Zoran Slavnic

The Ultimate Ends of Political Responsibility, or a Responsible Interpretation of Max Weber
The Ultimate Ends of Political Responsibility, or a Responsible Interpretation of Max Weber
Abstract

This article aims to problematise the interpretative tensions of the relationship between the ‘Ethic of Ultimate Ends’ and the ‘Ethic of Responsibility’ in Weber’s 1918 lecture, ‘Politics as a Vocation’ (first published 1919). To this end, we will first examine background factors relating both to Weber’s work itself and the later Weberian tradition in the social sciences, which decisively influence contemporary views and interpretations of Weber. In opening, I discuss internal and external points of controversy in Weber’s work, which is followed by sections treating the relationship between Weber the scientist and Weber the politician, as well as the fact–value issue. Finally I compare Weber the liberal with Weber the nationalist. My conclusion is that a large portion of Weber’s oeuvre has not been included in a corresponding theoretical synthesis. Consequently, his work remains in many ways unfinished and fragmentary and, more importantly, some of his theoretical statements are open to questionable interpretation. In the case of the relationship between the ‘The Ethic of Ultimate Ends’ and ‘The Ethic of Responsibility,’ understanding of the relationship tends to be based on epistemological and axiological principles in conflict with the principles upon which Weber’s general theoretical concepts are based. More specifically, and setting aside Weber’s fact–value distinction and his radical moral relativism, contemporary interpretations of the relationship between these two ethics tend to reinterpret Weber’s original proposition regarding ethical criteria that are legitimate within today’s liberal political theory and day-to-day liberal political rhetoric. This is in my opinion wrong, because it does not allow us, using Weber’s authentic concept, to learn more of the less visible aspects of our contemporary liberal political reality.
The Ultimate Ends of Political Responsibility, or a Responsible Interpretation of Max Weber

‘genuine artistry ... manifests itself through its ability to produce new knowledge by interpreting already known facts according to known viewpoints.’ (Max Weber, MSS\textsuperscript{1}, 112)

Introduction

This article aims to problematise the interpretative tensions of the relationship between the ‘Ethic of Ultimate Ends’ and the ‘Ethic of Responsibility’ in Weber’s 1918 lecture, ‘Politics as a Vocation’ (first published 1919). To this end, we will first examine background factors relating both to Weber’s work itself and the later Weberian tradition in the social sciences, which decisively influence contemporary views and interpretations of Weber. In opening, I discuss internal and external points of controversy in Weber’s work, which is followed by sections treating the relationship between Weber the scientist and Weber the politician, as well as the fact–value issue. Finally I compare Weber the liberal with Weber the nationalist. My conclusion is that a large portion of Weber’s oeuvre has not been included in a corresponding theoretical synthesis. Consequently, his work remains in many ways unfinished and fragmentary and, more importantly, some of his theoretical statements are open to questionable interpretation. In the case of the relationship between the ‘The Ethic of Ultimate Ends’ and ‘The Ethic of Responsibility,’ understanding of the relationship tends to be based on epistemological and axiological principles in conflict with the principles upon which Weber’s general theoretical concepts are based. More specifically, and setting aside Weber’s fact–value distinction and his radical moral relativism, contemporary interpretations of the relationship between these two ethics tend to reinterpret Weber’s original proposition regarding ethical criteria that are legitimate within today’s liberal political theory and day-to-day liberal political rhetoric. This is in my opinion wrong, because it does not allow us, using Weber’s authentic concept, to learn more of the less visible aspects of our contemporary liberal political reality.

\textsuperscript{1} Weber, M. (1949), “The Methodology of the Social Science”
Background

Dealing with Max Weber today necessarily involves an odd mix of feelings: inspiration on the one hand and frustration and uncertainty on the other. This presumably has as much to do with the nature of Weber’s work as with the nature of the general sociological and intellectual tradition after Weber. The current intellectual community, imprisoned in what Scaff (1989:5), paraphrasing Weber, calls the ‘...“iron cage” [of specialised] “vocational humanity”...’ i.e., the specialised and fragmented, apparently has problems dealing with Weber’s complex and wide-ranging work. These problems are diverse, and they result in various reactions against modern ‘intellectual claustrophobia.’ One such reaction relates to the need to construct a ‘... one-sided ... heroised Weber, as an emblem of an heroic intellectual time’ (Collins, 1993:870). At a time when encyclopaedic knowledge and universal intellectual engagement were still possible, the erudite Max Weber was able to move comfortably from philosophy2 and various other disciplines (economy, sociology, history) to passionate political engagement. In doing this he became symbolic of his time. Part of today’s sociological community, nostalgic for this time, has reacted typically for our time by specialising in Weber. This has given rise to a great number of meta-Weberian studies (Collins, 1993:861), locked in permanent dispute over ‘... what side of Weber is most central or most worthy of development ...’ (ibid.). Besides, ‘... ingredients of Weber's personal life and neuroses, his political ideals and context ... ’ (ibid.) are mixed on an equal footing within their arguments. Loyal to their own idealised versions of the ‘true Weber,’ some Weberians have become completely resistant to arguments that do not fit their picture of Weber. Alan Sica (1993:838) has reacted against such a situation: ‘... the time has come to save Weber from the Weberians.’

Another tension which further complicates understanding and interpreting Weber relates to the existence of at least two Weberian traditions. There are those who read Weber in the original German, and who belong to the German intellectual tradition. Others read Weber in English translation, and this tradition has included many from the American sociological tradition ever since Parsons introduced Weber to the intellectual community of his country. The problem appears on two levels. First are the differences between the cultural natures of the two traditions, where research procedures have different theoretical and methodological priorities, while research interests focus on different aspects of empirical reality. The other level relates to the fact that how a text is translated determines how it will be understood and interpreted.3 Besides, it never happens that the complete oeuvre of an author is translated into another language, so the overall opinion of an author’s work tends to be based on only a fragmentary oeuvre. Fewer of Weber's political than academic writings have been translated, presumably contributing to a somewhat different picture of Weber than if the translation circumstances were otherwise (Beetham, 1985).

