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Sociology's Case for a Well-Tempered Modernity

Individualism, Capitalism, and the Antisemitic Challenge

MARCEL STOETZLER

In this chapter I begin by arguing that in the very text that constitutes one of the finest moments of classical sociology's commitment and struggle for progressive, liberal society, Durkheim's 1898 intervention in the Dreyfus affair, "Individualism and the Intellectuals," ambivalences are operative that undermine this commitment and point instead to contradictions at the heart of modernity itself. Then I turn to another canonical text and argue that Max Weber wrote *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as a pro-capitalist challenge to German nationalist denunciations of the capitalist, or the American spirit, as mere utilitarianism, while maintaining intact the rejection of utilitarianism that Weber himself inherited from such nationalism. I suggest that Weber's specific argument on capitalism and (national) culture and its strategic aim of delegitimizing reactionary (typically also antisemitic) nationalism also underpins his conception of "the Jews" in *The Protestant Ethic*. Durkheim's and Weber's rejections of egotistic, economistic utilitarianism contain elements of the reactionary and antisemitic discourses that these two founding fathers of the discipline of sociology aimed to oppose. In the concluding section I argue that these ambivalences can be understood only by reference to the larger sociopolitical framework that classical sociology inherited from nineteenth-century liberalism.

Durkheim: Defending Nonegotistical Individualism against Spencer and the Economists

Perhaps Durkheim's most famous essay is "Individualism and the Intellectuals," his 1898 intervention into the Dreyfus affair.¹ This short but

iconic text marked the end of the decade in which he had published three of his major works, *Division of Labour in Society* (1893), *Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), and *Suicide* (1897), and it stood at the beginning of the period that would result in his fourth major work, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). That year also marked the turning point in the Dreyfus affair (1894–1906): in January 1898 Emile Zola had published his crucial text “J’accuse,” emerging therewith as a key defender of the captain’s case, and in March the leading anti-Dreyfusard, Ferdinand Brunetière, a literary historian and member of the Académie Française, had published his widely read reply, “Après le Procès.” It is as a response to Brunetière that Durkheim wrote “Individualism and the Intellectuals.”

Brunetière had formulated his reply to Zola and other high-profile defenders of Captain Dreyfus as a general attack on intellectuals and the beliefs they, in his point of view, typically held. Chief among these intellectual beliefs was Herbert Spencer’s individualism. Spencer, wrote Brunetière, “argued that the military profession was an anachronistic survival of barbarism in the age of industry and commerce,” an element of classic bourgeois enlightenment critique (such as in Adam Ferguson) that survived in Spencer’s writings. Individualism was for Brunetière “the great sickness of the present time.” The “self-infatuation” of intellectuals who arrogantly “rise above” laws and the statements of army generals in order to judge them by their scientific methods and logic, which is indeed what those who defended Dreyfus against his detractors in state and army (quite rightly) did, are “truly anti-social.”²

Brunetière’s concern was that the cohesion of a society under attack from corrosion by individualism needed to be defended, and this in turn required the defense of the authority of state and army. This conservative (i.e., compared to his full-blown racist colleagues, relatively moderate) anti-Dreyfusard represents thus a significant aspect of the zeitgeist of the period against which Durkheim posited the new discourse of sociology. It is of course one of the fundamental questions of the discipline of sociology whether modern society produces its cohesion spontaneously through the division of labor, the invisible hand of the market (Adam Smith), or “the law of differentiation and integration” (Spencer), or whether it needs robust moral, cultural, religious framing by intentionally created institutions and consensus. Comte for example, “had no confidence whatever in the possibility that the cross-national and even intranational social ties

necessary to cement the highly differentiated and specialized activity of industrial society would spontaneously emerge.” Even when “industrial society” will have been “properly reorganized,” the “social humanity” or “voluntary cooperation” will have to be “reproduced at every moment . . . because it rests on an (unnatural) preponderance of ‘sociability over personality’ and on a subjective consensus of mind, heart and body which likewise requires a reproductive—in Comte’s terminology, ‘rebinding’, i.e. religious—practice.”³ Only in *Division of Labor* Durkheim had argued that the developed, modern division of labor gave rise to strong (“organic”) solidarity that made remaining elements of “mechanical solidarity,” based on likeness, less relevant and necessary—an argument that can be read as a critique of ethnic nationalism. When Durkheim increasingly (and surely under the impression of various social conflicts that erupted in the 1890s, not least the Dreyfus affair) abandoned this rather optimistic position, he seems to have repeated a shift that others had executed before him (Saint-Simon and Comte included) and that many more would repeat after him.⁴ The constant repetition of this shift is, to no small extent, the history of sociology.

The wider historical background for this ambivalence is that the version of liberalism that trusted social harmony will emerge spontaneously and naturally if only no one interferes with the market learned throughout the nineteenth century to doubt its own wisdom, most prominently perhaps in the 1848 revolutions.⁵ The market economy itself produces fragmentation rather than harmony (not least in the form of a dissonant working class), which needs to be attended to by (national) culture and the state.⁶ The paradox that the totality of economy, society, state, and culture as under the dominance of capital produces unity only by way of producing fragmentation is one of the fundamental contradictions of modernity that the social sciences grapple with. All practitioners of the discipline of sociology in its classical period seem to share, though, the notion that the moral, cultural, religious code, if needed at all, must reflect and accommodate modern society as it presents itself, namely as based on individualism, rational-choice market exchanges, and the division of labor. Therefore one cannot simply aim to reimpose old-time religion: modern times call for the creation of new religions, such as the “religion of humanity” (Comte) or the “cult of the individual” (Durkheim) or charismatic political leadership underpinned by ethically driven capi-

