

CENTRAL EUROPEAN POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW

Political Science Quarterly of the Central European Political Science Alliance

CENTRAL EUROPEAN POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW

Central Europe passed through great changes after the fall of communism. Ten years after the transition, the democratic developments in the Central European countries produced many new achievements in the field of political science

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The editors of Central European Political Science Review therefore welcome the articles of political science researchers in the world, which are related to the Central European region or which carry a message for these countries.

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INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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PREFERENCES AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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North Macedonia, Lithuania, Moldova

BOOK REVIEW

Maria Spanò book by Evelina Praino

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ABSTRACTS

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Schumpeter, Russell and the Weberian Obsolescence

1. Introduction: Weber, a grumpy provincial in Cipolla and Schumpeter's portrait

Relatively young disciplines such as sociology, not yet bicentennial, sometimes fall into the temptation to create for themselves what are called classics. As a discipline evolves, it understands the distinction between systematics and history (Merton, 1983; Marletti, 1992) and thus a distinction becomes clear between the historical “museum” and the systematic “laboratory” of a discipline. Both deserve great respect, evoke prestige but perform rather different, distinct functions. The point is to avoid the two opposing drifts: a humanistic idea of sociology that coming from history and philosophy creates irreparable connotations between the need for scientific rigor and humanistic illusions including the use-absolutely improper-of metaphysics where knowledge presents a hole. Where there is a hole science investigates, humanistic knowledge fills it with whatever beliefs, myths, superstitions in order to show that the hole has been filled. History, in turn, seems to consign sociology to explanations-more or less deterministic-in which goedelianly axiomatic beliefs are presented as logical a posteriori explanations. No scientific answer can come from questions like “what were the causes of the Great War of 1914-18?”.

Sociology from Merton (Ferone, 2018) onwards has precisely begun to increasingly separate the museum from the laboratory also through the famous and lapidary Luhmannian statement “classics are classics as classics and as such should be used in a self-referential way” (Luhmann, 1990: 67). End of any ontological, philological or metaphysical illusion of society. The other drift belongs to the “bad” use, i.e., reductionist, of the laboratory. The self-deception of the scholar who overvalues the observation, the empirical data to the point of anchoring himself to an inductively naive idea of “reality” and turning the researcher into a normalized bureaucrat (in the Kuhnian meaning). One of the gods of young sociology was Max Weber in whose writings we glimpse both drifts in a somewhat anomalous way since the first humanistic drift jumps immediately to

the eye yes from his studies on ethics, religion capitalism, the other drift seems less obvious but is the one that will make him jump from research to politics.

Cipolla's book has the great merit of having begun to significantly dismantle the altar on which Weber is been put by a great many sociologists, especially in Italy. There, in fact, where sociology has made an efficient systematic filtering, important concepts also related to Weber (idealtyp, charisma, power, action etc.) have remained valid for scientific research without the need to carry on the shoulders biography, history, philology of a far more human author, really too human.

2. Ethics, religion and other things that have clouded Weberian observation

E. Cassirer (2015) brilliantly showed that humans evolve through their symbolic forms, that they are not (necessarily) rational nor are they scientific. Following in a heterodox way, Cassirer's lesson, it seems immediately evident that symbolic forms can be articulated into different types:

A) Conventional symbols of a scientific nature. H for hydrogen O for oxygen are on the one hand mere conventions on the other hand they are functional for composing maps of quick and easy reference so that from the world of symbols to the world of action one does not make a mistake, for example, by mixing elements that would, if mistakenly combined, make a building explode unintentionally;

B) Design symbols: literally those used by designers (Norman, 2015) who, when they get the design wrong, bring out onto the market home appliances whose on/off button is not even clear where it is. They may initially seem conventional but design errors lead to sometimes fatalhousehold accidents;

