

Joachim Radkau, *Max Weber: die Leidenschaft des Denkens*  
 Carl Hanser Verlag: Munich 2005, €45, hardback  
 1007 pp, 3 446 20675 2

PETER THOMAS

## BEING MAX WEBER

Hearing of Weber's death in 1920, many in the German academic community might have thought the news referred to Alfred Weber, Professor of Economics at the University of Heidelberg. While his elder brother Max had recently made a forceful return to public affairs, he was still known principally as the *fin de siècle* advocate of a muscular national imperialism and the author of some significant, albeit occasional, articles in specialist journals. Although he had tentatively resumed teaching and a more overt political role—having resigned his own post at Heidelberg in 1903, due to a deep depressive illness—Max Weber's scholarly reputation remained limited at the time of his death to a relatively narrow intellectual circle in *Mitteleuropa*.

Thereafter, the elder brother reclaimed his birthright; only a few years later, Alfred could complain that his own students were more interested in 'Marx and Max' than in himself. In the first instance, this was largely due to the efforts of wife Marianne, who not only tirelessly promoted Weber's work, but also in a very real sense 'authored' the Max Weber we know today. At the time of his death, Weber's only book publications were the two texts necessary for an academic career, while the main body of his work—the vast mass of *Economy and Society*; *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*—either languished in manuscript or had appeared in specialist journals. It was Marianne who assembled these studies into posthumous collections and edited the unpublished texts, thus ensuring a growing but still limited reputation in the Weimar Republic. International sacralization came with Talcott Parsons's rendition of *The Protestant Ethic* into English in 1930 and highly selective use of Weber for the construction of his own structural functionalism. It was this edulcorated transatlantic version that was re-imported

into the fledgling Federal Republic as a 'good' German, tainted neither by Nazi collaboration nor Marxist sympathies.

In 1959 this image was decisively challenged by Wolfgang Mommsen's *Max Weber and German Politics*. Mommsen's meticulous reconstruction of Weber's 'unsentimental politics of power' created a furore in Adenauer's Germany. The counter-attack—and, to some extent, successful recapture—was led by Parsons himself at the Heidelberg *Soziologentag* in 1964. Weber's influence as a far-sighted liberal advocate of the 'ethics of responsibility', theorist of modernity and a founder of the distinctively modernist enterprise of sociology continued to grow, both in Germany and internationally. Less a distinct tendency or school than an ether in which the social sciences are bathed, his generic concepts—'the Protestant ethic', 'charismatic leadership', 'rationalization', 'disenchantment' and 'ideal types'—have entered the lexicon of modern intellectual life, if all too often stripped of the originary contexts of their formulation. Weber's standing remains such that Lawrence Scaff could argue that whoever is 'able to have his own Weber interpretation accepted could determine the further progress of the social sciences': 'Weber is power'.

Up till now, this whitewashing of the political dimension of Weber's thought has been accompanied by a comparable silence about his sexual and psychological history. Interest in Weber's legacy has produced relatively few attempts at an overall picture of the man. Despite several 'intellectual' biographies and numerous specialist studies, the sole 'Life' has been Marianne Weber's 1926 *Lebensbild*. Along with a survey of his family history, intellectual life and political engagements, this offered some judiciously chosen insights into the thinker's personal suffering during his seven-year breakdown. Unsurprisingly, the devoted widow's portrait tends towards the heroic. Marianne's considerable literary talents conspire to present a tragic titan of world-historic stature; the closing lines of this part-biography, part-eulogy rise to a scarcely credible pathetic fallacy: 'As he lay dying, there was a thunderstorm and lightning flashed over his paling head . . . The earth had changed.' The image contributed not a little to the formation of a quasi-cult around the 'myth of Heidelberg'. Belatedly translated into English as *Max Weber: A Biography* in 1974, the work has remained, despite its obvious limitations, the standard reference for those seeking a fuller picture of the thinker's life and work. A new biography has long been needed, both to encompass recent advances in Weber scholarship and to benefit from greater distance, both temporal and affective, from the man.