talism (Weber), as well as at the margins of the discipline, for example the celebration of “effervescence” by the hyper-Durkheimians Bataille and Caillois.⁷ It is significant that Durkheim’s “Individualism and the Intellectuals” pivoted on his suggestion that modern society cannot but reject challenges to the rights of the individual as sacrileges. Anti-individualism is sacrilegious because, according to Durkheim, individualism is the new religion, and the only religion modern society produces. Durkheim’s notion that the cult of the individual is now the religion that holds society together is in this essay undergirded by a polemic against Spencer, utilitarianism, and “egotistical individualism”: he calls utilitarian individualism “a ferment of moral dissolution” (a choice of words that is rather close to a conservative, typically antisemitic *critique* of modern society) and contrasts it to “eighteenth-century liberalism” that he claims has penetrated French institutions and “our whole moral organization.” He claims that the “idealists” (including Rousseau, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel) fought against the utilitarian ethic because “it appeared to them incompatible with social necessities” (although in fact utilitarianism knew of social utility). The “utilitarian egoism of Spencer and the economists” equals “crass commercialism which reduces society to nothing more than a vast apparatus of production and exchange,” while Kant based his ethics on “faith and submission.”⁸ The strange and surprising point is that Durkheim’s celebrated liberal republican rejection of Brunetière’s attack on the Dreyfusards overlaps in the core of its argument with that of the enemy. Against Durkheim *and* Brunetière, I would like to suggest, “Spencer and the economists” need in the present context to be defended, as Durkheim seems to have been driven to caricature and demonize Spencer—whose thought occupies the area between liberalism and positivism that is also, for example, Durkheim’s—by the same impulse that drove the antisemites.⁹ This antimodernist impulse inhabits, of course, in Durkheim’s case the subtext, not the manifest center of the text.

Durkheim agrees with his opponents that only religion can produce “the moral unity of the country” but holds against them that “we know today that a religion does not necessarily imply symbols and rites, properly speaking, or temples and priests.” “Essentially, it is nothing other than a body of collective beliefs and practices endowed with a certain authority.” If religion should be defined in such a generic way, most late nineteenth-century observers (as well as still many early twenty-first-

century contemporaries) would probably consider nationalism to be the strongest candidate for being the religion of contemporary society; yet Durkheim argues that the “religion of humanity, of which the individualistic ethic is the rational expression, is the only one possible.” “To the extent that societies become more voluminous and expand over vaster territories” (an argument earlier proposed by Spencer), situations become more diverse and circumstances more mobile, to the effect that “traditions and practices” need to “maintain themselves in a state of plasticity and inconstancy.” At the center of Durkheim’s argument for the inevitability of individualism is a non sequitur: because of “more developed division of labor,” everybody’s “contents of consciousness” become increasingly differential. This leads toward “a state, nearly achieved as of now, where the members of a single social group will have nothing in common among themselves except their humanity, except the constitutive attributes of the human person in general”—a rather unsociological argument that omits the nation and all other structures of societal mediation.¹⁰ As Durkheim himself had argued earlier, the division of labor itself creates interdependence, society, and shared structures of consciousness, but unfortunately it does not produce *automatically*, in and of itself, cosmopolitanism and selfless humanitarianism. Durkheim continues with the equally dubious claim that communion of spirits can no longer be based on definite rites and prejudices because modern society has overcome rites and prejudices. Consequently, according to Durkheim, “nothing remains which men can love and honor in common if not man himself. That is how man has become god for man and why he can no longer create other gods without lying to himself.” None of this is plausible. It is on these grounds, however, that Durkheim believes that individualism is a “necessary doctrine”: “in order to halt its advance it would be necessary to prevent men from differentiating themselves more and more from each other” and “to lead them back to the old conformism of former times” (including mechanical solidarity), that is, to contain the general evolutionary tendencies of societies to become ever more extended, centralized and differentiated. “Such an enterprise,” namely halting or containing the course of societal evolution, “whether desirable or not, infinitely exceeds all human capability,” wrote Durkheim in a rather Spencerian, teleological, deterministic moment; history has shown meanwhile that there is no lack of “definite rites and prejudices” in modern societies. The

liberal (and socialist) belief in the irreversibility and linearity of progress, though, as paraded by Durkheim here, has proven to be a major liability to the struggles to stop disaster.¹¹

Weber: When Capitalism Was a Good Thing

Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is fundamentally a book about how capitalism turned from a good thing into a bad one, providing some hesitant implications about how the process could at least partially be reversed. From the history and actuality of capitalism Weber constructs a conceptual dichotomy between what he defines as essential and specific about modern, Western, bourgeois capitalism, and what is not so: essential, authentic, modern capitalism is contrasted with not specifically modern, or non-Western, forms or characteristics of capitalism, including the "pariah capitalism" of "the Jews."¹² Among the characteristics of the former (the "ideal-type" capitalism) is most prominently the drive for accumulation for its own sake, that is, neither for utility nor for enjoyment. Famously Weber credited Puritan Christian sects in the context of the English Revolution with having invented the "spirit of capitalism" in its specific, genuine form, while his narrative suggests that once it was "invented" and out there, it gained its own momentum, turned into an objective culture, became independent of its Puritan roots, and lost its "spirit," and the concern with material goods turned from a "light cloak" into a "casing hard as steel."¹³ Weber describes this process in which capitalism lost what—ideal-typically—should be its spirit, its being bounded, framed, and directed by a religious (Christian, Protestant, Calvinist) ethic, as a degeneration or regression toward "pure utilitarianism."¹⁴ Utilitarianism (or rather a caricature of it) was of course also one of the principal targets of nineteenth-century antisemites, as well as of Durkheim's specific effort at defending individualism against its detractors.