C) Symbolic multipliers (Melucci, 1995) are basically value destroyers, muda (waste) in the meaning of the Toyota model that exist to fragment, slow down and even paralyze and isolate a social context. Tools used by those with ambitions of great social control at any cost;

D) The symbols of metaphysical discursiveness: as aforementioned, obstacles to turn away from knowledge by replacing it with arbitrary, indemonstrable and merely subjective beliefs (religious, political,

moral, ethical, etc.) such as those behind a papal bull urging believers to despise the body and material goods. Before long the pope had to take back the bull because less hygiene was bringing new epidemics, less attention to business was bringing increasing poverty, and less care in military discipline was exposing the papacy to potential invasions (Fumagalli, 1990). There is nothing scientific about beliefs, indeed, but their social effects are easily observable and, a little less easily, scientifically modifiable. As we shall see in paragraph six, among the type D symbols those of ethical discursiveness are the most risky because unlike politics and religion-ethical discursiveness might disguise only apparent rationality but in fact ethical discursiveness is a form of arbitrary reductionist irrationality utterly inept in the face of complexity (Luhmann, 2005) that immediately wants to fill potholes whose meaning it does not understand where it lacks the knowledge to manage the construction site to intervene in the potholes. Max Weber believed that symbols C and D could be foundational to the social order and hence his conflation of capitalism, politics, ethics and religion and probably one of the most misleading readings of capitalism. Then he would find himself with Schumpeter at Caè Landtmann: it was 1918.

3. The clash at Café Landtmann and the misunderstanding of a value free Weber

The Max Weber presented by Cipolla (2023) with all his limitations as a scurvy provincial as also emerged from the famous quarrel at the Café Landtmann (Girter, 2013) – which gives the title to this essay of mine – in Vienna where Weber turned out to be choleric, passionate, almost aggressive, vis-à-vis the younger but far more rational Schumpeter who emerged victorious from the quarrel marking a symbolic epochal transition between a sociology exaggeratedly based on beliefs, values, axioms etc. like Weber's, to a sociology much more balanced between theory and applied research, between past and future, continuity and innovation in observing and managing epochal changes. The dispute, in particular, concerned the October Revolution, which Weber observed with all the anguish, horror and terror of the man full of beliefs who considers them knowledge, and the refined analyst and designer of the social sciences, who reasons by evolutionary cycles, functional equivalents between seemingly different models (capitalism, socialism, democracy) and

by impact studies of intangible models on tangible socio-economic dynamics for whom the October Revolution was an interesting laboratory experiment to be observed with as much analytical coolness as possible. The other colleagues present at the debate that later erupted into argument unilaterally saw an enraged Weber get up and leave indignantly, forgetting his hat. Schumpeter, an aesthete, almost dandy, when it came to self-image, found the forgetfulness a serious sign of Weber's neglect of himself both as a scholar, and as a man: not having self-control and self-care was inexcusable in Schumpeter's eyes, and certainly the man who emerged bareheaded and angry from the Landtmann Café (Girtler, 2013) would have been very little credible as an inspirer of a methodologically value free social science (inspirer fictitiously invented by the say questionable Parsonsian translation interpretation of Weber for English-speaking readers, cf. Scaff , 2006). Even for "oversights" such as these Parsonsian ones, at least among scholars the challenge is to directly master as many living languages as possible and to access the works in original language editions.

4. The stock exchange, the abstract, the universal

Weber's short essay on the stock exchange (2020), while clearly written, gives back well the figure of a Weber who, as much as he wants to, does not manage to abstract much by anchoring the logic of the stock exchange of his time still to that of the ancient palaces of merchandise. The stock exchange of Weber's time was less abstract and globally connected than that of today (Euronext teaches) but it was far more abstract than the palace of merchandise where to deal in wheat one had to physically take it there. Weber fails to abstract because for a sociologist he seems a little too much of a historian turned primarily to the past (whether Weber was a great historian or not, I yield the floor to the historians) and because he is too humanistic, passionate, and values-oriented to be a good analyst of his time with an eye to the future.