At over a thousand pages, including an extensive scholarly apparatus, Joachim Radkau's *Max Weber: die Leidenschaft des Denkens* aims to fill this void. Radkau has assembled a vast amount of data from varied sources: the ongoing work of the Munich-based *Gesamtausgabe*, prior biographical

studies and, most significantly, the closely guarded family archive material, usually inaccessible to researchers. In particular, unpublished correspondence between Weber and the women he was closest to—wife, mother, mistresses—together with their exchanges on him, provides a much fuller picture of his emotional life. (A short note at the end of the text indicates that Radkau gained access to this correspondence via copies of transcripts originally prepared for the *Max-Weber-Forschungsstelle* in Heidelberg, one of the participating institutions of the *Gesamtausgabe*, though the details of this minor social-scientific scoop remain unclear.)

By any standards, then, this is an important work. It is also somewhat eccentric. Radkau's organizing thesis is that 'nature' provides 'the often vainly sought missing link between Weber's life and work'. As he explains in his Introduction:

I want to portray Weber's life in three acts, with Nature as the generator of dramatic suspense. A sketch in the manner of a myth, certainly, or even better: an ideal type. For why not apply Weber's method to himself? One learns from him that we indeed need ideal types in order to grasp reality.

'Nature' here is to be understood in the broadest possible sense, as 'all that is given': not merely the opposite of an artificed culture but everything that we encounter as the limits (often uncomprehended) to our actions, whether these are imposed from without or from within. The 'passion' of the book's subtitle—*die Leidenschaft des Denkens*, the passion of Thought—is itself understood as a 'piece of nature in humans'. Even more significantly for Radkau, the term stands for Mother Nature, variously embodied in the figures of Weber's mother, wife and his later mistresses: the Swiss pianist Mina Tobler and, supremely, Else Jaffé, *née* von Richthofen, the sister of D. H. Lawrence's wife Frieda. These relationships play a central role in structuring the narrative. Radkau also marshals statistical evidence in his support: of the various key words, 'ideal type' occurs 187 times in the digitalized version of Weber's works; 'charisma' and 'charismatic', over 1,000 times; 'technique/technology' and 'technical', 1,145 times; but 'nature', together with its cognates, appears 3,583 times.

Radkau's own development provides a further clue to this approach. Born in 1943 near Bielefeld, Westphalia, Radkau's doctoral study on the Weimar emigration to the US was followed by a shift in the 1980s into the field of environmental history, with works on nuclear power, German industrialization and a technological history of wood. A historian at the University of Bielefeld, his 1998 *Das Zeitalter der Nervosität: Deutschland zwischen Bismark und Hitler* was a wide-ranging enquiry into the discourse and treatment of 'nervous disturbance' under the Second Reich, arguing that the failed resolution of this social malaise played its part in the nazification of German society.

In the figure of Weber, Radkau seems to have found an alternative path, a potential resolution to the contradictions of the *deutsche misère*: in 1920, the thinker finally discovers the peace that was inexorably slipping away from his contemporaries, only to have it cut short by his untimely death.

The trope of nature may seem a distinctly unpromising approach to a thinker so firmly focused on the specifically cultural—and, indeed, political—dimensions of human life. Even in those works where Weber's attention is turned to the pre-modern world, he is more concerned to emphasize the ways in which men shape and are shaped by their societies than their proximity to the organic; the Hebrew prophets of his studies in world religion being a case in point. Nevertheless, before coming on to the broader problems, it should be said in Radkau's favour that his detective-story approach, with the revelation of one clue after another pointing to the overall solution, provides a compulsion and coherence that renders the book, despite its length, remarkably readable. The tempo and density of the prose are constantly modulated; scholarly reflections and technical questions give way to literary allusions, historical narrative is displaced by the more conversational tone of a hospitable seminar. We step here into a gallery of late nineteenth-century *Bildungsbürgertum* Germany, precociously struggling to come to terms with belated industrialization and imperialist expansion, against a background of unresolved domestic questions; and follow its hubristic entry into the Great War, dashed hopes and subsequent political turmoil. One initial limitation should be registered, however: given the chronological switchbacks of Radkau's method, the lack of a subject index to complement that of names is a serious handicap.