Weber gives few hints of the general discourse from which and into which his search for genuine as opposed to utilitarian capitalism was feeding, but they are clear enough: on one of the first pages of the first chapter he invokes Thomas Carlyle, perhaps the most influential author of a "cultural" or "ethical critique" of capitalism. Weber (mis)quotes Carlyle's formulation in the introduction to his 1845 edition of the letters and speeches of Cromwell that Puritanism was "the last of all our

heroisms.” (Weber quotes the original English but leaves out the word *all*.)¹⁵ He refers a few times to Matthew Arnold, and the famous formula describing the personality type produced by decadent (post-Puritan) capitalism seems to be an amalgam or paraphrase of bits from Goethe, Nietzsche, Stefan George, plus perhaps other turn-of-the century *Kulturkritiker* (critics of civilization): “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart.”¹⁶ Most prominently, however, Weber uses Ferdinand Kürnberger’s 1855 novel, *Der Amerikamüde*, “the one who got tired of America,” as a sounding board for his own project.

In the second chapter of *Protestant Ethic* Weber develops his “ideal-typical” concept of the “spirit of capitalism” out of a reading of two texts by Benjamin Franklin (of 1736 and 1748), which Weber quotes from Kürnberger’s novel.¹⁷ (Weber notes that he corrected Kürnberger’s translation according to the English original.) In the novel by the Austrian writer (one of the cohort of “disappointed” 1848 democrats that includes many key figures in nineteenth-century National Liberalism as well as radical antisemites like Richard Wagner) Franklin’s texts represent the spirit of America and are the contrasting foil against which the “German,” humanistic values of the novel’s protagonist, Dr. Moorfeld, are developed. Newly arrived in America, full of idealism and high expectations, the German emigrant Moorfeld is treated to a reading of Franklin’s texts right away in the first chapter of the novel, the starting point of the process that leaves him increasingly disillusioned with and indeed “tired of America.” (Moorfeld is appalled by New York’s mammonism and soon goes to Pennsylvania. However, the backwoods disappoint him too; they turn out to be neither pleasant nor romantic, i.e., quite different from German forests. He finds that the farmers are dependent on bankers and speculators in New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, who must have been the ancestors of those who in contemporary populist discourse are referred to as the East Coast.) The gist of Franklin’s texts that represent the spirit of America for Kürnberger and the capitalist spirit for Weber is, in Weber’s words, the celebration of “the honest man of recognized credit” (in the German version, literally “the credit-worthy man”) and the “duty of the individual to the increase of his capital which is assumed as an end in itself.”¹⁸ Weber correctly describes Kürnberger’s novel as a “document of the (now long since blurred-over) differences between the German and the American outlook [*Empfinden*], one may even say

of the type of spiritual life, which, in spite of everything, has remained common to all Germans, Catholic and Protestant alike, since the German mysticism of the Middle Ages, as against the Puritan capitalistic valuation of action [*Tatkraft*].”¹⁹ This national framing of the question of a noncapitalist *Empfinden* shows that the main thrust of Weber’s argument is indeed not a defense of Protestant against, as one might have expected, Catholic “spirits” but Anglo-Saxon Calvinist against German Lutheran *as well as* Catholic spirits. Weber surely saw the Calvinist spirit also active in Germany, though, and helping to strengthen it for the better of the German nation was the whole point of the book.²⁰

Kürnberger’s text was a contribution to the debate that after 1848 aimed to redefine German nationalism under conditions of capitalist modernization. Weber published (and finished writing) *The Protestant Ethic* just after returning from a visit to America in 1904, where he had observed that in certain Puritan sects “in the midst of modern capitalism the personal ethic of individual responsibility . . . had survived and was the basis for social action.” This, the admirable version of the spirit of capitalism, was thus not “utilitaristic.”²¹ Whereas Kürnberger’s America had been a (mid-nineteenth-century) vision of how Germany might but ought not develop, Weber’s argument constitutes a critique of “the illusions of modern romanticists” within the field of competing conceptions of German nationality as it had developed in German post-1848 liberalism.²² What Weber found in the United States he also found at home, although, regrettably, overshadowed by the more powerful cultures (“spirits”) of Lutheranism and Catholicism. As Barbalet writes, in *The Protestant Ethic* Weber aimed to answer questions that he had raised in his 1895 inaugural lecture about the German middle class’s (lack of) ability to satisfy national aspirations. *The Protestant Ethic* was in this sense “an instrument of political education.” When Weber complained in the 1895 lecture about “the hackneyed yelping of the ever-growing chorus of amateur politicians . . . [who] believe it is possible to replace ‘political’ with ‘ethical’ ideas,” and subsequently fail to do what *Realpolitik* demands must be done, then *The Protestant Ethic* seems to suggest a type of ethics that makes amateurish, hackneyed, moralistic, romantic yelping unnecessary.²³ (Seeing *The Protestant Ethic* as an “instrument of political education” also solves the puzzle of why it has survived a century of scholarly refutations that have shown that Weber got many of his facts and interpretations wrong.²⁴

Like any other powerful ideological construction, the text is immune to factual refutation—although the latter is always a good starting point of critique—but can be challenged only at the level at which it actually operates, namely the level of asking what kind of modern bourgeoisie can, or should, govern what kind of modern society.)

