoubtedly suggests that there

\footnote{39} Scholars who write about Weber and usury are usually too committed to their subject to be fully amenable to this argument: Benjamin Nelson, The Idea of Usury (Chicago, 1969) is a well-known example; Lutz Kaelber, ‘Max Weber in Usury and Medieval Capitalism’, MWS 4 (2004), 51–75, is more judicious and scholarly, but still not exempt.

\footnote{40} I am indebted to Wolfgang Schluchter for drawing this source to my attention, and to Edith Hanke and Rainer Lepsius of MWG for making Weber’s text available to me: ‘Praktische Nationalökonomie’, §3 ‘Merkantilismus und Protektionismus’ fo. 46–v. All lecture quotations in this and the next paragraph are from this brief text.—For Weber’s view of ‘Practical Economics’ as a ‘nonsense’: to Johann Plenge, 28.12.19, Briefe. This can only have derived from his experience in the 1890s.

\footnote{41} W. Endemann, Studien in der romanisch-kanonischen Wirtschafts- und Rechtslehre (Berlin, 1874–83), i. 41, who relies on H. Wiskemann, Darstellung der in Deutschland zur Zeit der Reformation herrschenden nationalökonomischen Ansichten (Leipzig, 1861), 79–86. Both texts were well known to Weber.
was a new, religiously based ethical conception, whereby Calvin and urban Prot-
estants had come to terms with rising capitalism in a way that Catholicism and
Lutheranism had been unable to do; but it does not amount to much more than
saying that a vacuum had been created and that it was somehow filled. The *premiss*,
that there is some alignment between religion and acquisitive economic activity
under Protestantism (and indeed an alternative Catholic one represented by the
unscrupulous but still ascetic and systematic casuistry of the Jesuits) [cf. XXI.86 n.
35], is important; but the way this conceptual hole has been filled in is extremely
sketchy and to a large extent “wrong” when judged by what emerged in 1904–5.

Most obviously the crucial distinction the *PE* makes between ‘the personal views
of Calvin’ in the sixteenth century—which it relegates—and ‘doctrine of Calvinism’
in the fateful epoch of the seventeenth century is absent [XXI.6 n.5]. The lecture
focus on Calvin minus Calvinism would appear to be corroborated by Weber’s
acceptance of a graduate student in 1898, Maximilian Kamm, who began a
doctoral dissertation on ‘Johannes Calvin as a maker of economic policy’, although
the thesis was not completed, and we know nothing more about Kamm.42 Again,
the territorial focus of the *PE* is missing in the lectures. *Circa* 1897 Weber links
Calvin to the ‘Hanseatic towns’, a connection he subsequently repudiated in regard
to Hanseatic Hamburg.43 By 1905 (on the other hand) Calvinism means England
and Holland in the first instance, while ‘Germany remains wholly to one side’ [XXI.6
n. 5]. We can perhaps see vestiges of the 1890s conception at the very opening of
the *PE* when it points to the affinity between sixteenth-century Protestantism and
‘the majority of rich cities’ in the German *Reich* [XX.2]. The bibliography for the
*PE* also suggests that at an early stage of his research Weber was interested in
comparing sixteenth-century French Calvinism to the seventeenth-century Dutch,
English, and North German varieties that monopolize the account given in 1905—
which looks like a half-way house between Jean Calvin, the man, and seventeenth-
century Calvinism.44 But, while these data are of interest in regard to Weber’s
working methods—as showing how the fact that he started from a conceptual
blank did not dictate the final empirical and historical solution—it remains the
case that the position adopted in the 1890s lectures is a discarded preliminary,
overridden by strategic decisions that will follow later. On a point of detail,
consider Weber’s interest in the contemporary ‘th[eory] of the productivity of
low wages’ espoused by the Dutch writer and textile manufacturer Pieter de la
Court (1618–85), which supplies a textual link between the ‘Practical Economics’

42 Hartmut Lehmann, ‘Max Webers Weg vom Kulturprotestantismus zum asketischen
43 ‘Antikritisches’, 184; cf. [i.28 n. 2].
44 Note citations of the *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, Jean Aymon,
*Tous les synodes nationaux des Églises réformées de France* (La Haye, 1710) [XX.9 n. 1]; H. M. Baird,
*Geschichte von französischen Calvinismus* (1857–69) [XXI.5 n. 4].—Weber was not above publicly
invoking his French (Souchay and Huguenot) bloodline, but this was only a rhetorical and anti-racist
gesture: ‘Zum Vortrag von A. Ploetz’ [1910], *GASS* 458. Although the Souchays could be traced back
to Huguenot France, their visible presence in Weber’s family history is pre-eminently German or else
English: Roth, *Familiengeschichte*, chs ii–v, viii,i, etc.