Max Weber, Goethe and Rilke:
The Magic of Language and Music in a Disenchanted World
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Abstract
The relation between Weber’s concepts of bureaucracy and disenchantment are related to poetic concepts of disenchantment and re-enchantment in Goethe and Rilke.

Keywords: bureaucracy, disenchantment, Goethe, machine, re-enchantment, music, Rilke.

1. Introduction
This article is focused on the metaphorical and figurative construction of some textual tropes used by Max Weber in his writings about the ‘disenchancing of the world’ (Entzauberung der Welt). In this context, I try to connect some Weberian metaphors like machine (Maschine), magic (Magie) and enchantment/disenchantment (Verzauberung/Entzauberung) with German literature, especially with Goethe and Rilke. The description of the Western rationalization process as a ‘disenchantment of the world’ has become a central theme of Max Weber, as well as a way to characterize his work. The great German sociologist is often called the Entzauberer, because he disenchanted or eliminated those vestiges of irrational or magical explanation of the social world with the force of his thinking. For example, Joachim Radkau concludes his recent and comprehensive biography with this statement: ‘And the truth about Max Weber has a certain quality of release: it destroys none of the magic of the great anti-magician’.

However, I believe that the relationship between sociological disenchantment and German literature, in particular its poetry, has

been largely overlooked. Three German writers before Max Weber (Goethe, Schiller and Herder) prefigured his reflection, and another of Weber’s contemporaries, Rilke, developed variations on the same topic in one of his Sonnets to Orpheus. In addition, we can also remember the contrast between Thomas Mann (who was called the ‘Magician’ or the Zauberer, because of the magic of his literature, not only his Magic Mountain) and Max Weber, the Entzauberer, that is, the sociologist who disenchanted (or entzaubert) the explanation of the social world. And finally, Hermann Broch tried for many years to finish his novel titled Die Verzauberung (The Enchantment).

In 1797, Goethe wrote his poem Der Zauberlehrling (‘The Wizard’s Apprentice’). The apprentice, taking advantage of his teacher’s absence, utters the magic words so that the spirits obey his orders: to get the broom, go to the river and bring back water in a bucket over and over again. But when he wants to stop the spell, he cannot because he can’t remember the appropriate magic phrase and therefore floods the entire house. Only his old master’s arrival can put an end to this ordeal, making the broom obey him and go back to its corner and not carry water any more. The poem can be considered a mockery of those who cause events that they are not able to control and wind up being overwhelmed. From Max Weber’s point of view, it can be considered as a warning to those who give a twist to the process of rationalization in the West and cause irrational disasters.

Some scholars (Jaspers among them) have written that Max Weber got the inspiration for his ‘Entzauberung der Welt’ from Schiller’s expression ‘Entgötterung der Natur’ or ‘Entgötterung der Welt’, that is to say literally, ‘De-godding of Nature (of the World)’. This is puzzling to me, because for Weber ‘Entzauberung’ doesn’t mean ‘Entgötterung’: the disenchantment of Nature doesn’t result in a world without God, but in the return and ascendance of a plurality of old gods, who once again renew their eternal struggle with one another.2

On the other hand, the poet and philosopher Herder wrote in one of his Scattered leaves (Zerstreute Blätter) a poem entitled precisely The Disenchantment. Doctrine of the Brahmins (Die Entzauberung. Lehre der Brahmins), that begins as follows:

Beat the thirst for foreign goods, you, who has been cheated!
Disenchant your intellect and your heart;
You will only be satisfied by

What you earn by your works.
Time just ends up devouring the goods, honors and youth;
Those are illusions, disappearing in the blink of an eye.
Learn to recognize the eternal,
And take it into your heart.³

This poem links directly to Pedro Piedras Monroy’s recent, and excellent, book on the analysis of Buddhism and Hinduism in Weber’s sociology of religion. The author clearly establishes the relationship between Herder’s poem and Max Weber’s work on religion in India, both transfixed by the idea of Entzauberung, of disenchantment and its consequences for human life. There seems to be no other way out than hopeless effort and devoted work in profession (Beruf), following the Daimon who manages the threads of their own lives. These first words of Piedras Monroy’s book are significant:

A continuous thread runs from the Herder poem quoted at the beginning to the complexities arising from Max Weber’s thought process. He tried to unravel the Entzauberung process (disenchantment process) through which rational thinking, namely Western thinking, protected in its scientific casing, breaks the spell, takes the human being out of the enchanted garden of religious thought and deposits him in a world where events continue to happen, but they fail to have meaning. The poem tells us of a dying world and another that starts […]. We have to escape from the chaos of the world and look for open fields of seraphic calm. The only reason for existence seems to be devotion to hopeless effort, beyond any feeling. Our author will fight in his writings to break the spell and eventually to disenchant Western Entzauberung itself, whose outlines he had drawn, breaking the idea of having arrived somewhere in life, having achieved something other than ephemeral gains..., having overcome time.⁴

Finally, two years after Max Weber’s premature death, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote his Sonnets to Orpheus in the period 2-23 February, 1922. One of these sonnets, number X of the Second Part, can be interpreted as a kind of answer to the Weberian theory of the disenchantment of the universe: poetic word and music have the ability to re-enchant the world again, repeatedly, against the threat

⁴. P. Piedras Monroy, Max Weber y la India (Max Weber and India; Valladolid: Secretariado de Publicaciones e Intercambio Editorial de la Universidad de Valladolid, 2005), p. 17.
of mechanization of human life on earth. The rest of this work will be devoted to comparing the approaches of Weber and Rilke, the sociologist and the poet.