The Protestant Ethic is in this sense a polemic *against* the German nationalist denunciation of the (American) capitalist spirit as mere utilitarianism that nevertheless maintains the rejection of utilitarianism intact.²⁵ Weber, who inherits the legacy of German nineteenth-century National Liberalism (of which his father, Max Weber Sr., had been a functionary), continues its characteristic struggles to negotiate a place within German nationalism for “the capitalist spirit,” or to be precise, a politically and ethically attractive version of that spirit that would be compatible with what for German National Liberals were the specific values of the German nation. This ongoing renegotiation, the necessity to square capitalism with national culture, the search for culturally mediated and therefore benign, not so utilitarian, not so American, and, sometimes, not so Jewish capitalism, of which Kürnberger’s novel was a classic expression, is the general foundation of the ambivalence characteristic of nationalist liberalism. It was this ambivalence that made some National Liberals receptive also to antisemitism (Heinrich von Treitschke is the best-known example) and prevented others from consistently opposing it.²⁶ It would appear that *The Protestant Ethic*, a foundational text of the discipline of sociology, is part of that same general discourse; although it comes out *against* romantic nationalism and *for* the capitalist spirit, ambivalence remains.²⁷

The text’s location in this wider context also lends significance to the scattered remarks it contains on Jews, their characteristics and their alleged role in history. The connection to antisemitic anticapitalism is hinted at when Weber notes, apparently with sympathy, that asceticism condemned “covetousness, Mammonism, etc.” *Mammonism* is another keyword of late nineteenth-century *Kulturkritik*, criticism of modern civilization or culture, including its antisemitic variety. Weber also mentions Dutch Synods that excluded usurers.²⁸ Excluding usurers (however anyone may have defined that highly contentious term) does of course not make them antisemitic, but it signals an affinity between the discourse on asceticism and that on “Jewish capitalism.”²⁹ Weber also points out that “Calvinism

opposed organic social organization in the fiscal-monopolistic form which it assumed in Anglicanism under the Stuarts,”³⁰ a stance that he seems to sympathize with. He similarly opposed the state-socialist conceptions of leading members of the Verein für Sozialpolitik such as the antisemite Adolph Wagner.³¹ It is in these ways that Weber’s (typically National Liberal) ambivalences are woven into the text of *The Protestant Ethic*.

Jews and Jewish Capitalism

Weber’s position evolved in a protracted dialogue with his colleague Werner Sombart. Both had emerged from the tradition of German “national economists,” most of whom had a more or less state socialist inclination, meeting in a milieu where National Liberalism and (state-) “socialist” monarchism mixed, and it was in this specific context that they wrote their respective texts on what the spirit of capitalism was, who was responsible for it, and what was bad and what was good about it. Their positions primarily differ in where exactly they locate the dismal side of capitalism that endangers Western civilization, individualism, personality, and the amount of societal cohesion necessary to warrant civilization, individualism, and personality. For Sombart, trading and monetarization, summed up in the Jewish spirit, were to blame, while Weber was more original and pertinent in pointing at rationalization processes in the organization of labor, and, perhaps following Simmel’s analysis in this point, the wider social sphere.³² The cliché of the Jewish “commercial people” appears in this context as a reference to a group that was relevant merely at an early stage of the modernization process. In this sense, in Weber’s account, the Jews are excused. While Sombart’s critique of capitalism increasingly constructs a dichotomy between good, heroic, productive, martial capitalism and bad, money-minded, narrowly utilitarian, pacifist, parasitical Jewish capitalism, Weber arrives at a more dialectical view where the same historical force is responsible for the fantastic wealth and potential liberation (of the individual) produced by the modern economy but also for the “casing hard as steel” that suffocates individuality, personality, and *Kultur* (a dialectic that, again, is close to Simmel’s account and also a distant relative of Marx’s). Weber’s disagreement with Sombart’s emerging antisemitism did not translate, though, into a defense of Jewishness; liberals (like socialists as well) in the period took good care to avoid being suspected of “philosemitism.”

In this sense Weber wrote (in a footnote added to the text of *The Protestant Ethic* in the edition of 1920) that in the opinion of English Puritans, “Jewish capitalism was speculative, pariah-capitalism, Puritan capitalism the bourgeois organization of labour.” This (actually Weber’s, not so much the English Puritans’) argument is premised on a distinction between speculation and productive labor. According to this myth (or, as Weber might have put it, ideal-type), Jewish capitalism “looked to war, supplies from the state, state monopolies, commercial speculations, and the financial and construction projects of princes,” all, so Weber seems to imply, bad premodern habits that capitalism has since overcome.³³ Puritan-driven, proper modern capitalism, however, comes, according to Weber, with the peace-bringing *doux commerce* as sketched out (as an enlightened hope) by Hume, Smith, and Kant.³⁴

For Sombart, by contrast, the commercialization of economic life is the problem; trading is necessary but should not dominate and suffocate the creativity of heroic entrepreneurship. Sombart’s historical hero, the entrepreneur, shared “the freebooting, martial element that Weber had dismissed as a traditional form of capitalism,” i.e., as irrelevant and alien to modern capitalism.³⁵ Weber, in turn, tarred the Jews with the brush of what Sombart would have considered the heroic, un-Jewified, martial means of building the modern world while making a healthy profit.

The fact that Weber was sufficiently familiar with the reality of modern capitalist society to let the Jews off the hook in that respect does not mean that he was any fonder of them than Sombart was. The necessities involved in creating a coherent national culture that can salvage capitalist modernity both from its enemies and from itself remains the overriding value that would always trump sympathies for “minority cultures,” just as it made the National Liberals of Weber’s father’s generation dislike the good old Jewish stubbornness, the refusal to shed that annoying anachronistic remaining bit of “cultural difference.”³⁶ On the other hand, though, commitment to the humanistic education of the old-fashioned *Bürger-tum* of which he declared himself so proudly a member made Weber also claim that the Puritan ethic that he expected should inspire the salvation of modern, Western, capitalist civilization owed a lot to the spirit of the ancient Hebrews (a “philosemitic” but historically dubious claim).³⁷ Furthermore Weber and Sombart reflected in their disagreement a specific divergence within nineteenth-century antisemitism: whereas antisem-

ites of a liberal background (and also many socialists) had tended to see Jews as backward elements unfit for integration in a modern, bourgeois society, conservative antisemites (and also quite a few socialists) had blamed them for ushering in capitalist, liberal modernity. It was only the more radical antisemitism that emerged as an increasingly robust, though then still marginal ideology toward the end of the nineteenth century that combined and synthesized these two aspects in varying ways.³⁸ These two complementary main lines of nineteenth-century antisemitism seem to resonate in the subtexts of Weber's and Sombart's respective arguments about the Jews as too modern and therefore malignant, and as representatives of an outmoded, premodern economic mentality.³⁹