How a text is read and interpreted depends on the historical, cultural and political context within which this occurs. An example that is relevant for the sociology of knowledge is the book by W. J. Mommsen (1959/1984), Max Weber and German Politics 1890–1920, where the author ‘... has empirically established for liberal and democratic ears the unpalatable truth not only that Weber was a German nationalist, but that for him the national state was the “ultimate value”; in other

2 Weber himself did not wish to be a philosopher, but nonetheless he was, as Rickert (1926/1989:85) points it out, of great importance for philosophy.

3 One well-known example of this is H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mill’s translation of Politics as a Vocation, definitely one of the most influential English versions of this text. This version has Weber categorising politicians as either professional (‘vocational’) or occasional (‘avocational’). Just a few decades later A. B. Glunicks (1978/1991) discovered that the German original mentions a third type, the ‘part-time politicians.’
words, that in the final instance, the interests of the national state should prevail over any other interests’ (Lobera, 1998). In the preface to the book Mommsen explains that his approach is essentially different than earlier interpretations of Weber, which were dominated by a view of Weber as ‘... one of the (albeit very few) ancestors of German democracy... ’ (Mommsen, 1984:vii). After its publication, the book was violently attacked. According to the author, as well as himself, even the publisher was exposed to very emotional, even personal attacks. Despite such massive criticism, no strong rational counter arguments were presented, so the author’s reaction was: ‘I saw no reason to revise my argument on any essential points’ (ibid:xii). The point is—and that is why this story is interesting—that he nevertheless later modified his position. Lawrence Scaff (1989:154) wrote: ‘Wolfgang J. Mommsen is almost entirely responsible for triggering and then sustaining this polemic for nearly three decades, although he has moved from seeing Weber as a dangerous nationalist who managed somehow to soften up the German audience preparatory to its reception of fascism, to viewing him more sympathetically as the last great “liberal in the borderline situation” or “in despair” or finally as a thinker who attempted to hold contradictory positions in “dialectical combination” in order to achieve an “open” social and political order—all interpretations residing within the boundaries of the “problem of liberalism”.

The three situations described clearly have more to do with the dynamics of the sociological tradition after Weber, than with his work itself. But it is certain that the nature of his work also contributed to the emergence of ambivalent feelings of both intellectual stimulation and frustration among those who currently deal with Weber. Before discussing the internal antinomies within Weber’s work, we should say something of the external features which complicate current reading and understanding of Weber’s texts. First, as already mentioned, is the scale of Weber’s influence within various social sciences. Taking only sociology, it is safe to say that contemporary sociological methodology, political sociology, the sociology of religion, law, and organisation as well as the emergence of the action and system theories rely heavily on Weber. One consequence is that Weber is usually only fragmentarily read and even more fragmentarily understood. Another matter makes today’s specialist sociologist, trained to deal with unambiguous language, both fascinated and confused, namely the richness and multifaceted nature of Weber’s writing style, so typical of its time. His style namely tends to diverge from ‘unambiguity’ in the directions of both the synonymic and homonymic uses of language. One Weberian who, with special passion, has collected examples of the metaphorical richness of Weber’s style is Lawrence A. Scaff. Here is one such example, a set of Weber’s synonyms for the notion of ‘ethic of ultimate ends’ (‘Gesinnungsrthik’): ‘Simply consider Weber’s sublime language for describing this politics of sacred sentiments: “excitation,” “intoxication,” “romantic sensation,” “the flame of pure intentions,” “the thirst for the deed,” “romanticism of the intellectually interesting,” “cosmic-ethical ‘rationalism’,” and most significantly a belief that either “love” will conquer violence or “ultimate violence” will “eliminate all violence”’ (Scaff, 1989:174). Doubtless, any translation of Weber into other languages is an extremely delicate and thankless task. Additionally, a single original concept (‘Gesinnungsrthik’) may be have more than one English translations, for example: ‘Ethic of ultimate ends’ (Gerth and Mills, 1948/1991), ‘Ethic of single-minded conviction’ (Schluchter, 1979), ‘Ethic of absolute conviction or pure intention’ (Scaff, 1989), ‘Ethic of principled conviction’ (Lassman and Speirs, 1994), ‘Ethic of intention’ (E. Matthews, 1978). This further complicates the reading of Weber’s texts.

An even more problematic aspect of Weber’s style is his tendency toward homonymical language use, i.e., investing the same term with several different meanings. Brubaker (1984:2), for instance, has found that Weber uses not less than sixteen different meanings of the term “rational.”

---

4 …deliberate, systematic, calculable, impersonal, instrumental, exact, quantitative, rule-governed, predictable, methodical, purposeful, sober, scrupulous, efficacious, intelligible and consistent.’
Despite the semantic inconsistency, the notion of ‘rationality’ has, just thanks to Weber, almost totemic status in contemporary sociology. At the same time, the dominant status of this notion prevents all projects with non-rational or irrational social actions at the centre of their scientific interest from gaining any scientific legitimacy (Sica, 1988).

The question of Weber’s style is neither the only, nor the most important feature of his work that has determined how it is read, understood and interpreted. More important in this respect—and certainly central in this article—is the complicated relationship between his basic methodological principle of the necessity for consistent distinction between the spheres of facts (subject matter of science) and values (subject matters of politics), on the one hand, and his personal need to engage with the same passion in both of these human activities. In this regard, Collins (1986:11) says: ‘Weber’s writings are somewhat schizophrenic. It is not that he directly contradicts himself, or fails to handle each question thoroughly; but in his voluminous works, one can find almost anything one looks for ... [which does not lead] to one grand synthesis; it would be more accurate to say there are several different Webers, all coexisting within the same body of work.’ This article will deal with some of the contradictions within Weber’s work, as well as with some of the controversies related to them.

