

Philosophy in Review



Edith Hanke, Lawrence A. Scaff, and Sam Whimster (eds.), "The Oxford Handbook of Max Weber."

Giacomo Borbone

Volume 40, Number 4, November 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1074027ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1074027ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

University of Victoria

ISSN

1206-5269 (print)

1920-8936 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Borbone, G. (2020). Review of [Edith Hanke, Lawrence A. Scaff, and Sam Whimster (eds.), "The Oxford Handbook of Max Weber."]. *Philosophy in Review*, 40(4), 144–146. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1074027ar>

Copyright © Giacomo Borbone, 2020



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Edith Hanke, Lawrence A. Scaff, and Sam Whimster, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Max Weber*. Oxford University Press 2020. 680 pp. \$150.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780190679545).

The work of German sociologist Max Weber was, without doubt, one of the most remarkable attempts at understanding the dynamics of modern society (based, essentially, on the capitalist economic system). In this sense, the road had already been taken by Karl Marx with his monumental work *Das Kapital*, dedicated to the overall and essential aspects of the capitalist mode of production. Both Weber and Marx realized, as few before them, that in order to understand the course of Western society they had to investigate the complex dynamics of capitalism, but their conclusions would be quite different. Weber vehemently criticized the Marxian idea that the economic factor is what ultimately proves to be decisive in history, proposing a completely different point of view. In fact, according to the German sociologist, this sort of economicism had to be rejected forcefully and vigorously, since the origins of modern capitalism had to be traced to Protestant ethics. From a strictly sociological point of view, the question of Protestant ethics is the one that has certainly aroused the greatest interest in the work of Weber. However, one must bear in mind that Weber's monumental scientific production, as collected in *The Oxford Handbook of Max Weber*, edited by Edith Hanke, Lawrence A. Scaff, and Sam Whimster, embraces the 'leading concepts and ... ideas about topics like capitalism, modernity, state formation, bureaucracy, legitimacy, authority, leadership, world religions, academic knowledge, and processes of 'rationalization' figure prominently not only in sociology but in a variety of fields of inquiry. In light of such extensive contributions and borrowings, his status as a 'classic' has become assured, reinforced by the manifold ways in which his ideas have contributed to understanding our own modern world' (3).

The book is divided into six parts, the first of which is entitled 'The Economy: Capitalism in a Globalized World.' The first contribution was written by one of the editors, Sam Whimster, and is entitled 'Economics and Society and the Fate of Liberal Capitalism.' In this contribution Whimster analyzes the multifaceted aspects of Weber's economic thinking—who was not only interested in aspects of economic history, but also made significant contributions to economic theory. Whimster attempts to disengage Weber from the historiographical prejudice that Weber, in the field of economic research, has only made contributions in its history. Whimster strongly emphasizes the link with the Austrian School of Economics, particularly in light of Weber's first course in Freiburg in 1895, now published under the title *Universal 'Theoretical' Economics*. According to Whimster, this course 'reveals that Weber was far more closely engaged with the Austrian school of economics than previously realized and that his relegation to economic history, which is where his major contributions and the Protestant ethic studies in particular are placed, is erroneous' (23). Whimster not only debunks this prejudice, but analyzes in detail Weber's methodologies and his neoliberalism. This essay is followed by Hinnerk Bruhns' essay 'Max Weber's Analysis of Capitalism,' which analyzes the theme of capitalism within Weber's entire scientific production. As is well known, for Weber, Western capitalism has taken on those features that distinguish it thanks to its Protestant ethics. What ultimately created capitalism is durable rational enterprise, rational accounting, rational technique, rational law but, of course, not these factors alone. All these aspects were complemented by the rational attitude, the rationalization of the conduct of life and the rational economic ethos. With these words Max Weber tries to draw attention to the fact that capitalism is not based solely on the relentless pursuit of profit, since the latter was also typical of non-Western forms of capitalism. But unlike other forms of capitalism, only modern Western capitalism has been able to create a rational organization of work, which otherwise would never have appeared. Trade has appeared

everywhere and always, and it is possible to reconstruct its presence back to the Stone Age; so too we find, in various epochs and civilizations, funding for war, state functions, procurement of taxes and public offices, etc., but not a rational organization of work. The next essays in this section are ‘Money, Credit, and Finance in Capitalism,’ by Geoffrey Ingham; ‘Law and the Development of Capitalism’ by Laura R. Ford, which emphasizes the importance that Weber’s early studies in law and legal history had for his intellectual development; and finally Robert J. Antonio’s essay ‘Is There a Future for Bourgeois Liberalism?,’ which analyzes ‘Weber’s views about irrational consequences of rationalization manifested in “free-market” capitalism’ (111).