Sociology, Capitalism, Liberalism

In the process of proposing nonegotistical individualism, Durkheim revoked the more dialectical conception of individual and society that had underpinned his first works, including *The Division of Labour in Society* (written under the influence of and in conversation with Spencer, contemporary German moral philosophy and "socialism of the lectern").⁴⁰ Weber's and Durkheim's discourses are similar in that both defend the modern spirit by distinguishing it from utilitarianism. Durkheim argues against Brunetière and the antisemites in this respect very much like Weber argues against Kürnberger and German "romantic" nationalists (who were often enough also antisemites): the proper, modern (in Weber's case, National Liberal; in Durkheim's case, republican) spirit (Weber: Protestant-inspired capitalism; Durkheim: the religion of the individual) must be strictly distinguished from the base thinking of Spencer and the economists. Weber defends capitalism as nonutilitarian just as Durkheim defends individualism as nonegotistical. Both ignore that the antisemites whom Durkheim challenges head-on, Weber more between the lines, engage in a not entirely dissimilar project: trashing a straw man called Spencer or some equivalent and proposing a scheme of collective morality or quasi-religion (sometimes more, sometimes less openly national) by which the alleged dissolution of society in the modern age can be halted.

Why does any of this matter?

Part of the thrust of my argument is that Spencer and the economists need to be defended against the wrong kind of critique. Nineteenth-

century antisemites, but also liberal opponents of antisemitism like Durkheim, hardly give Spencer and the economists a fair hearing: they attack straw men, while at the same time reproducing some of the basic assumptions they pretend to challenge. The critique of false critiques is, though, the precondition of any emancipatory critique.⁴¹ The latter, informed by (self-)awareness of the “limits of enlightenment,”⁴² must therefore undertake to salvage and develop the Enlightenment elements of the doctrines of Spencer and the economists; this is the case even when, or especially when, it remains committed to the critique of the capitalist political economy whose apologists “the economists” are. The difficulty of the task consists in challenging the limits of Enlightenment and liberal modernity without betraying the humanity and individualism it has brought about for some and promised for all. The study of the liberal response to and involvement with antisemitism, including that of classical sociology, the “scientific” version of liberal and positivist social thought, is part of the analysis and critique of liberal modernity’s self-destruction.

The formation of sociological theory and that of (modern) antisemitism are related, partly cosubstantial, while at the same time competing, sometimes antagonistic phenomena, as sociology responded to, but in responding also followed, antisemitism, or rather followed some shared impulses. Sociological theory emerged as a liberal response to crisis phenomena at several points in the nineteenth century, while modern antisemitism is likewise a “travesty of a social theory” that offers in its phantasmagorias of “the Jew” and “Jewification” an explanation of the same society’s deficiencies and crises.⁴³ Modern sociology and modern antisemitism took their definite forms in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when both responded to phenomena (in Germany and France, to be sure) that can be described as a mixture of the final crisis of traditional society under regimes of intense modernization and early manifestations of a crisis of modern, capitalist, liberal society itself (overlapping but distinct phenomena). Several of the most influential antisemitic texts in the nineteenth century were written in France by writers who came from “early socialism,” in particular the field that resulted in France from the disintegration of the Saint-Simonian movement led by Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin (whose actual basis in Saint-Simon, however, is rather dubious) and its merger with the Fourierist school in the 1830s, in Germany from the left-Hegelian school (which likewise was only to an extent

based in Hegel's philosophy).⁴⁴ Both of these traditions were significantly parts of the wider liberal, democratic, and socialist currents of the time, inherited elements of the Enlightenment and had been produced by the era of bourgeois revolution. As such they are also fully part of the intellectual background of the formation of the discipline of sociology. One implication of this historical ambiguity is that the (according to some antisemites) allegedly Jewish science of sociology, like the wider traditions of liberalism, individualism, and rationalism (also sometimes connoted as Jewish), share some of their roots and lineages with their mortal enemy, modern antisemitism.⁴⁵

Durkheim and Weber, to be sure, were aware of antisemitism as a problem and reacted against it. The specific content of their reactions shows, however, an implicit—probably unconscious—acknowledgment that antisemitism reacted to perceived problems that were also their own concerns as sociologists: on the one hand, the atomization and disintegration of society; on the other hand, the suffocation of individual freedom and personality by that same society. The sociological concepts of the “thingness” of society, its “anomies,” the “casing hard as steel,” and, more abstractly, the predominance of structure over agency, society over community, commerce over sheer life, are also at the basis of what antisemites saw (and still see) as the “Jewification” of society. This allows us to ask to what extent sociologists proposed, consciously or not, sociology as an alternative, liberal competitor to antisemitism (as well as to revolutionary Marxism).⁴⁶

Saint-Simon and, at least initially, his followers had thought of Judaism as a crucial ingredient of the prospective religion of the future and also esteemed bankers highly as organizers of modern credit and thereby crucial for the industrialization and pacification of the world. According to Enfantin, the Jews in the past “exploited, by usurious money-lending, not the peasant—that was the privilege of the nobles—but the nobles themselves, a work of great social usefulness.”⁴⁷ In the present, Jewish, like any other bankers, promoted peace. Likewise a text by Auguste Colin (a Fourierist) stated that God had sent the Jews “everywhere to be apostles of peace and industry. They are the industrial and political *tie* between the nations; they are the bankers of the kings, and hold in their hands [the power to decide over] peace or war.”⁴⁸ Sweet commerce seemed to be promoted by God-sent Jews. These “philosemitic,” “utopian-socialist”

appraisals of the beneficial effects of, as it were, the Judaization of society from the first half of the nineteenth century were reflected in the emerging tradition of modern antisemitism by turning them into warrants for genocide. Such reversal gained currency when bourgeois thought lost the optimism characteristic of Saint-Simonianism and early, post-French Revolution liberalism, after the unbridgeable contradictions at the basis of liberal society had to be taken account of. Saint-Simon had seen human history as “marked by the constant decline of ‘parasitism’ and the rise of peaceful industry,” governed by “the producers” under the leadership of the most important merchants and manufacturers.⁴⁹ This account was proven wrong by actual nineteenth-century history: “parasitism” had not disappeared, nor was industry as peaceful, commerce as sweet as expected. The conviction that parasites were to be destroyed, though, stuck.