Let us take a comparative example: Max Weber (1864-1920) and Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)! The two were only six years apart, same generation. The fact, not argued or arguable here, is the greater longevity of the latter than the former. We will never know if an older Weber would have become more abstract and conceptual. Statistically improbable but precisely unprovable. Weber died aged 56, Bertrand Russell (chair of mathematics and Nobel laureate

in literature, another step, even as a young man, compared to Weber), in 1931 (at 59) published *The Scientific Worldview* (Russell, 1993), which in about 240 pages of great calmness, balance and in an extremely flat and flowing style opens up horizons never even remotely intuited by the “sociologist” Weber. Russell shares with great neutrality-warning about both opportunities, and threats-his vision of the world from that 1931 forward-a vision in which the scientific worldview is not so much and only epistemological but rather foundational to the entire world social order. All this without the aporias, the “acts of faith” in science of a certain positivism that does not belong in this 1931 booklet. In summary Russell’s vision:

1) The world social order would be increasingly pervaded by science and technology;

2) That the traditional technique fully intelligible at a glance by everyday common sense of the “layman” would be replaced by a highly specialized, formalized and complex technique accessible and understandable only to specialists and experts (Russell, 1993: 123–130);

3) That the means, the techniques, the technologies of entertainment, of amusement would be the Trojan horse for the specialized technicalization of the entire world order that would create user friendly objects (a Russellian concept, but obviously an expression of the writer, not of Russell) that is, easily usable by the consumer who, however, for example, in case of breakdown would only know how to take the object to the specialized maintenance technician;

4) That the world order would become increasingly artificial especially strategically and diffusely through production, education propaganda. By the term propaganda, as is clear from the Russellian text, Russell does not mean manipulative and regime political-institutional communication “strictu sensu” but what today we would call highly programmed and organized strategic communication that includes, for example, also advertising persuasion well present in the Russellian book;

5) That “scientific civilization requires a rather stable world organization” (Russell 1993:212).

6) That production organized by nation-states (and not internationally) leads to disastrous and ruinous economic results. From the following point, we see that where Russel wrote “international” today we should read “global”;

7) In fact, according to Russell, in a world economy every production will be concentrated in one and only one place per sector. Say: automobiles in the U.S., needles and pins in India, agricultural machinery in China, etc., and it will be the world scientific government that will decide, scientifically, what to allocate where;

8) Education will be differentiated between the training of common people and the training of elites.

9) “Every new science becomes jammed by too slavish imitation to the technique of some older science” (Russell, 1993: 155), so here we see that for Russell organizational-technological obsolescence is a viaticum for development (just as it was for Schumpeter) and that Russellian expressions such as “innovate in tradition” are meaningless oxymorons.

A clear, crisp and macro-scale vision in just nine points rather adherent to our current scenarios (beyond terminological issues such as “international” and “propaganda” but he wrote, precisely in 1931). Latifunds, Confucian bureaucracy, early capitalism, commodity economy. In Weber there is an infinity of themes and axiomatic evaluations, even of those that are indemonstrable, such as religious themes (Berger, 1984): only the present and, above all, the future are missing.

5. Capitalism that Weber did not understand and Schumpeter did

This topic would require an entire volume, even a large one and, nonetheless, it may not be enough here my intent is to sketch some Schumpeterian highlights (Pitasi & Ferone, 2008; Pitasi, 2010) that even today make us understand capitalism even in evolutionary terms there where for example reading Weber would be misleading:

1) Politics is a subsector of the economy, specifically the subsector that deals with trade and the exchange of votes. To expect more from politics would be naive;

2) Socialism, capitalism and democracy are three equivalent forms for the organization and allocation of votes mentioned in the previous point;