**Internal antinomies in Weber’s work**

Before we turn to discussion about differences between the two ethics in Weber’s speech ‘Politics as a vocation’, it is important to say something about the fundamental epistemological and axiological principles underlying not only his scientific project on the one hand, but also his political engagement on the other hand. First we are going to examine the radical distinction between ‘facts’ and ‘values’, which is followed by treatment of Weber’s radical moral relativism, as another important feature of his methodology. Then I am going to compare Weber as a scientist and Weber as a politician, and finally short account is going to be given about Weber as an uncompromising German nationalist.

Weber's methodological principle is one of the classical in sociology. Factual (‘is’) assertions and moral (‘ought’) assertions are two logically divided spheres, which means that values cannot be derived from facts in any way, and therefore science cannot aim to provide any kind of criteria within the sphere of personal value judgements. ‘It can never be the task of an empirical science to provide binding norms and ideals from which directives for immediate practical activity can be derived.’ (MSS:52) Nonetheless it does not mean that ‘value-judgments’ are completely inaccessible for any kind of scientific critics. According to Weber, science can help us to choose most appropriate means for the achievement of our ‘ultimate’ ends (MSS:52-53). Science can also answer the questions about the possible ‘costs’ that achievement of our ends may have, in terms of loosing some other important values (MSS:53). Moreover, science can make us become aware of the contexts as well as meanings of our ultimate values. (MSS:53). Science can even critically analyse some given value-judgments, in terms of formal logical analyses of historically given value-judgments and ideas, discussing the content and internal consistence of these ideas and value-judgements (MSS:54). The only thing science can never tell us is what values we should choose as our ultimate ends. “An empirical science cannot tell anyone what he should do – but rather what he can do – and under certain circumstances – what he wishes to do.” (MSS:54)

The above stated was about autonomy of the values in relation to the facts. On the other hand, Weber seems not to be equally clear and unequivocal in respect to the autonomy of the facts in relation to the values. Weber’s demand for value-freedom in social sciences has nothing to do with the demand for ‘value-neutrality’ (Root 1993:43). According to Weber, principle of ‘value-
neutrality’ is neither possible nor necessary precondition for scientific objectivity. “An attitude of moral indifference has no connection with scientific ‘objectivity’”. (MSS:60) What is however of crucial importance for scientists in this context is to keep their readers clearly and unmistakably aware about whether their arguments are based on ‘empirical knowledge’ or on ‘value-judgments’. Objective and neutral scientific analyses of any social phenomenon is according to Weber possible regardless of what ‘ethical imperatives’ govern scientist as his/her highest value ideals. At the same time, Weber confess that science can not be completely ‘free from suppositions’ (SAV5:153), since “… the very recognition of the existence of a scientific problem coincides, personally, with the possession of a specifically oriented motives and values” (MSS:61) This is something that is, according to Weber, not possible to be avoided. But what is problematic here in our view is absence of the clear line that defines the autonomy of the science in relation to the value-judgments, which in the end brings the original methodological claim for fact-value distinction into question. This contradiction is perhaps best illustrate by following quote:

“We can not discover, however, what is meaningful to us by means of a “presuppositionless” investigation of empirical data. Rather perception of its meaningfulness to us is the presupposition of its becoming an object of investigation. …” (MSS:76)

To sum up, here we have actually two Webers to deal with. One who pleas for radical methodological distinction between facts and values, and the other who questions the same principle by subordinating facts in relation to values.

This ambivalence seems to be particularly obvious if we take into consideration Weber’s personal engagement in politics on the one hand and in science on the other hand. The most important consequence of this double engagement was emergence of lots of controversial interpretations of not only his political, but also his scientific concepts. The only conclusion here can be that Weber did obviously not make himself clear enough to his readers at which point he as a “scientific investigator” becomes silent and he as a “evaluating and acting” person begins to speak (MSS:60). It is not only that many concepts developed within the framework of his political texts appeared later in his political sociology (Mommsen, 1984:420), or as Beetham (1985:275) argues that parts of Weber’s sociology contain traces of ideology, in the sense that ideology tends to support the existing social order. It is also so that, despite the fact that he himself continually insisted that political articles have nothing to do with science, almost all of Webers political texts contain not only value judgements but also theoretical elements and extensive empirical analyses. The same ambivalent relationship of closeness/remoteness between value judgements and scientific statements also exists within the Weber’s speech/article ‘Politics as a Vocation’. But before we start with analyses of this text, we have to say something about Weber’s radical moral relativism as well as about his nationalism.

As is well known, Weber’s methodology relies heavily on the theory of concept formation and on the theory of values developed by the Baden or Southwest German School of neo-Kantianism, initially by Windelband, Lask and Rickert. However, while Rickert’s theory of culture relies on the transcendental argument that the knowledge of the historical individual is possible only

---

6 See discussion about differences between a "character" and a “tendency” as properties of scientific journals (MSS:62-63). “Character” is associated with presuppositions, which are impossible to be avoided in science, while “tendencies” are linked to the situations where autonomy of science in relation to value-judgements is already violated.
7 As regards the categorisation and analysis of Weber’s ideological critics, see Roth (1991)
8 On influence of these three philosophers on Weber see G. Oakes 1987. and 1988.
on the assumption of the existence of objective universal values, which are unconditionally valid, i.e. binding for all, Weber rejects any possibility of the existence of objective values.