The antagonism to unproductive, parasitic eaters and those unable to “improve” the productive forces (in the first place, the warrior nobility and other savages) has, since Locke and Sieyes, remained at the heart of bourgeois thought and tends to provide it with its more revolutionary impulses.⁵⁰ Deep as this notion is built into the structure of bourgeois thought, it is reasonable to assume that subjects of bourgeois society who are by and large in agreement with its fundamental structures will be receptive to any argument that targets any group, including “the Jews,” as unproductive eaters or as endangering the productive power of society and the cohesion that warrants its reproduction (be that because this group is too savage and backward or too modern and cosmopolitan or too savage *by way of* being too modern). This specific ideological context of modern antisemitism is crucial, I argue, for an explanation of liberal society’s receptiveness to antisemitism and allows us to refer to it as the index of a more general and fundamental problem.

To the extent that sociology is an offshoot of the (lowercase) liberal tradition (as is socialism, generally speaking), it is also implicated in this problem.⁵¹ The crux of the matter is the question of who the parasites are: the nobility? traders and bankers? the Jews? the bourgeoisie? the capitalists? international finance capital? Wall Street? the East Coast? freemasonry? The question of which box (or boxes) the antiparasitist will tick depends on what political alliance he or she is in and who or what this alliance is supposed to be fighting. The bottom line is this: those to

be denounced, and perhaps persecuted, as parasites are those who do not contribute to creating and reproducing society, whereby one's own specific understanding of what that society is, or ought to be, is crucial. As formulating such understandings is one of the professional tasks of sociologists, they are crucially implicated in this mechanism.⁵² A social theory that would be a reliable tool in the struggle against antisemitism, or at least immune to it, would need to radically sever the link between a person's worth, or right to live, belong, and reproduce, from that person's contribution to the production and reproduction of society, let alone her or his compatibility with the cultural and political forms (including nation, state, gender) of that society. It would not know the concept of parasites.

Notes

Some sections of this article were previously published in my article 'Antisemitism, capitalism and the formation of sociological theory' in Patterns of Prejudice, 44:2, 2010, pages 161-94.

1. Durkheim, "Individualism and the Intellectuals," in *On Morality and Society*. An alternative (sometimes superior) translation with a useful introduction is Lukes, "Durkheim's 'Individualism and the Intellectuals.'" On the context, see Goldberg, "Introduction."
2. Lukes, "Durkheim's 'Individualism and the Intellectuals,'" 17-18.
3. Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity*, 215, 211.
4. Barbalet (in the context of his critical discussion of Weber) points to Adam Smith as the original modernist sociologist who based the capitalist spirit in "social processes rather than religious doctrinal subscription" (*Weber, Passion and Profits*, 12). Giddens suggests that Durkheim synthesized the opposing positions of Saint-Simon and Comte; according to Durkheim according to Giddens, "Comte was mistaken in supposing that the condition of unity in traditional societies, the existence of a strongly formed *conscience collective*, is necessary to the modern type of society," while Saint-Simon went too far when he suggested authority in modern society merely needed to be the "administration of things" (Giddens, *Studies in Social and Political Theory*, 239). However, it is questionable whether either Saint-Simon or Comte held the respective views in such one-sided form in the first place.
5. Stoezler, *The State, the Nation*, chapter 9; Langewiesche, *Liberalism in Germany*.
6. See Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*.
7. On Bataille and Caillois, see Falasca-Zamponi, "A Left Sacred"; Stone, "Georges Bataille and the Interpretation of the Holocaust"; Weingrad, "The College of Sociology and the Institute of Social Research"; Wolin, *The Seduc-*

tion of *Unreason*. Bataille and Caillois started out on their exploration of “the sacred” as constitutive of politics and as part of an effort to understand and fight fascism, but the solutions they came to recommend were so vehemently and undialectically opposed to utilitarianism and democracy that they ended up in the vicinity of fascism (at least temporarily and without thereafter having been able to account for the problem satisfactorily). The fact that radical but undialectical rejections of democracy and utilitarianism remain the principal inroad for fascism into emancipatory antihegemonic movements is what lends urgency and contemporary relevance to the otherwise ‘academic’ discussion of whether it was wise for Durkheim and his students to join into the reactionaries’ polemics against ‘Spencer and the economists’. What is at stake here is the old question of whether the Left can afford even the slightest ambiguity about its stance toward the Right while struggling against liberalism. It cannot.