2. Mario Presas’ Thesis on Weber and Rilke

A few years ago, while taking part in a philosophy conference held in the city of Puebla, Mexico, I had the opportunity to talk with Mario Presas about aesthetics and the ability of art and literature to show a view of reality that is not typically seen from a scientific point of view. Because of our common interest in German culture, we talked about the relationship between sociology and literature, specifically about the existence of a common core of ideas between Max Weber and Rainer Maria Rilke with regard to the disenchantment of the world and its possible re-enchantment by means of poetry and music. These pages serve to continue this dialogue, which I keep fondly in my memory. As a gift after our meeting in Puebla, Mario Presas gave me his book *The Truth of Fiction*, in whose introduction he states:

Max Weber, in describing the prevailing concept in modern Western culture, refers to the desecration of reality, that is, to the fact that scientific explanation cannot and must not resort to magic solutions. The world of instrumental reason is, indeed, a disenchanted world (*entzauberte Welt*). And here again Rilke offers us in his poetry, this time even literally, the counter-proposal: to the dis-enchanted world, without magic, without *Zauber*, the poet replied with his confession: ‘But for us existence is still “enchanted”’, it is a *verzaubertes Dasein* (re-enchanted being).5

Mario Presas explains this idea in greater detail in the chapter ‘The Magic of Art in the Disenchanted World’, which contrasts the two worlds in conflict in the tenth sonnet of the second part of *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Here Rilke conveys the clash between the disillusionment produced by the machine and modern technology with Orpheus’ spell, based on poetry and music. And Mario Presas accepts Rilke’s claim of the magic of art as an antidote not against science *per se*, but against the reductionism of all elements of life to scientific and technological solutions. Science and technology do not have the last word, nor should they be allowed out of their boundaries to invade all of human existence. The artist’s mission will consist precisely of

re-enchanting the modern world disenchanted by science and technology. It is not that we should react against scientific progress, but rather that we should reaffirm other aspects of life, while establishing limits to science. Thus, against the disenchantment of the modern world based on science and technology as defined by Max Weber, Rilke proposes new ways of re-enchantment of life, by means of the poetry and music. And in both cases, there are conceptual variations around the same verb in German: *zaubern*, to enchant. In the words of Mario Presas:

> It is interesting to see that both words (that we embody here in Weber’s formulation, on the one hand, and Rilke’s poem, on the other), come from the same verb *zaubern* (to enchant). One word with the prefix *ent-*, negating its meaning, and the other word, reinforcing its meaning with the prefix *ver-*. The poet contrasts the idea of an *entzauberte Welt* (disenchanted world) with the idea of a *verzaubert Dasein* (re-enchanted being).

I transcribe the full German text of Rilke’s tenth *Sonnet to Orpheus* from the second part of the book:

> Alles Erworbne bedroht die Maschine, solange
> sie sich erdreistet, im Geist, statt im Gehorchen, zu sein.
> Dass nicht der herrlichen Hand schöneres Zögern mehr prange,
> zu dem entschlossenern Bau schneidet sie steifer den Stein.
>
> Nirgends bleibt sie zurück, dass wir ihr ein Mal entrönnen
> und sie in stiller Fabrik ölend sich selber gehört.
> Sie ist das Leben, -sie meint es am besten zu können,
> die mit den gleichen Entschluss ordnet und schafft und zerstört.
>
> Aber noch ist uns das Dasein verzaubert; an hundert
> Stellen ist es noch Ursprung. Ein Spielen von reinen
> Kräften, die keiner berührt, der nicht kniet und bewundert.
>
> Worte gehen noch zart am Unsäglichen aus…
> Und die Musik, immer neu, aus den bebendsten Steinen,
> baut im unbrauchbaren Raum ihr vergöttlichtes Haus.

* * *

All we have achieved, the machine threatens to rule,
So long as it sways the spirit instead of obeying alone,
Unless the illustrious hand lingers longer upon the tool,
For the more resolute work starkly cuts the stone.


It nowhere remains behind so we might escape its zest
And oiling in silent factories it would be self-employed.
It is life,—thinks it knows best,
Having with equal resolve equipped, produced, destroyed.

But existence is still enchanted. Is at a hundred or more
Points in its origins still: a playing of pure forces
That no one touches who does not marvel and kneel before.

Words still fail before the unsayable sources...
And music, ever new, puts pulsating stones in place.
To build her god-like house in unusable space.

