# Max Weber and the Limits of Reason

Lucie Miryekta

Faith in reason as the faculty by which man can ascertain and judge reality is dependent upon the assumption of a morally rational world. According to Max Weber, this faith in the power of reason manifested itself in Western intellectual history in the successive hopes of reason as "'the path to true being,' 'the path to true art,' 'the path to true nature,' 'the path to true God,' and 'the path to true happiness'". One after the other each path failed to produce the expected results.

Weber writes that if we wish to understand why reason is impotent in the tasks set before it in the age of reason we must first admit that experiential reality discloses to us a world that is morally irrational. The consequence of this proposition, which Weber argues is empirically verifiable, is that a corrective to our understanding of reason is urgently needed. This is the meaning of Weber's oft-misunderstood facts-values distinction: it is a call to acknowledge the limits of reason as the unique faculty by which man can judge reality.

Weber's robust criticism of reason is sometimes interpreted to mean that he is a champion of moral nihilism. This is not the case. Unfortunately, despite a renewed interested in Weber scholarship in the last two decades, Weber's moral philosophy continues to be neglected. Weber argues that reason must be supplemented with the decisive factor in the acquisition of knowledge: a well-formed character. For Weber, character is chiefly made up of an "iron-clad will," but also a historically formed imagination and ethics. Weber's insights into the appropriate use of reason have the potential to be highly edifying in an age when much confusion on this subject remains.