8. Durkheim, “Individualism and the Intellectuals,” 47, 48, 45, 47. This would also seem like a rather dubious interpretation of Kant.
9. A recent, revisionist work on Spencer is Francis, *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life*. For a restatement of utilitarianism from within sociology, see Camic, “The Utilitarians Revisited.”
10. Durkheim, “Individualism and the Intellectuals,” 51. Durkheim added, as if he wanted to reach out to his Christian fellow citizens, that Christianity was already just another, somewhat disguised form of individualism anyway (53).
11. Durkheim, “Individualism and the Intellectuals,” 51–52. Perrin has written on Durkheim’s relation to Spencer, “While Durkheim misinterprets or misrepresents much of Spencer’s theory, he appropriates, with little or no acknowledgement, many of its essential features” (“Emile Durkheim’s *Division of Labor* and the Shadow of Herbert Spencer,” 793). What Spencer, perhaps unhelpfully, called the “organic” conception of society meant that society “naturally” evolves toward a state of minimal government and maximal extent of communal life and voluntary cooperation, thereby performing “a change from an incoherent homogeneity to a coherent heterogeneity,” which latter term is meant to denote a synthesis of community and individuality (Hiskes, “Spencer and the Liberal Idea of Community,” 600, 601). All this is in a register of liberalism not far from Durkheim’s.
12. Weber developed the notions of “pariah-people” and “pariah-capitalism” in the course of his ongoing exchange with Sombart (Ghosh, “The Place of Judaism in Max Weber’s *Protestant Ethic*”).
13. These formulations are from the famous and inspirational last few pages of *The Protestant Ethic*. On the problem of how to translate “stahlhartes Gehäuse,” see Baehr, “The ‘Iron Cage’ and ‘Shell as Hard as Steel.’” Weber writes already earlier in the text (*Protestantische Ethik*, 43) that the capitalistic order is (for the individual) a “faktisch unabänderliches Gehäuse” (Parsons translated this phrase as “an unalterable order of things”; *Protestant Ethic*, 54).

14. "The religious roots died out slowly, giving way to utilitarian worldliness" (Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 176). A similar formulation can be found on 177.
15. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 37; Weber, *Protestantische Ethik*, 27. I am not aware of evidence that Weber was influenced by Carlyle beyond using some of Carlyle's works as sources for his research on the English Revolution, but there are strong parallels that make Weber seem rather akin to Carlyle. Carlyle, a Scottish Puritan, had hoped, indeed like Weber, to infuse an unheroic present with some of the spirit of the English Revolution by, among other things, editing Cromwell's writings (Young, *The Victorian Eighteenth Century*, 22). There he praises English Puritanism as "a practical world based on belief in God" (quoted on 22). In his last work (six volumes on the history of Frederick the Great, 1858–65) he praised virtues in Prussian history such as (Puritan-inspired) thrift (18) and "Reformation sobriety" (37). Carlyle's crucial suggestion that the modern world is an age of machinery "in every outward and inward sense of that word" (in "Signs of the Times" [1829], quoted in Murphy, "Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians," 101), in which the individual can no longer accomplish anything out of individuality but only as a part of various "machineries" and institutions and with the help of mechanical aids, surely is close enough to Weber's view (as well as to Simmel's).
16. Weber, *Protestantische Ethik*, 169n28, 268n379, 161; Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 191n23, 280n96, 182. Although this seems to be Weber's own formulation, he put it in quotation marks as if it were an unreferenced quotation; it might also be an actual quotation that he could assume contemporaries would have recognized.
17. The passage Weber uses is in book 1, chapter 1 of the novel. Parsons obscures in his translation the reference to Benjamin Franklin by mistakenly referring to "Benjamin Ferdinand" instead (Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 50).
18. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 48–54; Weber, *Protestantische Ethik*, 37–42.
19. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 192n3.
20. Weber's mother, Helene, was a Calvinist of (on the maternal line) Huguenot background (Liebersohn, *Fate and Utopia in German Sociology*, 83). Lawrence Scaff notes that eleven-year-old Max was given a copy of Benjamin Franklin's autobiography in translation by Friedrich Kapp, a political ally of Max Weber Sr. Kapp had written an introduction to the German edition wherein he recommended that German fathers should teach their sons Franklin's practical maxims (Scaff, *Max Weber in America*, 12).
21. Loader, "Puritans and Jews," 639. Weber also contrasted to the American sects "the bureaucratic structure of the European 'church,' which offered no hope for the future" (Loader, "Puritans and Jews," 639). Bureaucratic domination is thus, next to utilitarianism, the other mortal enemy of a viable, modern, capitalist culture.
22. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 56. He discusses the contrast between German and Anglo-Saxon spirit also (127–28).

23. Barbalet, *Weber, Passion and Profits*, 19, 25, 27.
24. Most recently, for example, Steinert, *Max Webers unwiderlegbare Fehlkonstruktionen*.
25. Weber grants that Franklin's discourse is "already" overdetermined by utilitarianism; the ideal-type has to be constructed by mindful exegesis out of a less than ideal-typical empirical reality (the actual Franklin who still was a carrier of the genuine Puritan spirit but already affected by its degeneration; Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 52). In fact Weber, like Kürnberger, seems to have misconstrued Franklin considerably. Joachim Radkau quotes Mark Stoll (*Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America*, 86), who calls Franklin "one of the most secular Americans of the 18th century," and Eduard Baumgarten (in his 1936 study of Benjamin Franklin as "the chief instructor of the American Revolution") who emphasized Franklin's hedonism and Epicureanism (Radkau, *Max Weber: A Biography*, 600).
26. I have developed this problem in *The State, the Nation, and the Jews* and in "Cultural Difference in the National State." Kürnberger's "anti-Yankeeism" does not seem to contain any explicitly antisemitic elements (at least judging from quickly looking through his six hundred rather dull pages), but its general conception is in line with, for example, Gustav Freytag's "Debit and Credit," also of 1855 (see Achinger, *Gespaltene Moderne*): German Christian moral values, and indeed German ways of doing business could provide a socially sustainable form of capitalism that is contrasted to its rapacious and pathological (American, English, Jewish) forms. This liberal anticapitalism is quite different from, for example, Richard Wagner's antisemitism, but both discourses bear a family resemblance. For a comparative analysis of Freytag and Treitschke, see Stötzler and Achinger, "German Modernity, Barbarous Slavs and Profit-seeking Jews."
27. The interrelatedness of the question of asceticism with that of the nation is also evident in a famous quote from a letter Weber wrote in February 1906: "That our nation never went through the school of harsh asceticism, in *any* form, is . . . the source of everything I find hateful in it (as well as in myself)" (quoted in Radkau, *Max Weber: A Biography*, 317).
28. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 172, 260n7.
29. It is instructive to note that Weber's friend Simmel emphasized (especially in *The Philosophy of Money*) the double character—with benign and malign aspects inseparably, namely "tragically," interwoven—of the modern "money economy," thereby delegitimizing opposition to capitalism (antisemitic or otherwise), but nevertheless legitimated attacks on "Mammonism" when he defined in a text from 1914 Mammonism as obsessive and single-minded money making (Simmel, "Mammonismus," 312–13). Especially in the 1914 context of Simmel's supporting militaristic patriotism, Simmel adopts with this remark an element of antisemitic nationalism.
30. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 179.