The machine works in this sonnet as a metaphor for science and technology that threaten to destroy all human life as such, every culture, ‘everything acquired’ by men over centuries of work, when it fails to obey human beings and gives orders to their spirit. Rilke describes four factors in the idea of the machine dominating the human. First, the machine substitutes the craftsman in carving stone for the construction of buildings in a perfect way and overcoming the vagaries and imperfections of hand-carved stone. Secondly, the machine never slows down; we cannot escape from it even once. In addition, the machine becomes independent of the man who has designed and manufactured it: it ‘belongs to itself’, self-caring and self-lubricated in the silent, quiet and empty factory, now ‘abandoned’ of all human breath. Finally, the machine comes alive and thinks it knows better than us what life is, ordering our ways of living, creating new life forms that can no longer escape the technological development, but also destroying traditional forms of social life, polluting nature, destroying forests, contaminating rivers and lakes, increasing the level of pollution that ends up making human life impossible.

Faced with this situation described in the two quartets, Rilke offers a solution in the two triplets: ‘But existence is still enchanted. Is at a hundred or more/Points in its origins still’. We find places not yet dominated by technology and life’s meaning is revealed only if one ‘marvels and kneels’. These ‘pure forces’ emanate from art and its creators, who are those who can give meaning to human life and re-enchant the world disenchanted by the machine. The last three verses refer specifically to the importance of the poetry and music. The poetry gives new meaning to life and gives rise to new worlds: ‘Words still fail before the unsayable sources…’. Poetry

carries the word until the end of what we cannot say, of the ineffable. And music, which is renewed every time we listen to it, builds its divine house with trembling stones in an unusable space. In this way, music and poetry can build a new home for humanity, perhaps a more livable home than the one built with stones perfectly carved by the powerful technique of modern machines. Ultimately, if the machine disenchant the human world, art and poetry can be used to re-enchant it again.9

3. Marianne's Biography of Max Weber, 
Under the Sign of Rainer Maria Rilke

It is interesting to note that the vast intellectual biography Marianne Weber wrote about her husband Max has a poem from Rilke’s The Book of Hours as a frontispiece. Marianne does not quote the first lines of the poem in which we find that Rilke is writing about Michelangelo, a man who lives between two different periods and who is able to take upon himself the whole weight of his time. With this poem, Marianne Weber symbolizes and sums up her biography of her husband, applying to him those words that Rilke used to refer to Michelangelo’s genius over every other human being. Certainly these verses help us to understand Marianne’s perspective on Max, rightly viewed as one of the greatest talents of our time, as a new Prometheus in his constant challenge to all political, cultural, academic and intellectual forces with the hope to move the heavy wheel of history in a certain direction. Rilke’s poem, shortened by Marianne Weber to suit her purposes, reads:

This is the man who always will emerge
at moments when an era on the verge
of termination will assess once more
its value. He will lift its load before
he hurls it down the caverns of his heart.

Before, men had of bliss and pain their part;
but he feels nothing but life’s total weight
and that all things are joined in one estate—

9. Cf. O. Dorr Zegers’ commentary to this Sonnet in his bilingual edition of R.M. Rilke, Sonetos a Orfeo (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 2002), pp. 157-58. By the way, it is worth recalling that Goethe, speaking about scientific research, said that ‘the treasures of Nature are enchanted treasures, provided not by any spade but only by word’ (‘Die Schätze der Natur sind verzauberte Schätze, welche kein Spaten, sondern das Wort blosslegt’): Goethe’s conversation with Anton Eduard Odyniec, 29 August 1829.
only the span to God he cannot breach:
and yet he loves Him with heroic hate
for being utterly beyond his reach.\(^\text{10}\)

Why start her biography of Max Weber with a poem by Rilke? Which special meaning does Rilke have for Marianne and Max Weber? Karl Jaspers, a former student of Max and friend of the couple, offered his own interesting interpretations:

1. Jaspers speaks about Max Weber with words that recall the Sonnet to Orpheus quoted above (Sonnet X of Part 2). Social crisis of his time, the development of science and technique that result in humanity’s enslavement to the machine:

   Max Weber did not take an attitude of opposition or superiority to his era. But this era was undergoing intolerable tensions. Among his brilliant outward triumphs, his magnificent technical achievements, Man could no longer find himself. He had become the slave of a mechanism which he has ceased even to understand. Steadily advancing in concrete achievements, this world with all its knowledge was ultimately without truth. In such an era greatness could not crystallize into a harmonious personality, a reflection of a harmonious world around it.\(^\text{11}\)

2. Jaspers insisted on seeing Max Weber as a man on the ground between two different times, as the most outstanding personality of his historical moment, as the individual who is not a professional philosopher, but embodies philosophy itself, as a person like Michelangelo in Rilke’s poem from The Book of Hours, cited by Marianne:

   ‘Max Weber seemed to stand between a passing and a rising era. He sometimes felt himself to be an epigone, yet he already lived in an age that had not yet downed’.\(^\text{12}\)

3. The profound psychological crisis suffered by Max Weber at the turn of the century, roughly between 1897 and 1903, is well known. For some years he could neither teach nor write and at the worst times not even read, locked in a complete intellectual paralysis. Jaspers says that Max Weber felt the first signs of healing during his trip to Rome, when he was observing the ceiling of the Sistine


Chapel, where Michelangelo’s genius shines. Therefore, not surprisingly, Marianne attributed Rilke’s poem dedicated to the author of the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel to her husband, seeing him as a genius who bears the weight of his time in a period of transition to a different historical era.