That old sober old empiricist, John Stuart Mill, once said that no-one, on the basis of experience alone, would ever arrive at the existence of one god – and, it seems to me, certainly not of a god of goodness – but at polytheism. Indeed, anyone living in the 'world' (in the Christian sense of the word) can only feel himself subject to the struggle between multiple sets of values, each of which, viewed separately, seems to impose an obligation upon him. He has to choose which of these gods he will and should serve, or when he should serve the one and when the other. But at all times he will find himself engaged in a fight against one or other of the gods of this world, and above all he will always find that he is far from the God of Christianity – or at least from the God proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount.

Consequently, those highest ethical ideals that force individuals to act in certain way and at the same time provide their lives with meaning, can neither be derived from the science nor from certain generally valid ethical principles. Such principles do not exist, according to Weber. Instead ‘... the highest ideals, which move us most forcefully, are always formed only in struggle with other ideals which are just as sacred to others as ours are for us.’ (MSS:57) This principle is not only one of the corner stones of his methodology but is also taken for granted in all of his political texts. Perhaps most illustrative example for this is his inaugural address from 1895 (‘The Nation State and Economic Policy’) that not only illustrates his relationship to German national state, but also manifests, in important way, his moral relativism and his understanding of fact–value dualism. It is evident that struggle, both as concept and as conviction dominates these passages. Neither the aims of the struggle nor criteria for establishing of these aims can be derived either from the results of the rational economic science, or from any kind of universal, objective values, e.g., peace, human happiness or justice, but only from the ultimate interests of German nation state. These statements and convictions, put forward in the inaugural address at Freiburg, were never explicitly rejected by Weber (Anderson 1992, Mommsen 1984). ‘... the national state’s power was a fundamental value for him and all political goals were consequently subordinate to the nation’s requirements’ (Mommsen 1984:48).

So to summarise, Weber’s ‘radical moral relativism’ on the one hand, and his radical distinction between facts and values on the other, are fundamental epistemological and axiological assumptions underlying his whole intellectual project. At the same time, this is what integrates his sociology and his political engagement, too. ‘Max Weber affirmed struggle as a basic mode of human existence. He drew the consequences of this without intellectual compromise’ (Mommsen 1984:47). This résumé is an important intermediate stage before the discussion about the relationship between ‘ethic of ultimate ends’ and ‘ethic of responsibility.’

‘Ethic of Ultimate Ends’ vs ‘Ethic of Responsibility’

Weber’s speeches/articles ‘Science as a Vocation’ and ‘Politics as a Vocation’ not only occupy special status within Weber’s oeuvre as a whole, but also represent the ‘...most influential intellectual statements of this century’ (Anderson, P. 1992) Indeed, by the virtue of their intrinsic structure, as well as their relationship with each other, these two speeches reflect the complex and
problematic relationship between politics and science – values and facts – that exists within Weber’s work. Wolfgang Schluchter (1979) designates them as ‘academic’ speeches out of the series of speeches Weber delivered in the rather gloomy political situation at the end of World War I\textsuperscript{10} that had more academic character than others. As a matter of fact, they are academic in those passages where Weber analyses wider institutional and general social contexts in which science and politics are possible as vocations. In intention, however, they are nevertheless political speeches. ‘Many passages sound like an appeal. The speaker who appeals to us does not say what should be done, but unmistakably he tries to indicate what should not be done. This negative insistence retains for both speeches the very quality which they seem to deny by their manifest stance – they are political speeches’ (Schluchter 1979:70).

The expositional structure of ‘Politics as a Vocation’ is clear and steady. Weber begins by describing the historical conditions (the emergence of the modern state with a monopoly on the use of force as a means of domination over its territory) and the institutional conditions under which politics as a vocation is possible. Argument in this section is rational, ‘value-free’ and scientific – Max Weber is acting as a sociologist. Then he ‘enters the field of ethical questions,’ where the following essential question may be posed:

\textit{What kind of a man must one be if he is to be allowed to put his hand on the wheel of history?} (PAV\textsuperscript{11}: 115)

Such a person, according to Weber, has to have three characteristics: passion (i.e., a passionate devotion to the ‘cause,’ to the god or demon who is its overlord), a feeling of responsibility, and a sense of proportion (i.e., the ability to let realities work upon him with inner concentration and calmness).

Then comes the central question of the discussion, the question of ‘the ethos of politics as a “cause”,’ i.e., where is the ethical locus were politics is at home? In this respect a politician can chose to follow one of two ‘irreconcilably opposed’ ethics: the ethic of ultimate ends or the ethic of responsibility. Furthermore Weber says:

\textit{Surely, politics is made with the head, but it is certainly not made with the head alone. In this the proponents of an ethic of ultimate ends are right. One cannot prescribe to anyone whether he should follow an ethic of absolute ends or an ethic of responsibility, or when the one and when the other ... Whoever wants to engage in politics at all, and especially in politics as a vocation, has to realise these ethical paradoxes. He must know that he is responsible for what may become of himself under the impact of these paradoxes. I repeat, he lets himself in for the diabolic forces lurking in all violence ... Only he who has the calling for politics who is sure that he shall not crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer. Only he who in the face of all this can say “In spite of all!” has the calling for politics} (PAV:125–128).

There is an ongoing theoretical dispute among Weber’s interpreters over how these two ethics relate to each other. To a large extent this is because Weber himself used these concepts in a rather ambiguous way. According to Schluchter (1979:87), Weber sometimes tends to treat these two ethical principles as complementary and sometimes as mutually exclusive. As a result, we have

\textsuperscript{10} Internationally, Germany was faced with military defeat; at home, it was faced with the historical process of the transition from monarchy to republic.

a situation in which some of Weber’s interpreters give preference to the first tendency, some to second. This, however, is not all. Contemporary Weberian tradition is also strongly characterised by the trend of reinterpretation of the relationship between the two ethical principles in course of giving preference to the ‘ethic of responsibility’ in relation to the ‘ethic of ultimate ends’. This is in our view in contradiction with the authentic Weber’s concept. In following section we are going to show it by critical investigation of the three theories, which all in a relevant way represent above mentioned trend.