Radkau's three acts derive their titles from metaphors found in Marianne's canonical presentation: 'Violation of Nature', 'Revenge of Nature', 'Deliverance and Illumination' (*Erlösung und Erleuchtung*); their relation could be regarded, perhaps curiously for a study of Weber, as eminently 'dialectical'. Act One introduces the Weber household, headed by the worldly Maximilian Weber, scion of a Westphalian linen merchant family and successful National Liberal politician under Bismarck's chancellorship. Marianne would describe him as 'typically bourgeois, content with himself and the world', self-satisfied and easily appeased—quite the opposite to the combative, volcanic temperament of his oldest son. But the presiding figure—at least as far as young Max's affective life is concerned—is the Thuringian Protestant mother, Helene, who nursed the little boy through a near-fatal attack of meningitis. A close, agonistic relationship with his younger brother Alfred, born in 1868, shaped the subsequent childhood years. In 1869, when Max was five, the family moved from Erfurt, Thuringia, to Berlin, soon to be the rapidly modernizing capital of the new Reich. Here the father's political circle became Max's first introduction to the wider world. Three semesters

at Heidelberg from 1882 introduced the young scholar to hard drinking and duelling circles; Helene is said to have slapped his dissolute-looking face on his return. A year's military service followed in Strassburg, on the Reich's western border, where the 20-year-old Weber found a political mentor in his uncle, the historian Hermann Baumgarten, an erstwhile 1848 liberal who had latterly turned to Bismarckian medicine as cure for Germany's 'national illness'. Baumgarten's daughter Emmy, mentally unwell, was a first romantic interest.

From such influences Weber was summoned back to Berlin in 1884; he would not leave the family home until his marriage a decade later. It was under his parents' roof that he first established the compulsive work patterns that were a bid to keep 'self-indulgence' at bay. Doctoral and post-doctoral theses on medieval trading companies, with close scrutiny of the Spanish and Italian sources, and ancient agrarian society, were followed by the massive, empirically based study of East Elbian agriculture for the prestigious Association of Social Policy. During this period, the 'violation of nature', as Radkau portrays it, operates at a number of different levels. Intellectually, Radkau reads Weber's 1894 inaugural lecture at Freiburg—on taking a chair in Political Economy; one of the founders of modern Sociology, he never held a post in that discipline—as a misuse of nature. Weber's uncompromisingly political Freiburg address famously called for nation to be put above economy: the Junker estates, increasingly manned by cheaper Polish labour, must be recolonized with native German peasant farmers to save the Reich from 'polonization'—and if this meant the destruction of the Junker class, so be it. Radkau has little to say about the nation-building thrust of this argument; what upsets him is the way in which the argument is made. For Weber claimed that the danger of a Polish invasion lay in their 'physiological cleft' from the Germans. This is taking 'naturalization' too far and opens up impossible contradictions for Weber. His later 'anti-naturalism', Radkau opines, may be a shame-faced reaction to this 'advocacy of naturalization in a manifestly unscientific fashion'.