31. Durkheim also thought society rather than the state should, in principle, bring about benign capitalism, although he might have welcomed a slightly more interventionist “visible hand” than Weber did.
32. Simmel and Weber addressed what Marx implied in the concept of “real subsumption” (Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 182); this is the ground on which some in the Marxist tradition (such as Sayer, *Capitalism and Modernity*) have aligned Marx and Weber.
33. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 270–71n58; Weber, *Protestantische Ethik*, 257–58n342.
34. Barbalet points to the ambiguity in Weber’s attitude toward the Jews and antisemitism in these terms: “Weber’s failure to contribute to a sociology of anti-Semitism is a significant omission . . . because he was aware of anti-Semitism and opposed to it when it touched him.” Weber was aware of anti-Semitism’s “consequences on Jewish opportunities and aspirations. However, in his sociological treatment of the Jews he regards the pariah concept and its corollaries as not only necessary but sufficient in explaining Jewish economic marginalization. That is to say, in Weber’s view, the conditions of the Jews are to be explained only by reference to the particulars and peculiarities of their religious beliefs” (Weber, *Passion and Profits*, 196). Weber constructs his ideal-types of Jews, Puritans, and others out of his “philosophical presuppositions” (in other words, prejudices) rather than coherent, empirically backed analysis (202).
35. Loader, “Puritans and Jews,” 644.
36. Abraham, *Max Weber and the Jewish Question*.
37. Weber might have adopted this idea from the Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz (Ghosh, “The Place of Judaism in Max Weber’s *Protestant Ethic*,” 242). Weber’s argument reflects here, as in many other ways, nineteenth-century National Liberalism that tended to defend Jews only when this could be instrumentalized for the apologetics of market capitalism. This is what prompted socialists like Mehring to equate all forms of defense of Jewish emancipation—what Mehring calls “philosemitism”—with the defense of capitalism and liberalism. In reality, of course, neither most Jews nor all defenders of Jews were particularly pro-capitalist. On Mehring, compare Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany*.
38. Stöetzler, *The State, the Nation and the Jews*, chapter 8.
39. Radkau similarly concludes, “The attitude to Jews and Judaism is also one of Weber’s great ambivalences, and there is much to suggest that it occupied him throughout his life” (*Max Weber: A Biography*, 427; *Max Weber: Die Leidenschaft des Denkens*, 673). On the concept of pariah capitalism, he notes that “many passages in Weber would have been at least as useful as Sombart’s ‘Jewish Book’ for anti-Semites who distinguished between creative and predatory capital” (*Max Weber: A Biography*, 438).
40. Durkheim, “La science positive de la morale en Allemagne”; Jones, “The Positive Science of Ethics in France.”

41. In other words, no emancipation without truth.
42. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 137.
43. Rürup, *Emanzipation und Antisemitismus*, 115.
44. Central to this process in Germany was the positivist reformulation of the concept of the *Volksgeist* that became a positive entity thereby, such as in Johann Herbart or Moritz Lazarus (Simmel's teacher) in social science, but also in nationalist and racist ideologies (Belke, Einleitung).
45. "Friedrich Gundolf, himself of Jewish origin, mockingly described sociology in 1924 as a 'Jewish sect'" (Radkau, *Max Weber: A Biography*, 431). Radkau quotes from Dirk Käsler.
46. The fact that Horkheimer and Adorno made understanding antisemitism a central aspect of their critical theory seems to reflect the conviction that the renewal of Marxism as an emancipatory theory—after it had been turned into an ideology of domination—needed to confront the issues at stake here.
47. Enfantin (1832), quoted in Silberner, "Pierre Leroux's Ideas on the Jewish People," 378.
48. Colin, quoted in Silberner, "Pierre Leroux's Ideas on the Jewish People," 378. Szajkowski quotes another Saint-Simonian writer (Barrault) with an almost identical statement ("The Jewish Saint-Simonians and Socialist Antisemites in France," 41); here the Jews are the "bankers of the angels."
49. Iggers, introduction, xxi.
50. I have developed this argument in "Antisemitism, the Bourgeoisie, and the Self-Destruction of the Nation-State." The notion that the nobility are a warrior caste, that is, savages (as in Sieyes, who suggested sending them back into the Frankish forests), is mirrored by the complementary idea that the savages are noble (as in Herder).
51. On lowercase liberalism, see Wallerstein, *After Liberalism*.
52. The discussion of the dialectic between sociology and antisemitism may help explain why sociology throughout the past one hundred years had so little to say on the subject of antisemitism; perhaps sociologists were reluctant to address antisemitism (or fascism) confidently because they had to fear to see in their portrayals distorted mirror images of their own discipline. (This suggestion was made by Nicole Asquith, University of Bradford, in the discussion of a presentation of an earlier version of this paper at the ESA conference in Glasgow, 2007.)

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