On the other hand, Marianne discovers a change in Max Weber’s artistic tastes during his illness, reading the poetry of his historical moment and, especially, Rainer Maria Rilke and Stefan George:

The years of illness had deflected him from his course and had opened secret chambers of his soul that had previously been closed. He was now receptive to these artistic creations, which gave an ever new depth to feeling. He became absorbed in modern works of various kinds, particularly in Rilke and George, and he now read poems aloud very beautifully.\(^{13}\)

Marianne continues her story with Max’s views on Rilke as expressed in a letter to his sister (summer 1910). Weber describes Rilke as a true mystic: *He* does not write poetry, but *it is written* in him. Faced with the mystical experience known by Rilke in all its purity, Stefan George seems to Max Weber as ‘the orgiastic voice which then appears as an eternal voice. In other words, it never leads to substance, but only to the passionate sound of a harp’.\(^{14}\) Weber met with Stefan George several times in Heidelberg and maintained friendships with other members of his circle, such as Gundolf. However, these conversations led Weber to think that George and his disciples served ‘other gods’, that is, other than his own gods, they had radically incompatible value-systems.\(^{15}\)

So, Max Weber was a passionate and attentive reader of Rilke’s poetry, though he did not discuss his literary world with him as he did with Stefan George. On the other hand, we can speak of Rilke as a listener of one of Weber’s lectures. Indeed, Rilke wrote in a letter to his sister Clara that he was part of the large audience attending


a lecture by Professor Max Weber in the halls of Hotel Wagner in Munich in early November 1918—an extremely difficult period already marked by Germany’s defeat in the Great War and by political upheavals in the city. Rilke writes to his sister more about the circumstances than the content of Weber’s lecture. Rilke describes the crowded public environment, the smell of beer, of tobacco and of ‘human musk’, the coming and going of the waitresses through the crowd and the speech of a young worker who asked Weber and other present intellectuals for help in stopping the war, regardless of the authority of the discredited monarch: ‘University Professors here know French and will help us to understand French people and to express our thoughts to them...’. Max Weber impresses Rilke as a speaker, but he seems to be more impressed by the figure of the anonymous worker, by the revolutionary unrest of the masses and by the fact of being part of the public in that historical moment.\textsuperscript{16}

The following sections of this article will be dedicated to the analysis of the three core themes of this sonnet by Rilke in Max Weber’s work: the power of machines in the construction of a disenchanted world and the two possible solutions: through poetical language and through art, especially music. It is clear that Weber’s positions are not the same as Rilke’s, but it is enlightening to read some elements of Weber’s sociology through the lens of the concepts and images used by this poet. In section 4, I analyze the machine as a metaphor used by Max Weber. Section 5 is dedicated to the contrast between scientific and metaphorical language in Weber’s sociology. And in section 6 we will see Weber’s ideas about music as a means to emerge from a disenchanted world.

4. Machine as Metaphor in Max Weber’ Sociology

Rilke and Weber share the use of the metaphor of the machine, although it is a complex metaphor. The sociologist distinguishes between two types of machines: one refers to industry and the other

\textsuperscript{16} See Rilke’s letter to his sister Clara Rilke, written on 7 November 1918 in Munich. It is included by R. Sieber-Rilke and C. Sieber in \textit{Rainer Maria Rilke, Briefe aus den Jahren 1914 bis 1921} (Leipzig: Insel, 1938), pp. 206-10. Weber’s lecture took place three days earlier, on Monday, 4 November 1918, under the title ‘Germany’s new political order’ in an environment marked by the revolt of the sailors of the German navy in Kiel, riots that took place the day before. Marianne Weber, in the biography of her husband, wrote a brief summary of the lecture, made from the notes of some listeners, pp. 627-28.
to bureaucracy. The ‘dead machine’ represents the fruit of industrial labor and technology versus the ‘living machine’ composed of human beings that make up the bureaucratic form of social organization. Rilke’s poem refers only to this first usage of industrial ‘machine’. In this section I shall concern myself with the second sense of the machine in Weberian sociology, where the image of the bureaucratic machine appears from two opposing points of view, positive in one case and negative in the other.\footnote{I have written more extensively on Max Weber and his use of the metaphor of the machine in my book \textit{The Bureaucratic Machine. Elective Affinities between Max Weber and Kafka} (\textit{La máquina burocrática. Afinidades electivas entre Max Weber y Kafka}; Madrid: Visor, 1989).}

For Max Weber, all power is exercised through various forms of administration and bureaucracy. Weber is usually regarded as the great theorist of bureaucratic rationality, so it is necessary to recall that he is also one of the greatest critics of the process of bureaucratization. Once again, Weber’s Janus-like nature is shown in this theme. If, on the one hand, he made an aseptic, neutral, objective presentation of the ‘ideal type’ of bureaucracy, on the other, he makes a merciless criticism of it and attempts to place limits on the process of bureaucratization in the case of Germany. In the texts of theory of bureaucracy there arises the metaphor of the machine from a positive point of view, while the critical texts show a negative view of the same metaphor.

