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Making Sense of Eurasia: Reflections on Max Weber and Jack Goody

Chris Hann

Introduction

A century has elapsed since Max Weber delivered two lectures at the University of Munich that continue to figure prominently in assessments of his oeuvre and more generally in the methodology and philosophy of the social sciences.¹ In November, 1917, in “Science as a Vocation” (Wissenschaft als Beruf), Weber affirmed the sociologist’s duty to keep his values and his politics separate from his scientific practice. Professors should not preach to their students. The task of the social scientist was to construct ideal types that could be explored empirically and thereby contribute to causal explanations of social phenomena whose validity would have to be accepted on grounds of logic and empirical verification by all and sundry, independently of values. Even if the challenge was harder than that facing the natural scientist, since human subjectivities (beliefs and values) were among the main variables to be investigated, the scientific method was common to both. In “Politics as a Vocation” (Politik als Beruf), delivered in January, 1919, Weber’s main subject is the tension inherent in a democracy between the emotional skills on which the politician depends to obtain power, and the need of the modern professional politician (Berufspolitiker) to practice stringent rationality **in order** to be effective in office. The two “vocation essays,” as they have come to be known, range widely over core themes of Weber’s sociology, including definitions of the state, bureaucracy, and legitimate domination. Scholars have interpreted the texts in the light of Weber’s biography and the values he held personally, and also against the background of military defeat and political revolution in Germany. Weber died in 1920, and his interpreters have probed the consistency of these late lectures with his voluminous earlier

writings. Some have questioned whether the two essays are compatible with each other. Does not Weber betray, when implying in 1919 an enthusiasm for strong charismatic leadership, the impossibility of the “value-free” (wertfrei) social science for which he had pleaded just fifteen months earlier?

This essay is divided into three parts. In the first I consider the main charges leveled against Weber and **the** attempts to answer them, notably that of British sociologist W. G. Runciman. I argue that the defense amounts to a somewhat scholastic exercise in the face of the overwhelming evidence that Weber’s basic approach, or Fragestellung, was fundamentally distorted by Eurocentric assumptions. His values as a patriotic German and a proponent of Western superiority, his philosophical idealism, and his methodological individualism have had a lasting impact on social theory. No amount of special pleading can rescue the Weberian edifice of a value-free social science.

Nonetheless, as I shall argue in the following section, by embracing as he did in his comparative sociology of religion all the great traditions of Europe and Asia, Weber points to suggestive paths beyond his own Eurocentrism. My main guide in this part of the essay will be the anthropologist Jack Goody, who rejects all versions of a “European miracle” in favor of a philosophy of history that emphasizes a “Eurasian miracle.”² Weber did not use the concept of Eurasia (or that of miracle), but his work may still be of help in recognizing the unity of the landmass and tracing patterns of history in both East and West since the urban revolution of the Bronze Age. What Karl Jaspers termed the Axial Age might equally be labeled the Eurasian Age.³ It brought new configurations of economics, politics, and religion. I argue that this Eurasian Age was grounded in a dialectic of market and redistribution that that, over the long term, for all the increases in social inequality and hierarchy that it entailed, led to unprecedented forms of social inclusion. In the twentieth century this was exemplified by the many variants of socialism that prevailed across the whole of Eurasia.

There is a rival concept of Eurasia, associated above all with Russian nationalism. In the final substantive part of this essay I suggest that this phenomenon is best approached as a reaction to Eurocentric thinking and the domination of the West in recent centuries. This alternative concept of Eurasia has acquired ideological significance in Moscow. It has been paradoxically reinforced since the election of Donald J. Trump as president of the United States. Trump fails more completely than any of his forty-four predecessors to meet the Weberian specifications for the Berufspolitiker, since he is apparently incapable, **now** in office, of modifying the impulsive populism that propelled his successful campaign. This causes him to be vilified by liberal critics as a demagogue comparable to Vladimir Putin and other authoritarian rulers in Asia. I argue that Trump is better perceived as the latest incarnation of US exceptionalism when assessed in the context of the *longue durée* of Eurasia. His policies in fields such as health insurance and environmental sustainability are rendering this contrast more transparent than it has ever been. Weber's appreciation of the US reflected his distaste for trends in the Old World with which he lacked sympathy, and was central to his entire historical sociology. He emphasized an individualist Protestant ethic as the decisive factor linking the US to Europe and to a uniquely rational West (das Abendland). Weber's "history writ large" remains enormously influential, but it is fundamentally flawed. The emerging moral geography of the planet in the twenty-first century reveals the unity not of the West but of Eurasia. From Brussels to Beijing **exists** a deeper unity rooted in the civilizational history of the landmass since the Bronze Age.