We start with Wolfgang Schluchter (1979), who argues that the relationship between the two ethics is best understood as irreconcilable, with the ethic of responsibility being superior to the ethic of ultimate ends (Ibid: 87). He bases this on a preliminary argument about the role of science in a disenchanted world. Weber’s demand for value-free science is understood as not only providing the conditions for science to be possible in the world of antagonistic values, but also as providing the conditions for such science to be desirable. ‘Empirical science should be protected against the irresolvable struggle of the different value systems because a science that is independent in this sense has an intrinsic value’ (ibid.: 79). In this way, science transcends its role as a ‘technical critic of practical problems,’ becoming in a certain way a ‘partner’ in the process of decision-making. This is because ‘... every action, especially political action, must let itself be disturbed by science through value discussion and must let itself be corrected by inconvenient facts. The disenchanted world must at least subject itself to the principle propagated by science: The ought depends on know-how’ (Ibid.: 84).

Under the condition of having to choose between these two ethics, the real choice before politicians is whether to accept the restrictive conditions imposed by science or not. One who chooses the ethic of responsibility accepts these conditions. One who chooses the ethic of ultimate ends does not accept them, and hence ‘... stands outside a cultural tradition of which science has been one carrier. He breaks out of the disenchanted world ... in the sense that he wants to achieve self-clarification and self-determination in opposition to, and no longer within, the iron constraints of this society’ (ibid.: 86). As Weber, in Schluchter’s view, could not accept science which is not adapted to the conditions of the disenchanted world, i.e., science without intrinsic values, neither can he accept political action which is not adapted to the ethical irrationality of this world – political action which is ‘blind to reality.’ In opposition to this, according to Schluchter’s interpretation of Weber, the ethic of responsibility ‘... tends toward action that is organised in terms of the situation and a dialogue. Such action aims at controlling the world by foregoing an ultimate harmonisation and by ethically liberating the choice of means’ (Ibid.: 90).

At this point we have to return to the ‘real Weber’. In one of the previous sections of this text we said that his fact-value distinction is far from being problem-free. There is on the one hand radical claim for fact-value distinction, which is at the same time brought into question by implicit subordinating of facts to values. Schluchter is obviously aware of this ambivalence. But instead of understanding this ambivalence as an integral part of Weber’s concept, he tries to put his concept in balance, by redefining the relationships between facts and values. The result was, as we have seen, a new imbalance in which values are subordinate to the facts. I do not argue here that such concept is good or bad. To be able to make such a statement, we have first to confront this concept with social reality. What we state here is that the concept proposed by Schluchter is no longer Weber’s concept.

It seems that Schluchter himself realizes this problem, pointing out some of Weber’s statements that enable us to draw conclusions which differ from those made by himself, e.g., when Weber states that there are situations when politicians have to stick to their ‘ultimate commitments’ and ‘live the consequences to God.’ But Schluchter’s final conclusion is: ‘If one wants to support the interpretation suggested here [i.e., Schluchter’s version of Weber] he must apparently doubt
Weber’s statement’ (1979:85). Apart from this suggestion that certain of Weber’s statements are not to be taken seriously, he tries elsewhere in his book similarly to remedy Weber’s ‘shortcomings’ by replacing ‘unacceptable’ principles with those which are ‘acceptable’ ones. Accordingly, he embraces the way in which Hans Albert\textsuperscript{12} reconstructed Weber’s concepts by replacing the principle of sufficient justification with the principle of critical analysis. Albert argues that Weber’s concepts are based on an existential rationalism that ‘combines ethical fundamentalism and pluralism’ in an essentially problematic way. Weber’s rationalism is on the one hand ‘fundamentalist,’ since it recognises the existence of a dogmatic core to all basic beliefs (values) that is impenetrable to criticism. On the other hand, Weber’s rationalism is pluralistic because it presupposes a number of possible basic theoretical positions from which rational discussion of values is possible. And that is why, according to Albert, we have to reject Weber’s fundamentalism in favour of his pluralism, if we want his concepts to consistent (ibid.: 109).

Apart from being a problematic interpretative method, this is another example of ignoring Weber’s own view on fact-value issue. Once again, it is quite possible to agree with Schluchter’s view of political responsibility, but it is quite irresponsible to accept it as Weber’s view of political responsibility. Not only does Scluchter ignore Weber’s fact–value distinction, but he also ignores the autonomy of values in relation to ‘objective’ or ‘universal’ values: in other words they ignore Weber’s ethical relativism.

We will start with his understanding of political responsibility as something which is not ‘blind to reality’ and which is rational ‘in sense of criti ethic.’ His understanding of the notion of ‘reality’ is however problematic: it is all about a disenchanted world, characterised by permanent tensions between conflicting values, and by the ethical irrationality of the world. In the sphere of politics, this implies the existence of the ethical problem of how to act morally in a situation when the realisation of one’s political values may be connected with the employment of ‘morally problematic’ means. Such political responsibility can be understood in two ways. First, it may be understood as responsibility toward particular (one’s own) values, the realisation of which represents the essence of being a politician. This kind of responsibility we can also call responsibility for one’s own ‘being-in-the-world.’

On the other hand, this responsibility may be understood as responsibility toward universal values, i.e., as responsibility toward world itself. This also implies that one must accept, as a part of one’s responsibility, the realisation of ‘rival values,’ or even the partial abandonment of one’s own values, to allow space for ‘rival values’ to be realised. All this aims to preserve the world as a universal reality. Weber’s use of the concept of political responsibility in this respect is rather ambiguous, creating an opening for various interpretations. By understanding political responsibility as political conduct, which is ready to adjust to the situation, Schluchter seems to be implicitly accepting a dialogue as a means (instead of struggle). This also implies ‘realising the ultimate values in the sense of giving them up’ (1979:88), and understanding political responsibility as a responsibility toward universal values, which essentially questions Weber’s principle of radical moral relativism.