The fundamental reason which explains the progress of modern bureaucratic organization is its superiority over any other form of organization and administration. This context of greater efficiency is always referred positively when it appears in Weber’s metaphor of the machine:

> The fully developed bureaucratic apparatus compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with the non-mechanical modes of production. Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs—these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration, and especially in its monocratic form. As compared with all collegiate, honorific and avocational forms of administration, trained bureaucracy is superior on all these points. And as far as complicated tasks are concerned, paid bureaucratic work is not only more precise but, in the last analysis, it is often cheaper than even formally unremunerated honorific service.\footnote{Max Weber, \textit{Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology} (ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich; New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), vol. III, pp. 973-74.}
In his theory of bureaucracy, Weber constructs an ideal typical model that applies the positive side of the mechanistic metaphor: every nut and bolt are in place, the gears greased and everything works properly with the speed and effectiveness of a precision mechanism. The principle of division of labor increases the efficiency of the machine, which is not stopped by the personal desires or needs of the bureaucrats, who serve the functions that have been allocated to them. Everything is done according to objective criteria, without ‘partiality’, impartially, according to predictable rules that calculate the result beforehand. Otherwise, modern rational capitalism, which needs the predictability and calculability of results for its development, would be impossible, for this can only be achieved if the law and the administration function as machines.

But this is only one side of the coin. The passage of the formal model of bureaucracy to the historical and political analysis of the processes of bureaucratization also meant a change of perspective to Max Weber. The machine metaphor is now seen in a negative sense. If the scientific and sociological texts emphasize the positive aspects of the bureaucratic machine (its accuracy, efficiency, work without partiality, *sine ira et studio*, its functionality on the development of capitalist economy), his political texts show the other, much more realistic, side of the coin: the gears of the bureaucratic machinery are degreased and produce dysfunctions, the bureaucracy becomes an end in itself, beyond its purely instrumental work and imposes its own conditions, and so on.

Weber was aware of the historical wrongs caused by bureaucracy. For example, the Confucian bureaucracy became an obstacle to the development of rational capitalism in China, and the dominance of bureaucrats in ancient Egypt led to the overall stagnation of their society. And referring to his own society, he says that the bureaucracy of the German Social Democratic Party was responsible for the abandonment of political convictions and their absorption into the system. And also, the domain of Wilhelmine bureaucracy led to Germany’s political impotence.

Largely due to these historical lessons of the negative consequences of bureaucracy, Max Weber vehemently opposes all enthusiastic supporters of bureaucracy. His diagnosis of the bureaucratic degeneration of socialism is clear and powerful, with the additional virtue of being ahead of its time: he states that the centralized management of the economy will certainly lead to a dramatic increase in staff numbers and power. According to his estimates, when the
trained professional staff comes to dominate, this generates a power that is simply unbreakable: any power struggle against a developed state bureaucracy is useless. And the overall result would be a situation in which individual freedom would disappear completely, drowned among the threads of the bureaucratic spider web. Thus Max Weber opposes the disappearance of private capitalism:

If private capitalism were eliminated, state bureaucracy would rule alone. Private and public bureaucracies would then be merged into a single hierarchy, whereas they now operate alongside and, at least potentially, against one another, thus keeping one another in check. The situation would resemble that of ancient Egypt, but in an incomparably more rational and hence more inescapable form.

Max Weber rebels against the real possibility that the future will result in a hierarchical and bureaucratic society, in which the individual would disappear for the sake of the joint organization of the society and the social order. The fear that fate will lead to a society dominated by bureaucracy makes him advocate for the individual against those who seek the individual’s absorption in the company, social class or occupation. The servants of the future (and the future Weber thinks of is our present) is represented by the subordination of the particular individual to the social order and political and economic institutions that shape an organically vertebrate society in which there is no room for personal components.

Unlike those who advocate the nationalization of the economy, ‘socialism of the future’ by an ‘organized society’ or a ‘cooperative economy’, Max Weber clearly sets out the dangers of universal bureaucratization and a society subject to the dead spirit of the civil service. While recognizing that the future belongs to bureaucracy, he tries to resist the wheel of history as it turns in that direction.

From the experience of the nationalization of the mines and railroads in Prussia, Max Weber concluded that the state is the worst employer: the living conditions of workers in these companies are no better than their peers in large private capitalist enterprises. And in return, they are less free because every power struggle with a government bureaucracy has no hope of success; and in addition, because there is no appeal to another against it—unlike a private employer. The nationalization of companies does not mean a break

from the iron prison of modern industrial labor, merely the replacement of one custodian with another whose power is simply unwavering: the staff member.