Problems with Max Weber

Without entering into long histories of reflection in multiple philosophical traditions, let us begin by noting that the possibility of a value-free social science was vigorously debated from the inception of positivist and utilitarian approaches in nineteenth-century Europe. Long before his Munich lectures, Weber's stipulations were questioned by his fellow

sociologists in Germany. They pointed out how his own value preferences were unmistakably apparent in many of his own writings, including famous texts such as The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.⁴ Many scholars of other religions have complained that Weber's sociology of religion is so shot through with Protestant bias that it cannot possibly provide an adequate foundation for comparative research.⁵

In response, defenders of Weber have typically argued that, even if one concedes elements of Eurocentrism, these were unavoidable in light of the scholarship available to him at the time. More questionably, in the words of Wolfgang Schluchter, this is a "heuristic Eurocentrism" rather than a normative bias that necessarily leads to misrecognition of extra-European phenomena and false conclusions.⁶ For Schluchter and many other sociologists, there remains a great deal in the Weberian toolkit that is still valuable today, even if advances in scholarship in the last century have shown some of his assumptions to be exaggerated, or even wrong.

In this vein, Runciman has argued eloquently in a recent review essay in defense of the wertfrei Weberian methodology, **which** sets out to explain social phenomena by means of the construction of ideal types that include subjective or "psychological" variables.⁷ The most famous such argument is the one **that** traces the expansion of industrial capitalism to religious "inner-worldly asceticism," exemplified by Calvinism. Runciman concedes that Weber's thesis has not been substantiated empirically. It is nonetheless applauded as an innovative and logically coherent hypothesis. The problem, it would seem, is of a technical nature. Neither Weber nor anyone else has provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the doctrines of Calvin and other Protestant ideas were in fact influential in shaping the behavior of successful capitalist entrepreneurs. So the thesis fails, but not because of Weber's own values (the fact that he rather approved of these entrepreneurs, and made this clear enough in his prose, is considered irrelevant). On occasion, Runciman admits, Weber did transgress his own methodological guidelines. But he was ready to admit such errors when they were pointed out

to him. Thus Weberian methodology is upheld as a crowning achievement of the social sciences, one that today's social scientists would do well to emulate.

Runciman deals only cursorily with the problem of Eurocentrism. I think it deserves closer attention. At the beginning of the twentieth century, argues Runciman, European power was so great that it was simply inevitable that a sociologist aiming to grasp the big picture would pose modern capitalism as his explanandum. Western domination was a brute fact. Irrespective of one's values, an explanation had to be found

for why, at the time when he was writing, the societies of the West did visibly dominate those of the East (and of the African continent) rather than the other way round. It is the same question whether put in the form that Weber does or in the form of what Jared Diamond calls "Yali's Question"—Yali being a New Guinea politician who one day in 1972 asked Diamond "Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had little cargo of our own?"⁸

Runciman's comparison is a curious one for a sociologist committed to the application of a universalist Darwinian theory to sociological explanation: does it really make sense to equate the case of New Guinea with that of East Asia? Weber was a scholar of enormous erudition, well aware of the accomplishments of Chinese science and technology in an era when his own Germanic ancestors were economically backward. Why was it natural and legitimate for him around 1900 to impose the teleological narrative of a uniquely Occidental rationalism, as the silent preliminary for the construction of an ideal type (the Protestant ethic) to explain what a less Eurocentric scholar should have been able to perceive as a highly contingent and ephemeral state of affairs? How can a great comparative sociologist be such a prisoner of his "here and now"?