A second 'violation of nature' is meanwhile taking place on the sexual front. In 1893 Weber had guiltily dumped the mentally ill Fräulein Baumgarten to marry his second cousin, Marianne Schnitger. Radkau paints a picture of unequal emotional and romantic investments. The young Marianne, subsequently an accomplished scholar in her own right and author of a feminist history of marriage, appears to have fallen deeply and blindly in love. The cooler Max addressed her with the romantically ambivalent—for his class and time—appellation of 'comrade' and busied himself with ensuring that he would have a greater disposition over her dowry than was then conventional. It was a union that would endure for a lifetime, despite seemingly remaining unconsummated on account of the husband's impotence

in the wedding bed (although not, as we shall see, outside it). Following Karl Jaspers, Radkau argues that Weber's sexual problems during this period contributed strongly to his later nervous crisis; they form 'the fundamental fact of Weber's passion story'. It was during the early years of his marriage, too, that Weber's already demanding routine solidified into a 'workaholism' in which others have seen the causes of his breakdown. But the dramatic catalyst—and end of Act One—is Weber's impassioned accusation of his father in November 1897, in front of the assembled family, of selfishly desiring to keep his wife for himself. Max Senior died a few months later, still unreconciled with his son. Radkau notes the classically Oedipal dimensions of the conflict, but curiously declines to consider its impact in these terms. The following summer Weber plunged into mental crisis.

Act Two, 'Revenge of Nature', charts Weber's descent into a depression that reached its nadir in 1900, driving him to seek permanent leave from university and teaching duties, eventually granted in 1903. He was plagued by a 'daimon' (the Socratic resonance is emphasized) of sleeplessness, with migraines, painful limbs, inability to work and recurring wet dreams. The latter were the subject of an intensive correspondence between Marianne and her mother-in-law Helene, of which Radkau leaves the reader feeling somewhat over-informed. 'After a five-week pause . . . in the last few days of our trip and also tonight again four pollutions', wrote Marianne in a typical report of 1903. For Weber himself the worst torment was the insomnia, which drove him to experiment with various addictive sleeping pills and potions, heroin among them. Radkau suggests that the bromine Weber took for his insomnia may have been responsible for the apparent impotence, as against the Freudian explanations others have offered.

The reasons for the breakdown have long been a subject of conjecture by Weberologists, given the absence of reliable evidence—in great part due to Marianne's destruction of Weber's apparently ruthlessly honest self-analysis, written when he was recovering in 1907. Radkau says that, before destroying it, Marianne had sent the self-analysis to Jaspers, who later wrote that it had involved an account of Weber's first sexual arousal upon being beaten by a maid-servant. Radkau argues that it would have been unlikely for a maid to have administered a punishment of this kind to the adolescent oldest son of such a household, and suggests that it was Max's mother who had him over her knee. He maintains, however, that the breakdown had less to do with feelings for either mother or father, let alone exhaustion from overwork, than with a fundamental and 'violent misinterpretation of his own nature'. It was Weber's 'unnatural' politicization that was the root of the problem. 'In truth, he was no born warrior and ruler . . . but he didn't want to admit that': in this sense, Radkau specifies, we can speak of masochistic 'violation' of Weber's nature. This repression now returned to wreak its havoc. Weber

sought solace in travel (often to Italy, particularly around the turn of the century), experiments with vegetarianism and, later, visits to the decidedly *haut-bourgeois* counter-culture gathered on the Monte Verità overlooking Lago Maggiore—according to Swiss anarchist Fritz Brupbacher, ‘the capital of the psychopathic International’.

Radkau offers perceptive hypotheses on the reasons for the great diversity of Weber’s interests in his discussion of this phase, dictated by external events but also intimately tied to personal suffering. As he notes, the period of Weber’s greatest preoccupation with methodological issues is also that of his most serious doubts regarding his personal epistemological capacities. By 1903, now formally freed of all academic duties, Weber felt able to take on the co-editorship with Edgar Jaffé of a new journal, the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, which would become the pre-eminent site of German social science until closed down under Hitler. The two sections of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* were first published there, on either side of the three-month us tour that took the Webers from New York, Niagara and Chicago to Oklahoma, North Carolina, Baltimore and Washington. (Of Chicago: ‘the whole gigantic city . . . is like a man whose skin has been peeled off and whose entrails one sees at work’.) A further revival of energies was evident in 1905, when Weber learnt Russian in a matter of months in order to follow the revolution more closely.