It is in this context where the metaphor of the bureaucratic machine arises again, but now seen in its negative aspects. If the dead machine of industrial labor and the living machine of the bureaucratic organization join forces, we are caught in a new form of servitude from which there is no possible solution:

A lifeless machine is *congealed spirit*. It is *only* this fact that gives the machine the power to force men to serve it and thus to rule and determine their daily working lives, as in fact happens in factories. The same *congealed spirit* is, however, also embodied in that *living machine* which is represented by bureaucratic organization with its specialization of trained, technical work, its delimitation of areas of responsibility, its regulations and its graduated hierarchy of relations of obedience. Combined with the death machine, it is in the process of manufacturing the housing of that future serfdom to which, perhaps, men may have to submit powerlessly, just like the slaves in the ancient state of Egypt, *if they consider that the ultimate and only value by which the conduct of their affairs is to be decided is good administration and provision for their needs by officials* (that is ‘good’ in the purely technical sense of rational administration). 20

The dead machine and the living machine, industry and bureaucracy, set the goals we advance towards. There is some possibility of liberty if the gears of the two machines are not coordinated. But when both work together, synchronized under the direction of specialized staff, there is no escape. Thus, Max Weber defends the values of the individual, of democracy and of political control over the bureaucracy: it is a case, therefore, of establishing limits to the power of the unstoppable rise of civil service and of saving a remnant of humanity in a society dominated by the ideals of bureaucratization.

5. *Scientific Language and Metaphorical Language in Max Weber: the Magic of Words*

This article is only concerned with Weber’s metaphors and its relationships with German literature. I do not have enough space to analyze his whole sociological theory of disenchantment of the world. It is worth recalling that in some of Weber’s publications

from before his serious psychological depression, there is a key idea which explains the internal motivations of human actors in historical processes, and which is related to our topic here. In his studies about the rural exodus of Germans to the west of the Elbe and in particular to Berlin, Max Weber proposed that the real driving force of the historical process is the *Zauber der Freiheit*, the ‘magic of freedom’. This powerful psychological enchantment of the yearning for freedom, acting as a kind of Hegelian ‘astuteness of reason’, leads to the emergence of the free individual from a situation in which he was subjected to patriarchal forms of organization and social domination. We can find a certain contradiction in that the author of the theory of progressive disenchantment of Western culture postulated a benign and charming power as the driving force of historical process: the *Zauber der Freiheit*.

But let us go to the second phase of our author’s thinking, after his serious illness. Max Weber tried very consciously to build up a conceptual structure for social science. His sociological categories are an attempt to use only well-defined concepts eliminating the magic of words, metaphors and allegories. He took the ideal of the old Faust as a model, exclaiming as he did: ‘If I could remove magic from my path...’ (*Könnte ich Magie von meinem Pfad entfernen...*) and yet, he is forced again and again to turn to non-scientific language, making a mixture of sociological concepts with the mythical and literary language of Goethe (or Rilke).

The topic of disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) of the universe is central to Max Weber’s thinking, because it was he who coined the analysis of Western rationalization as a process of growing intellectualization of the conceptions of the world, as a growing process of more sophisticated rationalization of social life in all its facets and as a process, in short, now expressed in a negative keyword of ‘demystification’ or ‘disenchantment’ (*Entzauberung*) of the world. And it is very curious that Max Weber used formulations belonging to the literary works of Goethe in this context: ‘If I could get magic out of my path...’. Weber is well aware of the 5th Scene, Act V, of Faust II. At midnight, four wise old women present themselves at the door of the palace where Faust resides. Finding the door closed, three of them leave: *Mangel* (want), *Schuld* (guilt) and *Not* (necessity). But *Sorge* (care or anxiety) remains alone, because only she is able to crawl through the keyhole to talk to Faust. *Sorge* (care) is always present and may enter through any crack. But let us listen to Faust’s monologue before meeting with *Sorge*:

Four saw I come, but those that went were three;
The sense of what they said was hid from me,
But something like ‘Necessity’ I heard;
Thereafter, ‘Death’, a gloomy, threatening word!
It sounded hollow, spectrally subdued:
Not yet have I my liberty made good:
*If I could banish Magic’s fell creations,*
*And totally unlearn the incantations,*–
Stood I, O Nature! Man alone in thee,
Then were it worth one’s while a man to be!
Ere in the Obscure I sought it, such was I,—
Ere I had cursed the world so wickedly.
Now fills the air so many a haunting shape,
That no one knows how best he may escape.
What though One Day with rational brightness beams,
The Night entangles us in webs of dreams,
From our young fields of life we come, elate:
There croaks a bird: what croaks he? Evil fate!
By Superstition constantly ensnared,
It grows to us, and warns, and is declared.
Intimidated thus, we stand alone.—
The portal jars, yet entrance is there none.

*Sorge’s* (care’s) answer is positive and she begins her dialogue with Faust in which Faust ends up being blinded by *Sorge*, who breathes in his face while saying: ‘Throughout their whole existence men are blind; / So, Faust, be thou like them at last’.