It is a commonplace to assert that no historian can step outside the constraints of his or her moment in the flux of events. The problems of selection and causality facing a scholar

who aspires to grasp the very big picture are particularly formidable. In any case, the Weberian ideal types derive clearly from the values of the author and the circumstances in which he wrote. Although his political orientations changed several times in the course of his life, Weber was always a German patriot. His antipathy toward Marxist socialism and the inroads made by embryonic forms of social democracy in a recently united Germany are well known. He felt only disdain for the pioneering institutions of social insurance implemented under **Otto von** Bismarck. These views, in combination with his unstable mental state, combined to make his visit to the United States in 1904 an exhilarating, even transformative experience. In the US there was no need for the rhetoric of class struggle, since evidently a successful capitalist economy was being constructed on different foundations: rugged Protestant individualists and their free associations. For Weber these features, **rather than** socialist class struggle, exemplified the attractive values of modernity. **Protestant individualism** had a unique origin in European (more specifically Western European) Christianity, but in Europe **its** creative potential was being stymied by new political trends. Hence the inspiration Weber drew from the US. He constructed his most influential ideal type on this highly subjective basis.⁹

Aligned to this construction of das Abendland, two further issues deserve attention. They can be glossed as idealism and individualism. Let us take the former first. Here Weber's approach reflects the main strands of German philosophy in the Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment. As every student of sociology is taught, Weber is never so crass as **to** crudely oppose ideas to materialist causation. He is an erudite economic historian whose narratives demonstrate his awareness of technological change, new forms of money, and the expansion of markets. In principle, his sociology paid attention to the entire institutional context, since ideas in themselves can hardly suffice. Yet sometimes he fell short. The danger is touched upon by Runciman, who criticizes Weber's focus on Jewish notions of constituting a uniquely distinctive sacred people. Irrespective of Jewish doctrines and popular understandings of them,

it is obvious to Runciman that, as a matter of historical fact, “discriminatory institutional practices and cultural prejudices” were of prime significance in constraining behavior.¹⁰ But this principle of constraint may warrant a more general application. Would it not be equally reasonable to attribute Euro-American domination of the world around 1900 to the practices and institutions of European imperialisms and superior military technologies, rather than posit religious beliefs as a prime cause?

One problem, then, is the idealist proclivity, especially seductive when it comes to the big picture, to locate the ultimate causes of social phenomena in Kultur, often in the form of religion. Weber did pay attention to the changing material context, but he privileged subjectivities, in particular beliefs. More specifically, he focused on the mental states of individual actors. Alongside Eurocentrism and idealism, methodological individualism is the third silent preliminary to be borne in mind when assessing the Weberian mirage of a value-free social science. This is a further fundamental difference between Weber and the other founding fathers of sociology, Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim. It is so fundamental to Weber’s method and ideological appeal that it often goes unnoticed (as is the case with Runciman, discussed above). Certainly Weber acknowledges the existence of social groups and the influence of others over the way the individual constructs conflicting value spheres and negotiates his Lebensordnung.¹¹ But his sociological agent is a decision-taking individual. Here, too, Weber is very much a scholar of his time. His first university position was in economics (Nationalökonomie, as it was then called). He was well acquainted with the debates between the followers of Carl Menger, founder of the Austrian school of neoclassical economics, and the German historical school, with its center in Berlin. Weber’s efforts to develop a theory of “value spheres” are clear evidence of a will to avoid the neoclassical postulate of a utility-maximizing homo economicus. But these efforts were not consolidated, and the new economics paradigm that emerged definitively from earlier forms of political economy during Weber’s lifetime had an abiding influence on his sociology. The neoclassical

paradigm likes to present itself as value-free, like Weberian sociology. It aspires, primarily through its mathematical rigor, to be classified among the natural sciences rather than the social sciences. Yet when it comes to the real economy, this science has little or no predictive capacity. In an age of neoliberal attacks on the collectivism embodied in welfare states, no discipline founded on methodological individualism is value free.