By 1909 a ‘new era’ had opened in Weber’s life, ‘a spiritual revival accompanied by a new feeling of bodily well-being’, contemporaneous with—but, according to Radkau, as some impatient reviewers have failed to note, not caused by—a first brief romantic encounter with Edgar Jaffé’s wife Else. Before her marriage, Else von Richthofen (a distant relation of the Red Baron) had been Weber’s student at Heidelberg, one of only four women at the university, and had completed her doctoral thesis on factory legislation under him. He had helped her obtain a position as a factory inspector for women workers in Karlsruhe. Else was—according to Radkau, who depicts her as a veritable incarnation of ‘Mother Earth’—the great love of Weber’s life. But the affair was shortlived. Soon after, Else began a relationship with the more sexually confident Alfred, for whom she left her husband; it would last until Alfred’s death in 1958. The jilted Max meanwhile sought consolation with the pianist Mina Tobler.

Act Three of Radkau’s study, ‘Deliverance and Illumination’, details Weber’s steady return to his full powers after 1910. These are the years in which some of Weber’s most enduring concepts, such as ‘charismatic leadership’ and ‘rationalization’, are most fully elaborated, with the production of *Economy and Society* and the studies of world religion; they are also the years of the ‘value judgement controversy’ in German social science and increasing political engagement. Weber’s war-time interventions might

seem to offer a stumbling block for Radkau's 'deliverance' thesis. Though sceptical from the start about the Reich's military and diplomatic policies, Weber was exhilarated by the popular enthusiasm: 'Whatever the outcome, this war is great and wonderful'. He resolutely rejected the view that the conflict might have been avoided. 'Responsibility before the bar of history' demanded that Germany resist the division of world power—and that means ultimately control over the nature of culture in the future—between 'Russian officials' and 'the conventions of Anglo-Saxon "society"', with perhaps a dash of Latin 'reason'. 'We have to be a world power, and in order to have a say in the future of the world we had to risk the war'—albeit with the crucial caveat that the vast economic strength of the us be kept out of the conflict. Weber favoured a short war and limited territorial gains on national economic, not pacifistic grounds: high war-time wages and fixed securities threatened to damage the country's competitive spirit and hence its economic vitality. The one essential territorial aim, he argued in a public speech of 1916, his first in two decades, was to secure Poland under the military protection of Germany.

Weber's activity intensified after the surrender. He polemicized furiously against the Spartacists, declaring in January 1919 that 'Liebknecht belongs in the madhouse and Rosa Luxemburg in the zoo'. Although he condemned their murder (which occurred only 11 days after his outburst), this hardly absolves him, as Radkau notes, of contributing to the 'brutalization of political demagogy'. Nor, as Radkau does not note, did he moderate his rhetoric: less than two weeks later he renewed his attacks on the revolution as merely 'the satisfaction of hatred and the craving for revenge'. These heated words were pronounced in Munich, at the first public hearing of *Politics as Vocation*—with *Science as Vocation*, perhaps the text upon which Weber's contemporary reputation as apostle of moderate liberalism depends. He was the only non-official participant in the 13-man Constitutional Committee that drafted what would become the Weimar Republic's constitution, arguing forcefully for the formula of plebiscitary leadership democracy—it was this unequal marriage of weak parliamentarianism with charismatic 'elected monarch' presidency that eventually allowed Hindenburg to usher Hitler into power. As an advisor to the German delegation negotiating the Versailles treaty in the summer of 1919, Weber forthrightly demanded the rejection of the 'peace of shame', whatever the consequences. Early in 1920, Mommsen records his reply to a student that, in defiance of Versailles, his sole concern now was 'how to ensure that Germany once more had a great General Staff'.