The second relevant interpretation in this context is that of Lawrence Scaff (1989). He also maintains that Weber clearly gives preference to the ethic of responsibility, despite the complexity contained of Weber’s treatment of these two ethics. The complex tensions between ‘passion and perspective,’ ‘devotion and distance,’ ‘intellect and soul’ and ‘conviction and responsibility,’ which Scaff believes are deliberately established and kept in mutual tension by Weber, only reflect the actual tensions of politics. Recalling Weber’s argument that “preserving and mastering the demon of politics” is possible only through “responsibility” and a “pathos of distance”’ Scaff explains

\textsuperscript{12} Hans Albert, ”Traktat Über kritische Vernunft”, Tübingen, 1969.
that to act responsibly means to consider the possible consequences of one’s action, and to under-
stand the laws of historical development. Such responsibility is possible only with awareness of the
ethical paradoxes existing in the world in which one must act as a politician. To act responsibly
despite these ethical paradoxes is in Schaff’s view possible only in so far as one possesses a ‘pathos
of distance,’ i.e., an ‘attitude of inner distance and reserve’ ‘... toward the self, others and the
world’ (ibid.:183).

Accordingly, a responsible politician in Scaff’s view has to have a rational distance even to-
ward his/her own ‘highest ideals which move him/her most forcefully’, putting them on the same line
with the same kind of ideals of others. Moreover, understanding historical laws as a precondition
for political action is nothing other than rationally adjusting political action to these laws, or ‘ac-
commodating’ one’s ultimate ends (i.e., readiness to scale back ambitions regarding one’s ultimate
ends) to ‘rival’ values. As a consequence, Scaff’s interpretation of Weber implicitly rejects a strug-
gle, not only as fundamental presupposition for achieving our highest ethical ideals, but also as a
fundamental law of history, which is in contradiction with original Weber’s concept.

Third relevant interpretation that is going to be presented here is that of Nicholas Gane
(1997). He is even more explicit in his statement that politics as a vocation is, according to Weber,
only possible through reconciling the two ethical principles, but by subordinating one’s convictions
to an ethic of responsibility. Following on Karl Lowith (1993), he argues that the two political eth-
ics represent ideal types of political actions corresponding to Weber’s ideal types of instrumentally
rational action on the one hand, and value-rational action on the other. In this regard, is the ethic of
ultimate ends in fact ‘irrational conduct,’ in that it manifests indifference toward the consequences
of an action, i.e., it has a ‘value-rational’ orientation? On the contrary, the ethic of responsibility
takes into account the consequences of an action on the basis of the available means. This is thus a
relative ethic not an absolute ethic, since it is related to the knowledge. Thus the ethic of responsi-
bility is in fact an ideal type of instrumentally rational action.

Since politics cannot possibly become a vocation through exclusive commitment to one of
these ethical alternatives, continues Gane, the question is not how to choose between them, but
rather how to reconcile them in practice. Indeed, every political engagement implies the involve-
ment of some irrational elements, since the main aim of politics is, after all, the realisation of cer-
tain values. ‘This irrationality, for Weber, is not to be eliminated, for it is crucial for political ambi-
tion, but it is to be held in check by responsible, instrumentally rational action. In this sense, just as
the ethic of ultimate ends is to be synthesised with and subordinate to an ethic of responsibility,
value-rational action is to be synthesised with and subordinate to instrumental rationality’
(ibid.:558). Political maturity means, concludes Gane, having a feeling of ‘passionate responsibil-
ity for the consequences of [one’s] conduct ... ’ (ibid.:560).

In saying this, Gane actually ends up on the same position that has been criticised here in
Schluchter’s interpretation of Weber. Irrational ‘ought’ should be held in check by rational ‘is’,
which is contained in political ethics of responsibility. Gane however does not give us explicitly his
statement about relationship between instrumentally rational political action on the one hand and
those highest ethical ideals that are accepted as ultimate ends of political action. According to We-
ber:

*Action is instrumentally rational (zweckrational) when the end, the
means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account
and weighed. This involves rational consideration of alternative means
to the end, of the relations of the end to the secondary consequences,
and finally of the relative importance of different possible ends. Deter-
mination of the action either in effectual or in traditional terms is thus incompatible with this type. (E&S\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{13}}:26)

Gane uses this very same quotation to support his argument. But while his quotation finishes at this point, the original texts continues with following two sentences, which are of crucial relevance in this context:

*Choice between alternative and conflicting ends and results may well be determined in a value-rational manner. In that case, action is instrumentally rational only in respect to the choice of means.* (Ibid:26)

By excluding these two sentences from his quotation, Gane in fact avoids to give us an explicit answer on the essential question in this context. Does the rationality, contained in political responsibility, has a role to adjust, change or even to reject those values that represent the ultimate ends of political action, or are these values already given, that is determined in value-rational manner and therefore out of reach for instrumental rationality? By avoiding to answer this question, Gane implicitly allows even those fundamental values that force politicians to act politically, to be determined and subordinated by instrumental rationality, which is according to Weber impossible.

But this is not all. In Weber’s view ‘... as a rule only the outstanding individual was capable of setting new goals and imparting a new drive to society, out of personal value-orientations whose origins were to be found beyond the routine everyday life ... He alone, on the basis of personal convictions which are not simply a reflection of given conditions, but are rather rooted in fundamental value-orientations, is in a position to give society the force needed to go beyond the routine of everyday life’ (Mommsen, 1989:26–27). These characteristics, so indispensable for Weber’s politician, are in Gane’s concept ‘held in check by responsible, instrumentally rational’ self-control. That is why Gane’s ‘responsible politician’ is perhaps able to survive politically within the routines of everyday life. However, in the first political situation, which exceeds the bounds of everyday life, the politician may either start looking for another job, or reorient his of her responsibility toward ultimate ends.