The Second Part is entitled ‘Society and Social Structure.’ Its first essay is entitled ‘Contemporary Capitalism and the Distribution of Power in Society,’ and is written by John Scott. Scott analyzes a fundamental aspect of Weber’s sociology, namely the concept of power, which Scott illustrates is based on a distinction between *Macht* (Power) and *Herrschaft* (Domination). As Scott says, ‘Power, Weber held, consists simply in the chances that the will of an agent, whether individual or collective, can be imposed on that of others, even against their resistance. [...] Power becomes domination (*Herrschaft*), when it is formed into stable and enduring relationships of social control’ (134-135). The concept of power is one of the key concepts of Weber’s sociology and Weber’s social theory is the subject of the next essay, ‘Weberian Social Theory’ by Ralph Schroeder. The main concern of Schroeder’s essay is the Weberian theory of rationalization. As is well known, according to Weber in no other civilization do we find what is typical of the West, that is (besides the rational organization of work) the state in the modern sense, rational law, modern science and the rational ethos of life conduct. Obviously, the rational ethos of the conduct of life, traceable to Calvinism, does not lead Weber to equate Calvinism with capitalism. Rather, the German sociologist tried to overturn Marxian structuralism by claiming that, to put it in Marxian terms, it was precisely a super-structural element that posed itself as a precondition for the birth of the modern capitalist mentality. In this sense should also be understood the well-known Weberian conception of the *Beruf*, a term that Weber understands both as ‘profession’ and ‘vocation,’ and which after all acts as a *trait d’union* between Calvinism and capitalism. This second part of the volume ends with the following essays: ‘Democracy, Partisanship, and Civil Society’ by Sung Ho Kim; ‘Nation, Nation-State, and Nationalism’ by John Breuilly; and ‘The Weberian City, Civil Society, and Turkish Social Thought’ by Lufti Sunar.

The third part is entitled ‘Politics and the State.’ This section opens with the essay ‘The Modern State and Its Monopoly on Violence’ by Andreas Anter. As is well known, according to Weber, the modern state is an institutional power group that, within a given territory, has successfully endeavored to monopolize the use of legitimate physical force as a means of power. As Anter says, ‘The category of legitimacy is the Archimedean point of his sociology of domination. In his view, domination cannot last if it lacks a legitimate basis. Accordingly, every state requires a legitimating foundation that provides validity of its orders. The legitimacy of the modern state, to be precise, rests primarily on the belief in the *legality* of its orders’ (228). Closely related to these reflections is the essay ‘The Relevance of Weber’s Conceptions and Typology of *Herrschaft*,’ by Stefan Breuer. Next is ‘The Supranational Dimension in Max Weber’s Vision of Politics,’ by Kari Palonen. Palonen addresses the problem of European policy which, according to Weber, ‘was still shaped by a balance of powers, called “European concert” and “Westphalian order”’ (259), in which the territorial principle is seen as the basis of the international order. Palonen’s conclusions are quite interesting, stating that ‘Weber would today be among those of us who support the politicization of the European Union via the two channels of parliamentarization and denationalization. The two channels also provide a chance to make the European Union a model for other supranational institutions’ (272).

The third part of this volume ends with ‘Plebiscitary Politics and the Threats to Legality’ by Claudius Härpfer, and ‘Politics and Ethics, and the Ethics of Politics’ by Hans Henrick Bruun.

Part IV is entitled ‘Religion’ and opens with the essay ‘Max Weber’s Ethics for the Modern World’ by Peter Ghosh, which argues that for Weber ‘religion (and not idealist philosophy) had been the great generator of ethics in all eras and societies previous to his own’ (314). In ‘Max Weber and the Late Modernization of Catholicism,’ Rosario Forlenza and Brian S. Turner complain about the small number of studies dedicated to Weberian conceptions on Catholicism. The fourth part of this volume ends with the following contributions: ‘The “Disenchantment of the World” or Why We Can No Longer Use the Formula as Max Weber Might Have Intended,’ by Kenichi Mishima; ‘The Literati and the Dao,’ by Scott Lash; ‘Class, Caste, and Social Stratification in India. Weberian Legacy’ by Hira Singh; ‘Including Islam’ by Stefan Leder; and ‘The Study on Ancient Israel and Its Relevance for Contemporary Politics’ by Eduardo Weisz.

Part V is entitled ‘Culture’ includes the following contributions: ‘The Rationalizations of Culture and their Directions’ by Thomas Kemple; ‘Max Weber and the Sociology of Music’ by Brandon Konoval; ‘Contemporary Life Conduct and Existential Culture’ by Barbara Thériault; ‘From Occidental Rationalism to Multiple Modernities’ by Johann P. Arnason; and ‘Max Weber and the Idea of the Occident’ by Joshua Derman.

The last part of this extensive book (part VI) is entitled ‘Science and Knowledge’ includes ‘Intellectuals, Scholars, and the Value of Science’ by Gangolf Hübinger; ‘The Iron Cage in the Information Age: Bureaucracy as Tangible Manifestation of a Deep Societal Phenomenon’ by Jos C. N. Raadschelders; ‘Causation, Value Judgements, Verstehen’ by Stephen P. Turner—quite interesting for the way it addresses the problem of concept formation—and finally ‘Realism and Reality in Max Weber’ by Sérgio da Mata.

In this volume, readers will be able to grasp, in its general features, not only the fulcrum of Max Weber’s thought—which constitutes, even with all its limitations, an obligatory step for the understanding of the contemporary world—but a whole series of aspects considered minor, but actually fundamental to an appreciation of the extraordinary conceptual universe of this great thinker.

Giacomo Borbone, Catania University