Given the scale of his biography, Radkau's treatment of this tumultuous period is notably curtailed. The First World War gets fewer than twenty pages, the constitutional debates and *Politics as Vocation* less than ten. The



upshot of the war was to enact Weber's separation from politics, Radkau argues, and—despite his continued, energetic interventions—to confirm him as essentially non-political. 'Max entered politics without much alacrity or system or results. "Weber" the politician is more comedy than tragedy.' By the end of 1919 at the latest, Weber had recognized that 'his way was not that of the *vita activa*, but rather the *vita contemplativa*'. A single, enigmatic formulation from *Economy and Society* about the 'energetic concentration on certain truths' is offered as evidence for such an unexpected conclusion. United at last with his own nature, so long denied, Weber looked set to enjoy a new and productive scholarly phase, but unexpectedly died of pneumonia on June 14th, 1920, at the age of fifty six.

Radkau's narrative attempts to provide a compelling account of both the coherence and the discontinuities of the 'life'. There is something of the comedic in its structure, in a strong Dantean sense: after years of being misled by the street cries of politics, the hero, accompanied by his Beatrice, finally turns his ear to the inner, more profound call of science and its ethics. At the same time, the organizing trope of 'Nature' is sufficiently widely conceived to allow Radkau to expand his field of vision well beyond any conventional sense of the word: family, nation, profession, mother, wife and lovers at different times all play the role of 'that which is given', for which, or because of which, Weber suffers in a passionate excess that slowly confirms his own true nature.

Radkau is not shy of drawing more general conclusions from this tale. Weber 'became the authority of a sociology that denied its own naturalistic origins', with the implication that to recover the true complexity of the 'naturalism' of Weber's life and work could prompt a wider reconsideration of the relationship between the social and natural sciences. This represents, as Radkau himself recognizes, a 'Weberian' revision, so to speak, of a key Weberian thesis; for Max, in opposition to his brother Alfred, fought bitterly against naturalism in the social sciences. Nevertheless, Radkau argues plausibly that Weber's real concern was to champion the true variety of natural phenomena, in opposition to a dogmatic conception of a unitary nature. His legacy does not necessarily banish the theme from the social sciences *per se*, but rather opens the way for a more nuanced and realistic engagement with it. In this sense, Radkau has not merely written a biography of Weber, but presented a case study of a hidden counter-history that is at the same time a proposal for the future.

This strength, however, is also the source of the study's more serious weaknesses. Over-reliance on ambiguous natural metaphors leads Radkau to under-explore alternative explanations, even those suggested by his own research. He takes at face value Weber's claim to have been justified in his confrontation with his father, despite presenting evidence that

would support a more classically Freudian perspective. That his father had been 'no politician in the full sense, but rather a semi-bureaucrat', of the type scorned in *Politics as Vocation*, indicates an unresolved enmity that could have been more fully explored. Though its professed aim is to demonstrate that 'nature' is the missing link between Weber's life and his work, the biography's emphasis falls far more strongly on the former. Weber's texts receive varying amounts of attention, depending upon their concordance with the structuring thesis. Similarly, the focus on 'passions' comes at the cost of a survey of the intellectual traditions within and against which he worked, resulting in some forced interpretations. For example, Weber's use of thought experiments to yield abstract categories that permit empirical apprehension of a reality they do not exhaust—the 'ideal types'—is read largely in a transhistorical and almost naturalist register, related to Weber's growing appreciation for the 'continuum of spirit and nature'. Analysis in relation to other social-scientific methodologies—such as the development of the notion of 'real abstraction' in Marxist traditions, arguably a more rigorous form of concept-building—might have produced a more satisfying survey of the continuing intellectual, rather than personally affective, significance of this aspect of his thought.