The First Eurasian Age

All attempts to impose order on the past through historical periodization are open to contestation. Historians conventionally restrict themselves to the eras for which they possess written source materials, but it is of course possible to reach further back. David Christian begins his “big history” of the planet 13.8 billion years ago, with the Big Bang: the past can hardly be writ larger than this.¹² In the book mentioned above, Jared Diamond reaches back a modest 13,000 years to the end of the Palaeolithic/Paleolithic.¹³ If one is interested in the emergence of large-scale social organization, highly differentiated in terms of culture as well as the division of labor, a very strong case can be made for opening the narrative not with the Neolithic revolution but significantly later, with the emergence of cities in the Bronze Age.¹⁴ Civilizations have emerged and flourished independently in several parts of the world, but those of Eurasia have a strong claim on our attention due to their longevity and the intensifying connectivity that eventually draws them into a single system (even though parallel evolution remains significant long after contacts are established). By Eurasia I mean all those parts of Europe and Asia, plus those parts of North and East Africa that were integrated into this world system, in the centuries preceding the Common Era.¹⁵ (Needless to say this particular temporal demarcation is no less arbitrary than the distinction between “continents,” which we have inherited from the ancient Greeks.)

The long-term contrast between this Eurasia and the rest of the planet can be explored in various domains. One, of interest primarily to anthropologists, is that of domestic

institutions: marriage, the family, and kinship. Jack Goody constructed pioneering ideal types of Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa in order to demonstrate that the differences between domestic institutions were based ultimately on differences in production systems, and on modes of holding and transmitting property.¹⁶ Only in the urbanizing societies of Eurasia were conditions conducive to the emergence of proto-bourgeois cultures of distinction. Literacy enabled systematization and cumulative advances in scientific knowledge, which in turn made possible new technologies and economic expansion. Diffuse “merchant cultures” disseminated ideas as well as goods over ever-wider regions; the maritime routes of the Indian Ocean world were just as important as the overland “Silk Road.” This post-Bronze Age history has been largely neglected by the founders of the Western social sciences for the simple reason that, during the centuries in question, western Eurasia (i.e. Europe) hardly played a significant role.

Having illuminated the contrast between Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa at a very macro level, in later decades Goody turned his attention to the significance of differences within the Eurasian landmass. Max Weber was one of his prime examples for Eurocentric bias.¹⁷ Weber’s key concept of rationalization, exemplified in double entry bookkeeping, was shown by Goody to be just as applicable to East Asia as to Europe. Nor is Goody at all impressed by Weber’s focus on religion as a causal factor: rather, in his understanding, doctrines and churches expand alongside commerce within and between civilizations, and there are no grounds for privileging Western or, even more narrowly, Protestant Christianity. Goody does not deny the importance of the European scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, nor of the industrial revolution that followed a century later, nor the links between the two. But he places these momentous developments in the context of long-term developments across the landmass. Only in the nineteenth century did the gap between East and West widen dramatically, in the course of a “great divergence” brought about by a combination of the new industries, technologies, and military might of the Western powers.¹⁸

As we can now recognize with the rise of the Asian economies in the twenty-first century, even this period of emphatic Western advantage has turned out to be temporary.

I think Goody goes too far in his dismissal of religion as a prime factor in the evolution of Eurasia. He is surely right to play down the significance of the Protestant Reformation. Even Weber sometimes conceded that this was a product of a long-run dynamic in Western Christianity (which Weber perceived to be a different Kulturwelt from the stagnant mysticism that he believed to be intrinsic to the Eastern Christian traditions). Weber also drew attention to the “this-worldly” concerns of the Confucian tradition, so different from the soteriology of Buddhism, which in this respect was closer to all three of the Abrahamic variants of monotheism. We are left with a muddle: would Weber have managed to bring more order into his comparative sociology of religion if his life had not been cut short in 1920, before the planned synthesis could be completed?¹⁹

Following another World War, Weber’s legacy was brilliantly taken up by a new generation. Jaspers theorized an “Axial Age” in the first millennium BCE, based on unprecedented notions of transcendence that simultaneously instigated new standards of ethical conduct and legitimated new forms of polity.²⁰ This theory has been much refined but remains controversial.²¹ It was not addressed by Goody, but I think it can be grafted onto his account, which gives priority to an earlier material revolution in the cities. This welding of political economy and cosmology constitutes a frame for later developments. Opening the narrative of modernity some three millennia ago, in multiple civilizational traditions across Eurasia, is preferable, from this perspective, to selecting particular moments of rupture in particular places (such as the Weberian thesis about Protestantism in the West) as the decisive cause of a global modernity.

Axial notions of transcendence had secular economic and sociopolitical correlates. Whereas Jaspers’s philosophy of history paid little attention to these, it can be extended to encompass a dialectical relationship between the expansion of market economy and

redistribution by the state, which that is rendered increasingly accountable to its subjects and attentive to their social entitlements as well as to legal and political rights.²² The most important changes ushered in by the Eurasian Age were those that linked political legitimacy to new, universalist ethical principles. Against the ethics of the sword and the marketplace, even as social inequalities increased and slavery was common, eventually ideals of just rule and inclusive citizenship became more prevalent. This abstract model bears no resemblance to a Weberian ideal type, yet it may be productively enriched through an engagement with Weber's sociology of religion. In other words, behind the Eurocentric Weber rightly critiqued by Goody, there lurks another Weber whose unfinished explorations in the domain of religion, as continued by Jaspers, can help us to trace the emergence of a Eurasian Age in a balanced way that does justice to both the material and the ideational (cosmological) dimensions of human history.

There can be no better illustration of this model than the way in which the unleashing of market forces in the wake of the industrial revolution in western Eurasia was promptly followed by a countermovement that emphasized radically new forms of redistribution. Socialism is best construed as an original form of secular transcendence, in which freedom and redemption were to be attained through **both** a vanguard party and central planning. In the twentieth century these principles spread to virtually every corner of Eurasia, from the flexible institutions of Scandinavian social democracy to the more repressive variants experienced in much of Asia (and elsewhere). Even the least attractive forms of socialism (from the point of view of a Euro-American liberal) were based upon notions of an inclusive community, i.e. upon the prioritizing of the social rather than the individual, and thus upon the setting of limits to market-based inequality.

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s marked a new phase in the deep history of social citizenship in Eurasia. In most parts of the victorious West, the social-democratic accomplishments of preceding generations have come under intense pressure. Although states

remain indispensable (and some, especially those marginalized by the more powerful players, have become increasingly interventionist and authoritarian), in our global “here and now” the forces of the market are clearly in the ascendant. This is commonly explained and justified by an economic ideology known as neoliberalism (the origins of which are often traced back to Menger and the Austrian school). Many parts of the former “red Eurasia” have experienced neoliberal capitalism in extremely turbulent forms. Yet both in the former Soviet bloc and in those East Asian states that still profess to be socialist, the evidence of anthropological research indicates the resilience of the values of redistribution and social solidarity.²³

Disentangling a Rival Usage

Some readers who have followed the argument so far may be inclined to ask impatiently: why call the belt of Bronze Age and Iron Age agrarian civilizations that stretched from the Mediterranean to the East China Sea “Eurasia”? After all, the civilizations of what I have labeled the first Eurasian Age did not directly incorporate more than a small fraction of the total surface of this landmass. Besides, isn’t the term “Eurasia” commonly applied to a much smaller surface at the interface of Europe and Asia? Why use it for their agglomeration (not to mention the inclusion of large parts of Africa and the Indian Ocean world)?

The rival “interface” conception of Eurasia is of interest for a number of reasons. Some readers of this journal may be impressed by the fact that it was largely the invention of gifted humanities scholars—linguists, geographers, historians, theologians, and others—in the Russian diaspora in Western and central Europe in the decades following the Bolshevik revolution.²⁴ These scholars had lost their country to the socialists and needed to work out a new identity (and ideology) for themselves and their homeland. They did so by celebrating the expansive imperial power that had conquered most of northern and central Asia in recent centuries. The Russian Eurasianists highlighted the superior moral (often mystical) qualities of Russia, in contrast to the soulless rationality of the West. Their concept of Eurasia drew on

a long history of intellectual ambivalence toward the economically more developed West. In its essentials, this ambivalence resembled earlier German reactions to the French enlightenment.²⁵ The natural reaction of the marginalized to assertions of universal reason by a dominant power was to assert the primacy of Kultur over Zivilisation. As in Germany, in Russia, too, the spirit of the nation (narod) was taken to be the fundamental source of value. Unlike Germany, the Russians had acquired a vast empire stretching from the eastern European steppe to eastern Siberia, and including most of Islamic Central Asia and the Caucasus, so there was a great deal to integrate in the patriotic celebrations.

The Russian diaspora notion of Eurasia might have remained an obscure current in the history of ideas, of interest to antiquarian scholars only. However, whether because the tenets of historical materialism and scientific atheism were inherently insufficient to generate collective identifications and social cohesion, or for some other reason, these notions of Eurasia became influential within Russia long before the collapse of the USSR. The original contributions of Lev Gumilev were accorded generous recognition in the era of Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika. In the postsocialist decades, Eurasianism has flourished as a major component of Russian nationalism.²⁶ It is considered to be the ideological foundation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as of the Eurasian Customs Union (sometimes described as Asia's prime alternative to the European Union).

It is more surprising that this notion of Eurasia has also gained widespread recognition outside the countries to which it is applied. For example, the most important area studies association in the US for the study of the Slavic world (publisher of the journal Slavic Review) has changed its name to Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. This evidently has nothing to do with the sense in which I adapt the concept used by Goody and most global historians. From my point of view, to promote this Russian definition of Eurasia is to attach excessive weight to a particular nationalist (and occasionally racist) current in the history of ideas, and indirectly to remain in thrall to the domination exercised by western

Eurasia in recent centuries. Russian Eurasianism is a product of the very same era in which Weber developed his own combination of German nationalism and Eurocentrism. It is a reaction to the latter, as much as to the utopian internationalism of Marxist-Leninist socialism. This particular Russian coinage should not obscure analysis of the place of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation as it exists today, in the context of the larger Eurasian dialectic outlined in the previous section.

As a postscript to this discussion, it is worth noting the unexpected alignments that are lending spurious credibility to the Russian ideological concept of Eurasia in the US in the **Trump** presidency. Trump cannot be held personally responsible for the negative valence that the term Eurasia has gathered in the West since the end of the Cold War. On the contrary, I find commendable his repeatedly stated determination to correct the visceral anti-Russian stereotypes that seem so entrenched in policy-making circles in Washington. But given the undeniable fact that the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin has become a markedly less liberal and attractive partner for the Euro-American West than seemed possible at the beginning of the new century, liberals out of sympathy with everything else that Trump represents find it convenient to tar him with the brush of authoritarian, corrupt, patrimonial “Eurasian” tendencies, as opposed to the allegedly tolerant, liberal, law-governed, democratic West. The upshot is a thoroughly negative stereotype of Eurasia in Western public spheres in which the term was previously unknown. This Eurasia, a coproduct of Russian nationalists and US liberals, is commonly contrasted to idealized notions of Europe. It obviously has nothing in common with the encompassing historical concept of Eurasia advanced in the previous part of this essay.

Conclusion: A Second Eurasian Age?

For Weber, the US is a supremely interesting offshoot of a Western Christian Kulturwelt, molded above all by Protestant individualism. This perspective has a lot to

commend it. But Weber's efforts to place this strand of Christianity in a causal relationship with capitalist modernity were misconceived. Developments in the US, not least due to its population history and the conditions of the frontier, are better represented as an aberration of the long-run Eurasian dialectic of spiraling social citizenship. Today in the presidency of Trump (arguably an epitome of the insurgent, crusading, charismatic leader for whom Weber expressed sympathy in 1919), the country is displaying more affinities with the rival sense of Eurasia: it is marked by indulgences of an imperial imaginary, with a predilection for illiberal, authoritarian leaders who appoint close family members to top positions and are unable or unwilling to adjust to the standard constraints of representative democracy.

Since the age of Weber, and more specifically ever since Werner Sombart asked why socialism was absent in the US, the question of US exceptionalism has not gone away. It is posed today in dramatic new forms. The world's most powerful industrial state was obliged in the interwar decades to introduce a number of institutions necessary for the efficient functioning of a complex capitalist economy. In Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, which helped the country cope with the dislocations of the Great Depression, notably in the 1935 Social Security Act, crucial steps were taken to bring the US into line with measures taken earlier in Germany and Britain. But the American measures were not a celebration of social citizenship in the sense of T. H. Marshall.²⁷ On the contrary, the emphasis was placed on private contract: pensions would reflect one's personal contributions over the years. In reality, there was a large element of redistribution, both intra- and intergenerational, but normatively this had to be denied because it was not compatible with a worldview rooted in Protestant traditions of individualism. This misrepresentation has left the program vulnerable to neoliberal opponents in recent decades. They insinuate that social security has the same perverse effects as public assistance and that it reduces the incentives for individuals to assume full personal responsibility. This claim is typically backed with the mantle of science, in the form of elementary mathematical proofs, rather than ethnographic investigations of how

poor people actually get by. Social security is too deeply entrenched and popular to be openly rejected by elected representatives; but there are good reasons for supposing that the present strategy of Trump's government is to "starve the beast" and eventually cut back even further on the limited extent of social citizenship rights.²⁸

Much of Eurasia, meanwhile, struggles to move in the opposite direction and ratchet social rights upward (to the extent that neoliberal economic conditions permit): witness the recent extension of universal old age pensions to hundreds of millions of Chinese villagers. The great majority of Eurasian citizens attach high value to redistribution and universal entitlements that provide guarantees not only of existential security but of freedom itself, in a meaningful substantive sense. Thanks to the legacies of recent geopolitical conflict, this consensus among the people of Eurasia is not easily translated into common political action; but the unity between China and the EU in affirmation of the 2015 Paris environmental accords, recently abandoned by Trump, could mark the beginning of a new trend. The main forces that hinder the expansion of social citizenship globally are the need of capitalists to make profits and the neoliberal ideological justifications of this capitalism.²⁹ These justifications are commonly presented as wertfrei: as emerging from the objective logic of a universal social science. But closer inspection reveals that economists' diagnoses of perverse incentives and "moral hazard" are not neutral at all. They are deployed in order to legitimate profits and excuse ever-widening polarities in society. Neoliberal social science comes in many variants, from game theory to the neo-Darwinism of Runciman. All of them obstruct the goals of achieving more inclusive forms of democratic social citizenship and more responsible stewardship of the resources of our planet. The social relations of the Anthropocene can be traced back to the dynamic of economic expansion and political inclusion that was launched in the first Eurasian Age.³⁰ We need a second Eurasian Age to counter the threat posed by the present hegemon.

Notes

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¹ These lectures are now available in several English versions. Translating Max Weber into English has been difficult and often controversial. It is now widely accepted that early efforts, including those of the great sociologist Talcott Parsons, are inadequate. Recent efforts to tackle both lectures include that of Rodney Livingstone (Weber, The Vocation Lectures, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong [, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Hackett, 2004)]). The 1917 lecture has recently been included under the title “Science as a Profession and Vocation,” in a collection edited and translated by Hans Henrik Bruun and Sam Whimster, eds., Max Weber: Collected Methodological Writings (London: Routledge, 2012), 582-613. This edition has been reviewed by W. G. Runciman, in an article that I discuss in the following section of this essay.

² Jack Goody, The Eurasian Miracle (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

³ Karl Jaspers, “The Axial Age of Human History: A Base for the Unity of Mankind,” Commentary 6, no. 5 (1948): 430-5.

⁴ Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: With Other Writings on the Rise of the West, trans. Stephen Kalberg (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009).

⁵ For the case of India see, for example, Sheldon Pollock, The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2009).

⁶ Wolfgang Schluchter, “Max Weber’s Sociology of Religion: A Project in Comparison and Developmental History,” in Max Weber’s Economic Ethic of the World Religions: An Analysis, ed. Thomas C. Ertman (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017), 50.

⁷ Runciman, “Was Weber a Methodological Weberian?” European Journal of Sociology 54, no. 2 (2013): 213-30.

⁸ Runciman, “Was Weber a methodologicalMethodological Weberian?” 221.

⁹ Weber was undoubtedly influenced at the time by the articles of his colleague Werner Sombart: Why is There No Socialism in the United States? (1906; White Plains, NY: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1976). Although The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism was drafted before his trip, the manuscript was extensively revised in the course of Weber’s travels. For a thorough assessment of Weber’s encounter with the US, see Lawrence A. Scaff, Max Weber in America (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2011).

We can speculate as to whether Weber’s sociology of religion and philosophy of history might have turned out very differently had he been able to make personal visits to China and India as well as (or instead of) the US. Given the conditions prevailing in those macroregions of Eurasia around 1900, this would probably have made no difference.

¹⁰ Runciman, “Was Weber a Methodological Weberian?” 220. This example is of great theoretical interest since the role of religious affiliation in cementing group trust (or “closure”) is well documented among merchant capitalists cross-culturally since the Bronze Age. This was certainly clear to Weber. Through these mechanisms, diaspora communities played key roles in the spread of merchant capitalism. It follows that it is the total social context that matters, and it is unsafe to make sociological deductions from ideas alone. If this is so, and if

the point is well recognized in much of Weber's own work, the puzzle remains as to why he found it so difficult to treat the state of the world in 1900 as contingent, or as a product of the practices and institutions of European imperialisms and their new technologies (especially military superiority). Runciman, "Was Weber a Methodological Weberian?" 220.

¹¹ Sylvia Terpe, "Max Weber's 'Spheres of Life': A Tool for Micro-Sociological Analysis," Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Papers 179 (Halle/Saale: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 2016).

¹² David Christian, Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2004).

¹³ Jared M. Diamond, Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997).

¹⁴ V. Gordon Childe, What Happened in History (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1942).

¹⁵ For a fuller elaboration of the argument, see Chris Hann, "A Concept of Eurasia," Current Anthropology 57, no. 1 (2016): 1-27. The temporal notion of Common Era is no less arbitrary than the spatial distinction between "continents," which we derive ultimately from the Ancient Greeks.

¹⁶ The first book-length synthesis of this comparative approach was Goody, Production and Reproduction: A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976).

¹⁷ Goody, The East in the West (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996). Goody blasts Karl Marx in similar terms in the same volume. In a later, more complete diagnosis of the problem, he took aim at Fernand Braudel, Norbert Elias, and others: Goody, The Theft of History (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006). In his last major publication he emphasized yet again how "the shadow of the Protestant ethic" had obscured understanding of

the pan-Eurasian origins of capitalism and the “modern world”: Goody, Metals, Culture and Capitalism (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012; citation at p. 144)

¹⁸ Goody was an admirer of the so-called California School, the members of which in several major works in the 1990s attacked Eurocentric bias from an East Asian perspective. See in particular Kenneth Pomeranz: The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000).

¹⁹ See Ertmann, Max Weber’s Economic Ethos.

²⁰ Karl Jaspers, The Origin and Goal of History, trans. Michael Bullock (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1953).

²¹ See Robert N. Bellah, Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2011); see also Johann P. Arnason, S. N. Eisenstadt, and Björn Wittrock, eds., Axial Civilizations and World History (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

²² I borrow the concepts of redistribution and market exchange from the economic anthropology of Karl Polanyi: they were first outlined in Polanyi, The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time (Boston: Beacon, 1944).

²³ See the biennial reports of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology since 1999, available at <http://www.eth.mpg.de/>. See also Kirsten W. Endres and Hann, eds., Socialism with Neoliberal Characteristics (Halle/Salle: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 2017), http://www.eth.mpg.de/4376641/2017_-_dep_-_hann.

²⁴ Marlène Laruelle, Russian Eurasianism. An Ideology of Empire (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008); Stefan Wiederkehr, Die Eurasische Bewegung: Wissenschaft und Politik in der Russischen Emigration der Zwischenkriegszeit und im postsowjetischen Russland (CologneKöln: Böhlau., 2007).

²⁵ Wiederkehr, Die Eurasische Bewegung.

²⁶ Caroline Humphrey, “‘Eurasia,’ Ideology and the Political Imagination in Provincial Russia,” in Hann, ed., Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practice in Eurasia, ed. Hann (London: Routledge, 2002), 258-76; Victor A. Shnirelman, “To Make a Bridge: Eurasian Discourse in the Post-Soviet World,” Anthropology of East Europe Review 27, no. 2 (2009): 68-85.

²⁷ T. H. Marshall, Citizenship and Social Class (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1950).

²⁸ The argument of this paragraph is inspired by Margaret R. Somers, “How Grandpa Became a Welfare Queen: Social Insurance, the Economisation of Citizenship and a New Political Economy of Moral Worth,” in Jürgen Mackert and Bryan S. Turner, eds., The Transformation of Citizenship, vol. 1, Political Economy, ed. Jürgen Mackert and Bryan S. Turner (London: Routledge, 2017), 76-98.

²⁹ Wolfgang Streeck, Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism, 2nd ed., trans. Patrick Camiller and David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2017).

³⁰ Hann, “The Anthropocene and Anthropology: Micro and Macro Perspectives,” European Journal of Social Theory 20, no.1 (2017): 183-96.