3) Capitalism (and colonial imperialism) never needed violence, violence is not of capitalism. Warning! This does not mean that there was no violence during colonialism, rather that such violence was a cost as tragic as it was unnecessary. Capitalism is

reproduction on a global scale of abstract design knowledge that can create added value. A video-game app on a smartphone that entertains, amuses makes people laugh could make billions (and often does, and that too was already in the Russellian vision of 1931) without any violence at all while politics fluctuates between opposing managements of violence from G. Sorel to Gandhi, as we shall see below. It was not the Protestant ethic that made central-northern European capitalism strong as much as understanding, for example, how to reproduce worldwide hypertechnological waterworks and dams, for their times. Certainly, raw materials, and even slaves, but real capital did not expand because of the real economy of labor and raw materials but because of the ability to organize and reproduce globally designed and “engineered” abstract knowledge models: from South Africa to northeastern Brazil, from present-day New York to the Bahamas’ Nassau to Taiwan, Dutch technological knowledge of the XVII century is still pervasive capital (Pitasi, 2023).

There would be much more for example the cyclical evolutionary character from micro to macro of the abstraction of ownership (from the store to the joint-stock company, cf. Hansmann 2005, Seabright 2005) but here only the goal was to make the reader realize that understanding capitalism and reading Weber are two distinctly different paths. I hope I have succeeded.

6. Luhmann i.e. ethics as the derivation of inconclusiveness

Capitalism is reproduction on a global scale of abstract design knowledge capable of creating added value. If surplus value is created, it will be subject to the decreasing marginal utility until it comes to the obsolescence of that knowledge-based design and the goods and services derived from that design. End of a cycle and beginning of a new cycle usually lasting about thirty years (Kuznets, 1990). There are, as in an old pipe of fouling, rusts that could make the cycle of development activated less fruitful than expected. Such encrustations and rusts that slow, flood and slow down are essentially of four types: 1) ethics and morality; 2) religion; 3) policy; 4) common Meaning. Let’s look at them briefly:

1) Ethics and morality are the voices of powerlessness and ignorance in that they offer beliefs where they lack knowledge and axioms where explanations would be needed. With lucid ruthlessness Luhmann (2005: 71–72) writes: “I see no connection between the problems arising from scientific-technical progress and the

argumentative capacity of an ethics (.). I would like to further exacerbate the tone by stating that I consider ethics incapable of argumentation, unreasonable and incompetent". Ethics, partly because of its inherent reductionism and its inevitable and undecidable axiomatics, turns out to be at the same time wholly inadequate to deal with techno-scientific complexity and well convinced, instead of living up to it by landing on a paradoxical drift: posing itself as a reductionist solution for the governance of technology and science to ward off its reductionist drifts.

2) Religion: if there is a stupid phrase in history books and not because of the fault of historians it is "God is with us", a phrase that every army of every age has always adopted until the paradox of World War II where the "Gott mit uns" of the Nazis guided them while they were engaged in exterminating that people, the Jews, who had defined themselves as the chosen people of God. A tragic and at the same time comic paradox in which persecutors and persecuted act according to the supposed will of god and if it is true that "there is no progress without paradox" (Luhmann, 2005: 59), secularization seems to be the way out of the paradox by showing the absence of knowledge behind beliefs and thus the all earthly and social character of god for whom in evolutionary terms, a rosary and a bottle of whiskey, a temple and a brothel are functional equivalents if they both expand the evolutionary horizons of our species (Evans, 2016). Theodicy-let god's will be done, it was God's will-is the best example of an axiomatic belief that does not generate knowledge, understandings, or explanations, and for this reason methodological atheism seems the only epistemologically respectable position for a scholar of political social sciences, and beyond (Berger, 1984).

3) Politics, in discursive forms quite different from ethics and religion, in essence is another locus of C and D type null value-added symbolic forms described above in reference to Cassirer. Since it has to simulate having an impact and power to intervene that it does not have, it plays on emotional radicalizations related to hatred and violence. Politics is a firefighter putting out the fires it sets itself, Dahrendorf (1993), not surprisingly had called politics the dramatization of the insignificant.