Above all, it is the significance of politics in Weber's life and work that threatens to disappear from view. Radkau provides some treatment of political events and contexts, and frankly relays some of the more distasteful, for contemporary sensibilities, of Weber's pronouncements. However, Radkau's narrative strategy and organizing thesis—perhaps chosen as a counterbalance to Marianne's *Lebensbild*, which, understandably, placed much greater emphasis on her husband as a public figure and rather less on his extra-marital dalliances—mean that Weber's political interventions are all too often used to supplement the main story of his struggle with his inner demons. By the end of this quest, politics appears as that which the hero had to overcome in order to be himself. Radkau seems to take Weber's by and large unsuccessful forays into politics—attempting an alliance between social democrats and liberals, swaying between left and right rhetoric at the war's conclusion, outnumbered in the German delegation to Versailles—as confirmation that he was indeed, 'by profession: a scholar', as Weber himself declared during the polarizations of 1920, when 'insanity' dominated politics 'from the left to the right'.

Yet at another moment, he had told Mina Tobler that 'the political' was his 'secret love', and politics clearly played a rather more central role in Weber's life—scholarly, public *and* emotional—than Radkau allows. The emergence of 'charisma' in Weber's vocabulary in the immediate pre-war period, for instance, is integrally related to a position discontentedly subaltern to the political culture established by Bismarck, but without concrete alternatives;

this may have intersected with, rather than resulted from, a contemporaneous personal experience of 'grace'. The further development of 'charisma' may have occurred at a moment when Weber was blessed with a 'second chance' with Else; but it was also when Weber was advocating the need for a 'charismatic leader' capable of giving Germany a 'third chance'.

Radkau's argument that the truth of Weber's life is to be found in the 'unpolitical' posture he adopted shortly before his death should be greeted with a healthy scepticism, as a conveniently 'comedic' closure to this tale of redemption. Arguably, Weber's position in the spring of 1920 was an eminently political act, an Olympian refusal of the polarization of class forces in the revolutionary period that left little room for his own preferred national-integrative hegemonic strategies. Had he lived through the next tumultuous decade of the Weimar Republic, it is hard to believe that such a seasoned veteran would have resisted the inner call to re-enter the fray. The zigzagging of his prior political engagements, thrust followed by defensive guard, suggests that this hypothesis is at least as probable as a self-confirming 'circle of nature'. Radkau may have attempted here to make a necessity of the contingent.

Yet his suggestion that the 'true' Weber is the scholar and not the politician is fully of a piece with influential contemporary interpretations. Unable to deny the evidence amassed in the aftermath of Mommsen's intervention, these readings rely upon the customary qualifications that have been used for the integration of some of the least democratic of modern German thinkers into the transatlantic liberal conscience. Whatever his earlier mistakes—so the story goes—the 'great' Weber is the voice of a balanced ethics of scientific responsibility subulating a more unstable ethics of political conviction—a particular type of *Lebensbild*, which its proponents do not hesitate to offer as contemporary counsel. The warp and woof of this biography's entire narrative, however, provides enough evidence that one of the 'natures' given to Weber, one of the 'daimons' under whose torments he suffered right up to the end, was that of his own class fraction. A neurotic *Bildungsbürgertumer* like many of his contemporaries—exceptional in the extent of his suffering, rather than the type—Weber shared in their frustration with the Reich's inability to resolve the contradictions of the German *Sonderweg* and realize its true world-historical nature, as bearer of a rationalized modernization eclipsing its imperialist competitors. Weber may yet be remembered for the sophisticated form he gave to this passion; science for him was a form of politics continued by other means, while political efficacy—if we are to judge by deeds rather than words—was the end in which science found its ultimate justification. 'We are all "occasional politicians", seeking 'to influence the distribution of power within and between political structures', he told the first audience of *Politics as Vocation* in Munich in 1918. For Weber,

as for Machiavelli, everything depended upon recognizing the opportunities of the moment. Perhaps this is the most accurate characterization of the ‘missing link’ between his life and work. If so, it is not the one sought in this voluminous but misconceived work. For all that, in the Germany of the *große Koalition* Radkau’s ‘re-naturalized’ hero—transcending political conflict to find consolation in personal and mystical life—would find himself much at home.