It is necessary to make a few critical remarks pertaining to the above ways of understanding Weber’s two political ethics. The problem with all these views of political responsibility – Schluchter’s, which allows science via facts to ‘discuss’ and ‘correct’ values; or Scaff’s, which demands that one adjust one’s intrinsic values to the objective laws of history; or Gane’s, which implies subordinating one’s intrinsic values to the control of ‘responsible instrumentally rational action’ – is that they ignore in a fundamental way Weber's fact–value distinction. For in all three cases, the realisation of intrinsic values is conditioned, directed and controlled by the binding norms of the ‘objective rationality,’ which is impossible according to Weber.

To conclude, responsibility as understood by these three authors, and the rationality inherent in such responsibility, influence political action in two ways. On the one hand this creates and imposes on its bearer new values, different from those he or she would have had in choosing the ethic of ultimate ends. On the other hand it makes the bearer of responsibility ready to subordinate his or her ultimate ends to some sort of universal value system. Consequently, if some of these particular values collide with other values in the system (especially if those other values possess higher status in the value system) then our responsible politician would be ready to abandon unconditionally his or her values, or yield to the other values. The first of these alternatives necessarily conflicts with Weber’s radical distinction between facts and values, while the second alternative conflicts with Weber’s radical moral relativism. The political action of the responsible politician, as outlined by these three authors, would in Weber’s view comprise sheer dilettantism, or at best, action fittingly

performed by political officials or bureaucrats. This is why future generations would remember such politicians only by their weakness (these generations would view such responsibility only as weakness), and by their inability to provide them with more ‘elbow room.’

Finally we are going to present a theory (Rogers Brubaker, 1984) that stands for quite a different reading of Weber, and that is very close to our understanding of the relationships between the two ethics. Brubaker starts from the assumption that both instrumental rationality (Zweckrationalität) and value-rationality (Wertrationalität) are defined by Weber subjectively, i.e., from the actor’s perspective. Value-rational action hence is rational for the actor because he or she subjectively believes in the intrinsic values inherent in just that kind of action. Instrumental-rational action, in turn, is based on the actors’ subjective endeavour to calculate and keep in mind all possible consequences during action. The objective correctness of the actor’s beliefs in the first case, and his or her expectations in the second, are completely irrelevant to the subjective rationality in both cases.

Weber, according to Brubaker, strictly distinguishes such subjectively rational action from ‘objectively rational’ action, which chooses the means in accordance with scientific knowledge. However, objective rationality is in Weber’s view a narrower notion than subjective rationality, because it can be applied to subjective instrumental-rational action, but not to subjective value-rational action. In first case it is possible because it is possible objectively, i.e. scientifically, to distinguish adequate from inadequate means of achieving desired ends. At the same time, it is impossible objectively or scientifically to determine what ends actors desire to achieve, i.e., what values they want to realise.

The choice between the ethic of ultimate ends and the ethic of responsibility is, in Brubaker’s view, a choice between two kinds of rationality. Those who follow an ethic of ultimate ends, are in fact adopting a pure value-rational orientation. On the other hand, adopting of an ethic of responsibility does not, according to Brubaker, mean the same as following pure instrumental rationality, because this sort of rationality does not calculate only means against ends, but also ends against consequences, as well as various ends against each other. Since the ends – values which to be realised by political action – are given, they can neither be rationally established nor changed, so in Brubaker’s view the ethic of responsibility is Weber’s attempt to integrate instrumental-rationality and value-rationality. ‘The ethic of responsibility requires on the one hand that the development of personality through the exercise of reason in the anthropological sense be disciplined by the cool scepticism of scientific rationality so as to maximise the chances of actually realising the values to which one is committed. It requires, in short, that ends determined in a wertrational manner be pursued with means selected in a zweckrational manner. On the other hand, the ethic of responsibility requires that scientific rationality serve reason in the anthropological sense, that the calculating attitude of Zweckrationalität be subordinated to the pursuit of ends chosen in a wertrational manner’ (ibid.:109).

Applying this to our case, we can say that responsible political action means taking reality into account (endeavouring to act in accordance with objective rationality), which implies surmounting the subjective limitations of individual politicians in their capacities to conceive of all means to achieve desired ends. An objective rationality can also help politician to calculate the ‘costs’ of achievement of desired ends in terms of loosing some other ends as a consequence of this achievement. Moreover, politician can, with the help of objective rationality, learn more about contexts as well as content of the chosen ends. However, responsible political action cannot include the possibility of changing ultimate ends themselves, but only correcting the strategies for gaining these ultimate ends (the same ultimate ends which the follower of the ethic of ultimate ends strives to achieve in ‘irresponsible’ ways). Political responsibility can neither involve adaptation of the own political action (or the own ultimate ends of such political action) to some sort of universal values, which are to be applied everywhere, on everybody and in every situation and in this sense superordinate to any particularistic ends of each individual political action. Contrary to this, political
responsibility in Weber's view does not recognise such universal values, but represents an effort to preserve, defend and develop just those particularistic values.

Finally, for Weber's politician the ultimate ends themselves are, especially in situations exceeding routine everyday life, beyond the dough values of the nation state. This is not only because the emergence of the modem nation state (which, incidentally, is how Weber begins his speech) is the basic historical precondition for modern politics as a vocation, but also because the basic medium through which Weber's politician acts is the nation state. It is impossible to conceive of Weber's politician outside this medium. With Weber's politician, responsibility for one's own nation state does not merely mean responsibility for one's own political survival, but also responsibility for the continuation of civilisation. Because politicians act within the framework of the nation state, which in turn exists only in power relationships with other nation states, it is not only 'is' of the world for Weber, not being possible to be otherwise, but also 'ought' of the world, ought not to be otherwise.