Returning to the use of this text in Weberian sociology, there are two different contexts in which Goethe’s sentence—‘If I could get magic out of my path...’—is used. The first one is part of the sociology of religion, in the context of the contrast between the ethics of Confucianism and the ethics of ascetic Puritanism. According to Weber, magic served as a reinforcement of traditional society and was never replaced in China by the prophecy of redemption or a native religion of salvation. The individual found in magic a way of escape from need and suffering, but this solution made the rational control of the world and of one’s own life impossible:

Like the educated Hellene, the educated Confucian adhered to magical conceptions with a mixture of skepticism while occasionally submitting to demonology. But the mass of the Chinese, whose way of life was influenced by Confucianism, lived in these conceptions with unbroken faith. With regard to the beyond the Confucian must say with old Faust, ‘Fool who turns his eyes blinking in that direction’; but like Faust he would have to make his reservation, ‘If only I could remove magic from my path…’

But I am more interested in another context. In her intellectual biography of her husband, Marianne Weber describes Max’s constant attempt to construct a social science based on clearly defined and elaborated concepts, referring to his effort to develop a logical ‘disenchantment’ of historical and sociological concepts, speaking of the will to establish a value-free social science, and ending with the following statement:

And only those who join Weber in his thought process will be compensated for the radical ‘disenchantment’ of those value-covered structures by a new truth-content. In his quest for truth, Weber everywhere ‘removed magic from his path’.23

Marianne Weber’s identification between Max’s efforts and those of Faust are significant. And yet, it can be argued that there is a contradiction between the scientific intent of the logical concept development of interpretive sociology and the use of certain metaphors from the literary world of Goethe, like ‘the search for the Daemon’ who pulls the strings of individual life, the characterization of ‘politics as a pact with the Devil’ or the definition of ethics as a ‘tragic conflict between gods and demons’ that rule the world of practical philosophy. In other words, the theorist of the disenchantment of society through science ends up re-enchanting the universe of social science through metaphorical language.

Certainly the ‘Basic Sociological Terms’ which opens Max Weber’s great treatise on Economy and Society leave no room for the magic of words. Here there is a logical structure of the concepts of interpretive sociology and it is probably the greatest effort of conceptual

clarification in the entire history of social sciences. According to Marianne Weber:

The language of the entire work, particularly of the theory of concepts, is very different from that of his other writings. The sentences are almost always short, subjects and predicates are close together, and there are no encapsulations. Arranged by numbers and letters, sentence follows after sentence, blow upon blow, as it were. The definitions are expressed pithily according to a peculiar formula: ‘Soziologie soll heissen,’ ‘Soziales Handeln soll… heissen’, ‘Betrieb soll… heissen,’ ‘Herrschaft soll… heissen’, etc. (‘Sociology shall mean…’, ‘Social action shall mean…’, ‘Organization shall mean…’, ‘Domination shall mean…’). These imperatives, however, are not a claim to the validity of the new constructs outside the framework of this special sociology; on the contrary, their meaning is this: ‘In my theory of concepts this shall be the meaning, this is what I call these structures for certain methodological purposes, and only the scholarly yield shall justify my procedure; let others sociologies and, above all, other disciplines proceed differently for their cognitive purposes.’ The illustrations and interpretations that are inserted between the definitions and that break up the substance that has just been compressed are usually couched in sentences with a transparent construction. The thought process moves at a brisk pace, a rhythmic pace, as it were, and anyone who has the capacity to understand it is swept along through the material by this logical verve.24

But this ‘logic of concepts’ is not always followed by Max Weber. His two lectures Politik als Wissenschaft and Politik als Beruf flourish over and over again in a mythical or allegorical language in which references to God and the devil, the various ‘daemons’, the obstinate struggle between the different gods and demons who populate the field of practical reason, are constant. Weber’s language repeatedly refers back to Greek antiquity, but to a Greece influenced by the classicism of Goethe. The contemporary situation forces us to realize that the monopoly of interpretation of the grand pathos of Christian ethics is at an end and the subsequent resurrection of the old gods, plural and diverse, from which the individual has to choose personally:

Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another. What is hard for modern man, and especially for the younger generation, is to measure up to workaday existence. The ubiquitous chase for ‘experience’ stems from this weakness; for it is weakness not to be able to countenance the stern seriousness of our fateful times.

Our civilization destines us to realize more clearly these struggles again, after our eyes have been blinded for a thousand years—blinded by the allegedly or presumably exclusive orientation toward the grandiose moral fervor of Christian ethics.\(^25\)

The end of Christian monotheism and its replacement by the conflict and struggle of various gods makes the present situation have a certain resemblance to ancient Greece, but there are also clear differences. In the ancient world, not yet free from their gods and demons, the conflict is actually lived as an evaluative conflict between gods (Aphrodite against Apollo, for example), or as a conflict between the gods of the city and the family gods, or a conflict between these and the ‘daimon’ of the individual. Today, in a disenchanted and demystified world, we can speak of a conflict of gods and demons only in figurative way. But it is interesting that Max Weber makes use of this language to highlight in an artistic way his thinking. There seems to be a certain contradiction between recognizing that the fate of our time is to have to live ‘without gods or prophets’ and the use of this mythical language, in which the very reference to fate itself ignores the fact of our living in a disenchanted world.


The second volume of ‘The Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion’, which contains essays on Hinduism and Buddhism, was published posthumously in 1921 under the editorial work of Marianne. This book begins with this simple dedication: ‘To Mina Tobler’, but absolutely nothing is said about this woman. Who was Mina Tobler? Coming back to Marianne’s Max Weber is the best way to answer this question. In the book we can find several references to her and her friendship with the Webers.

Just before referring to the ‘rise of Eros’ in Munich and Heidelberg led by the emergence of young artists with a new lifestyle, Marianne says that Mina Tobler was introduced at the Weber house by Emil Lask, a philosopher, friend and disciple of Heinrich Rickert. Marianne also says that Mina’s artistic temperament and experiences provided them with deep human and musical enrichment over the

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course of their friendship, which lasted many years. The truth is that the pianist Mina Tobler maintained a deep friendship with the Webers starting in 1907 and Max appreciated her artistic skills. In 1911, referring to a musical evening held in Berlin during the winter, Max writes that his close friend Mina Tobler played works by Mozart and Chopin, the latter especially wonderful, even physically, with such grace and power that it was a joy to see her in action. In the summer of 1911, Mina Tobler accompanied the Webers on their visit to the Bayreuth Festival. They also admired together the beauty of the cities of Bamberg and Würzburg. In April 1914, Max writes to Marianne about his trip to Zurich where he met Mina (‘Tobelchen’), who was residing there at the time. According to Marianne, their friendship was maintained until Max’s final months in Munich.

I will not speculate here about the sexual nature of the relationship between Mina Tobler and Max Weber. What seems certain is the deep attraction that Max felt towards her since they met in 1907 until the final years of his life. Anyway, what interests me is highlighting of Mina Tobler’s important role in two ways: First, she appears at the beginning of Max Weber’s withdrawal from ascetic rationalism, maintained until 1907 as an absolute virtue. In fact, Mina took part in discussions in Heidelberg about the ‘ascent of Eros’. Max Weber gradually revises his position of the complete subordination of the erotic, stemming from a highly repressive Puritanical sexual ethic. Second, and linked with this, a new assessment of erotic and aesthetic aspects of human existence as a form of escaping from an obsessively organized and rationalized world to a more authentic and vital world connected to the lost sources of life. Max Weber’s diagnosis speaks of the paradoxes of the Western rationalization process that seems to throw us into a world of petrified and meaningless human relationships. As he stated in one of his last lectures in Munich:

> The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world’. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations.\(^{26}\)

Faced with the so called ‘iron cage’ of bureaucratic reason there are only three possible outcomes: (1) a solution at the political level

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with the emergence of charismatic leaders who break the blindness of the state bureaucracy and political parties, a solution that Weber considers greatly problematic. (2) the gateway to the otherworldly realm of mystic life, a solution that Weber respects when it is lived honestly even if it involves the ‘sacrifice of the intellect’. And (3) the search for fraternity in the immediate relations between individuals. Erotic and aesthetic elements play an important role in this third solution, as beauty and love are forces having great and irrational power that link us to the sources of life.

Turning once more to the ‘Intermediate Reflection’ we find the contrast that Max Weber made between art and the religion of salvation. Although art has been used to convey religious messages, the development of intellectualism and the rationalization of life change the situation, to the formation of an autonomous aesthetic sphere:

Art takes over the function of a this-worldly salvation, no matter how this may be interpreted. It provides a salvation from the routines of everyday life, and especially from the increasing pressures of theoretical and practical rationalism. With this claim to a redemptory function, art begins to compete directly with salvation religion.27

Thus, there is a certain parallelism between eroticism and art to the extent that both favor a worldly departure from the rationalization of modern life. The artistic solution, perhaps also the conjunction between eroticism and art, is symbolically represented by Mina Tobler. Max Weber’s preoccupation with music from 1911 onward is the fruit of his conversations with her and her direct influence. In fact, Max writes the first sociological essay about music and does so from the perspective of the peculiarities of Western rationality. In the second edition of *Economy and Society*, Marianne included Max’s essay titled ‘On the Rational and Sociological Origins of Music’, which was originally published as a short book. Marianne writes that this essay was the cornerstone of the Sociology of Art that Max had planned, but never managed to write.

Max Weber conceptualized music from two aspects: first, as a typical result of a specific Western rationality, and secondly, as an escape from the undesirable effects caused by the same process of Western rationality. Music is a means of redemption from the increasing pressure of the rationalization of all spheres of life. And because of this double conceptualization, Max Weber’s relationship

with the pianist and music teacher Mina Tobler played a very important role.

Let us return, in conclusion, to the last triplet of Rilke’s poem: ‘Words still fail before the unsayable sources…’ Weber made this verse become truth, because the depletion of sociological concepts opened the use of metaphors in his thinking. Besides, music, always new, becomes a language capable of building a divine house for humankind. Max Weber, the theorist of the disenchantment of the world, also had the sensitivity to perceive the limits of reason and, if he could have read this sonnet, I think he would have agreed with Rilke: the magic of poetry and the magic of music can re-enchant the universe.