4) Common sense is a random and disorganized collection of beliefs or at most automatic behavioral knowledge and therefore subject to rapidly decreasing marginal utility and even more rapid

obsolescence. “Vox populi, vox dei” makes “Gott mit Uns” sound like a pearl of wisdom, which is saying something. No invention and no decisive discovery of today would have survived if while in its embryonic stage it had been subjected to popular referendum.

7.Conclusions: Bureaucracy and Weberian misunderstandings of the rationality of social organization

If we draw a distinction between denotation and connotation, between description and standard (or even prescription!) we face a bifurcation between being and ought-to-be that is misleading today because the bifurcation is a tripartition. Between description, the isotropic standard and the legal and/or social norm. Perhaps sometimes in the Weberian pages being and ought-to-be get a little too confused but certainly Weber seems to grasp more the bureaucratic forms (historical and a little of his time) than the capitalist ones, of course in Weber there is a lack of any reference to isotropic standardization which cannot on the one hand be blamed on Weber (it would be like blaming Durkheim for never appearing on TV) but at the same time makes Weberian pages on bureaucracy more historically important than systematic (Merton, 1983; Marletti, 1992). Let us clarify what an isotropic standard is. In Weber’s time, the bureaucracy was an essentially vertical apparatus whose expansion was more inward through an increasing number of smaller and smaller cells that a certain vulgate and perhaps some not-so-good translation have condensed into the equivocation of the “steel cage” (Pitasi & Ferone, 2021). Bureaucracy perimeters the administrative machinery of states and their formal subunits. This is the bureaucracy that Weber observes. Modernity consists in good substance, in a mass dismissal of customs officers and inspectors (Touraine, 1993: 304) that is, of all those controllers who besides falling into the endless paradox of “who controls the controllers?” soon turn out to be a transactional cost far greater than the risks and harms they are supposed to avert. This does not entail the end of bureaucracy nor does the total absence of controllers entail, rather that bureaucracy becomes horizontal, worldwide, global by creating platforms and criteria through which for example a drug is either approved/authorized everywhere or if it is in some areas and in others not the matter becomes suspicious. Whether it is intellectual property, world trade rules or validation of a drug the game has long since moved from nation states to much

more complex organizations (WHO, WIPO, WTO) whose language is global as are their parameters: isotropic standards. Weber, who died in 1920, obviously could not (pre) see this nonetheless to remain today anchored to bureaucracy, in the Weberian meaning, would be beyond misleading. Let us talk about Gustave Eiffel for a moment before concluding. What Eiffel have to do with Weber now? The reader will ask perhaps intrigued, perhaps impatient. Capitalism is reproduction on a global scale of abstract design knowledge that can create added value to which we hook isotropic standards: the technological-scientific-economic equator of the globalized world. Eiffel (1832-1923) is from the generation before Weber's. They are 32 years apart although Eiffel even outlives Weber by three years. Well, to claim that Eiffel as early as the 1870s understood and anticipated the inescapable globalization would be a gamble to say the least but if we understand Capitalism as the reproduction on a global scale of abstract design knowledge capable of creating added value and to this we hook the isotropic standards that form the technological-scientific-economic equator of the globalized world and then observe how the engineer Eiffel worked a certain admiration for him becomes inevitable: whether it is department stores and a tower in Paris, multiple bridges in Portugal or helping Bertoldi install a whimsical arm in the Statue of Liberty that Paris was about to give to Washington at the end of the day Eiffel's architecture is a catalog of standardized iron designs that he can combine and recombine in multiple forms, virtually anywhere in the world (Lambertini, 2012) while the vast majority of architects and engineers of his time were mostly "local craftsmen" Eiffel had created isotropic design standards, before isotropic standards (Lambertini, 2012). Isotropic standards are a kind of norm Weeber did not consider and these standards became the slippery slope to drift Weber towards obsolesce.

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