This is, in my view, the only correct way of reading and understanding Weber in this context. There is however one more question that should be addressed in this paper. In opening section of this paper, we have already said that great part of interpretations of Weber, have to do more with dynamics of the sociological tradition in particular, as well as intellectual tradition in general after Weber, then with his work itself. The trend of reinterpretation that has been critically examined in this paper is not exception to this rule. It may be said that the interpretative tendencies, clearly illustrated by the three concepts which have been presented here, tend actually in one way or another, to reinterpret Weber's concept of politics as a vocation in direction of ethical criterion that are legitimate in today's liberal political theory and practice. The problem is however, that even today's liberal political philosophy, liberal conscious of ordinary people, as well as liberal political practice, are all full of internal contradictions. One of these internal tensions, tension between 'explicit liberalism' and 'implicit nationalism', were theoretically discussed by Samuel Scheffler (1997).

On the one hand we have one of the very basic values of liberalism, which is 'commitment to moral egalitarianism', i.e. universal claim that all people have the equal moral value, or in other words that there is no person whose interests can have higher intrinsic moral importance for us, then interests of any other person. This value is according to Scheffler in permanent tension with value of 'commitment to particularism about political responsibility', i.e. particularistic claim that we have fundamentally different duties toward citizens and institutions of our own society, then toward members and institutions of other societies. It is namely so that the sheer fact that people exist as members of different societies, oblige members of some particular society to give priority to associative duties (in sense of providing the benefits or giving advantage to interests) in their relations with other in-group members, doing this sometimes at the expense of non-members, sometimes despite the fact that non-members actually have the greater needs for such benefits. In both of these cases, argues Scheffler, liberal principles of the equal moral values of all people, are brought into question. This tension is, according to author, equally present on the level of liberal political philosophy and on the common-sense level of ordinary liberal people. This tension is however, also present on level of contemporary liberal political practice, which is especially important from sociological standpoint, as well as from the standpoint of this paper. One of the most relevant properties of the modern liberal politics is its internal ambivalence between universal and egalitarian moral principles dominating the political rhetoric on the one hand, and particularistic and egoistic moral principles dominating the concrete political practice.

If we at this point return to Weber, then we can argue that three theoretical interpretations, presented in this article may be considered as attempts of reinterpretation of Weber's concept in the direction of establishing within his concept the above presented tension existing in liberalism today. In my view it is wrong, not only because it prevents us from understanding properly Weber's the-
ory, but also because it prevents us from understanding properly the actual political reality that we live in.

**Conclusion**

As has been emphasised, Weber’s voluminous work, which touches on almost all sociological fields, is fatally flawed by the fact that his work in its many aspects has remained incomplete, fragmentary and without adequate synthesis. Combined with Weber’s metaphoric style, this permits wide-ranging interpretations of many of his theoretical statements. It is certainly wrong to use ambivalent and inconsistent passages in Weber’s work as a license for free interpretation, or in other words as an opportunity to reconstruct these passages according to epistemological and axiological criteria which do not fit Weber’s general theoretical concepts. On the contrary, the interpretative reconstruction of these passages must be based on epistemological and axiological principles defended by Weber himself.

One of these principles is the fact–value distinction, according to which facts and values are logically completely detached spheres, meaning that value judgements cannot in any way be derived or conditioned by statements of facts. In the case of political responsibility, this means that the implied rationality in the ‘ethic of responsibility’ cannot change or replace given ultimate ends, which are the final aim of every political action, because:

... general views of life and the universe can never be the product of increasing empirical knowledge, and that the highest ideals, which move us most forcefully, are always formed only in struggle with other ideals which are just as sacred to others as ours are to us (MSS: 57)

Considering the other essential principle, i.e., the principle of ethical relativism, political responsibility can by no means involve taking the consequences for the effects of one’s own political action on individuals and communities outside of one’s political and moral community. Any suffering of outsiders caused by such political action does not necessarily impose moral obligations on the agent of such political action. What makes them morally obliged, by pushing them more responsibly to calculate means against the ends, is eventual power of these outsiders. Nor can political responsibility involve the adaptation of one’s own political action (or the ultimate ends of such political action) to some sort of universal values to apply everywhere, to everybody and in every situation, and in this sense be superordinate to the particularistic ends of individual political actions. On the contrary, political responsibility in Weber’s view does not recognise such universal values, but represents an effort to preserve, defend and develop such particularistic values.

The basic framework within which these values are to be preserved, defended and developed, is the nation state. This is also the basic platform from which struggle (sometimes competition, sometimes war) against other nation states is organised and launched. Weber’s concept of political responsibility cannot be understood outside of this framework.

And finally, “... having a calling is [applied to Weber’s politician] the condition of charisma” (Owen, 1994:143), meaning that responsible political action implies acting in accordance with one’s convictions. In other words, a politician’s rational projections should go beyond the possible, even if a majority of those led by this politician, are ‘too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer.’

Thus the interpretative tendencies illustrated by the three concepts presented here tend, in one way or another, to reinterpret Weber’s concept of politics as a vocation in pursuit of ethical criteria legitimate in today’s liberal political rhetoric. This occurs by moderating, ignoring or ampu-
tating certain particularistic elements of his concepts, on the one hand, or by amplifying, emphasising, or imputing certain universalistic elements in his concepts on the other.

We should not try to put some make-up on Weber’s concepts, as did Schluchter, Scaff and Gane – all of which represent efforts to express political responsibility in a certain way. Instead of that, we should try to express our intellectual responsibility by confronting Weber’s concepts in their authentic form, with the social reality, in order to learn more about this reality.
References:


