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The Political Anthropology of Social Theory

by

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> All coming to presence, not only modern technology, keeps itself everywhere concealed to the last. Nevertheless, it remains, with respect to its holding sway, that which precedes all: the earliest. The Greek thinkers already knew of this when they said: That which is earlier with regard to its rise into dominance becomes manifest to us men only later. That which is primally early shows itself only ultimately to men. Therefore, in the realm of thinking, a painstaking effort to think through still more primally what was primally thought is not the absurd wish to revive what is past, but rather the sober readiness to be astounded before the coming of the dawn
> Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*

> It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy has hitherto been: a confession on the part of it author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir
> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 6

> [knowledge emerges] in benevolent proofs and in discussions without envy
> Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 344B

This paper will explore the possibilities suggested in the title in two senses.[1] On the one hand, it will reconstruct the history social theory of the past two centuries with the help of a series of anthropological concepts that complement the genealogical method developed for analysing the history of thought by Nietzsche and Foucault. On the other hand, it will suggest the outlines of an approach for understanding social reality and the dynamics of the modern world that again rely on a series of anthropological concepts, combining classical philosophical anthropology, in particular the ideas of Plato, with social and cultural anthropology. In this way, it will try to explore with a degree of systematicity the old recognition that social theory, in order to be more than either a form of investigative journalism or a scholastic exercise, must use history and/ or anthropology in order to achieve both a degree of distancing, and a comprehensive and involved in-depth understanding.

Since two hundred years social theory represents a sustained effort to reflect on the nature, characteristics and dynamics of the modern world, or the 'spirit of the times'. Yet, at the same time it is also influenced by this same 'spirit of the times', and in manifold ways. Apart from the evident difficulty of reflecting on developments of which oneself is part, corresponding to W.V. Quine's famous metaphor comparing philosophers to sailors forced to repair their ship while at sea, such influences include political movements and ideological currents, including two world wars and a series of totalitarian regimes; various aspects of academic politics,[2] including the prestige of the natural sciences, and the exigency to imitate them, but just as importantly the building up of various schools and empires within academia, with disciples transmitting

(mis)understandings of their professors as the sacred canon; the need to secure research funding; the manner in which academic concerns are mediated by the requirements of publishers, who for commercial reasons are only interested in publishing increasingly shallow and repetitive textbooks; the need to attract media attention, in order to become a 'superstar', and then repeat unceasingly one's 'trademark' idea; or attempts to appeal to students by flattering and entertaining them in various ways. As a result of such impacts and influences, contemporary social theory is thoroughly entrapped in its own history, and what we transmit as our 'canon' is by no means a collection of the most important and innovative ideas of the last two centuries, as they should be, but the vector product of manifold political, social, cultural, ideological, administrative and economic considerations. Previous mistakes are often thought to be resolved by a 'synthesis' of one-sided positions, but this is clearly not satisfactory.

The task of each generation of social thinkers is to reassess the canon and thus improve and renew the analytical value and force of social thinking. This paper will attempt to make a contribution in this regard partly by revisiting a series of intellectual controversies in philosophy, sociology and anthropology (around the legacies of Kant and Hegel, in particular as linked to Hölderlin, Dilthey and Nietzsche; the work of Durkheim and Durkheimians, in contrast to Mauss, Tarde and van Gennep, but also Radin and Bateson; the problematic reception of Max Weber, rooted in the nature of his own reading experiences; and the impact of the ideological divide after the Russian Revolution); and partly by using anthropologically based concepts in order to build up a coherent theoretical framework.

Anthropology as a method to analyse the history of social theory

Given that the central reason for reassessing the social theory of the past centuries is its entrapment in its own history, intermingled with the social and political history of the past centuries, it is reasonable to suggest that the best way to escape this is to employ concepts that were developed outside the modern world, for the study of non-Western societies. The significance of anthropological work for such purposes is therefore evident. However, one must be careful here, as anthropologists were subjected to much the same factors as social theorists in general, including political ideologies and regimes, just as academic fashions. Thus, one must be very careful in selecting only such anthropological concepts that were not 'contaminated' by the same intellectual currents that the analysis tries to clinically identify and separate. The best such examples are concepts developed on the field and/ or on the basis of comprehensive comparative studies by anthropologists who confronted these intellectual and/ or political fashions and as a result came to be marginalised within anthropology itself. This paper suggests the extensive use of five such concepts: rites of passage, liminality and master of ceremonies, developed by van Gennep, one of the main intellectual antagonists of Durkheim, who as a result

came to be marginalised within the French-speaking academic environment, with his milestone 1909 work not being translated into English until 1960, and then developed further by Victor Turner; schismogenesis, a concept developed by Gregory Bateson in the 1930s on the basis of his fieldwork among the Iatmul in the 1930s, but whose work was repudiated by Radcliffe Brown and Malinowski, and who consequently never got a position in anthropology, in spite of his Cambridge PhD; and trickster, a term developed by Paul Radin on the basis of his PhD fieldwork among the Winnebago Indians in Wisconsin before WWI, but which was not published until 1956, with Radin – in spite of having been the first PhD student of Franz Boas, (re-)founding figure of American anthropology – never holding a stable position either, for a rather obscure set of reasons.

The main outlines of the methodological approach to be followed are the following. Just as in rites of passage the suspended 'liminal' situation forces the initiands to reflect on lives and the world around them in a particularly intense way, human beings who are forced to live through particularly intense moments of real-world large-scale liminality, like a revolution, a war, a natural catastrophe, or a major socio-economic crisis, are bound to be forced into similarly intense reflections. Such experience-based reflections can be particularly momentous for those who are at the same time undergoing a liminal moment in their own lives, in particular if connected to becoming adult. In such cases a coincidence of individual and collective liminality might produce a particularly marked effect.

The manner in which such experiences are channelled in the direction of intellectual projects much depends on the presence of available masters of ceremonies. In the absence of proper 'initiators', and given the uncertainties of liminal situations that undermine judgment, direction might fall under the influence of 'Trickster' figures. A central characteristic of tricksters is their outsider position: they are not part of the society that is being challenged by a crisis, so preserve a cool head and thus can give particularly shrewd advice; however, due to their lack of involvement, their suggestions can easily be interest-driven and not benevolent. As a result, far from offering a solution, this can easily result in schismogenic developments.

Academic debates away from *Academia*

1. Hegel, Hölderlin, Schleiermacher

The first and in many ways path-breaking and norm-setting case of intellectual mis-development can be rooted in an extremely concrete time and place: the first years after the French Revolution in Tübingen, Germany; a room where three young students, Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling lived

together during their university years, studying philosophy and theology. These facts as well known, just as the differing fate of the three friends: Hegel became one of the most influential philosophers of all times; Hölderlin a poet who lost his sanity for the last almost four decades of his life; while Schelling a rather obscure and 'irrational' philosopher, with little lasting effect. Hegel therefore 'won' hands down – except for the fact that some of the most important and innovative figures of in the history of philosophy had a different opinion: Nietzsche, Dilthey and Heidegger championed Hölderlin, having little respect for Hegel; while Voegelin, who considered Hegel outright a 'sorcerer', also appreciated Schelling.

Three factors can be added, on the basis on the anthropological hints, that can help to better understand the situation. The first concerns the coincidence of the French Revolution with the maturation of these three thinkers: both Hegel and Hölderlin were 19 years old when the events of French Revolution took place, just at the end of their first university years. The second concerns the respective talents of the three thinkers: while Hegel was incomparably the most successful of the three, both during their lifetime and after, there can be no question that he was by far the least talented. Schelling was considered a 'wonder child' and accepted to university at the age of 15, while Hölderlin was also exceptionally gifted. This poses the question concerning the reasons for the strikingly divergent successes. This matter is not so minor as it seems, as to a large extent – through the tremendous influence exerted by Hegel – it sealed the fate of European intellectual life. The answer can be given through attention paid to the significance of friendship for intellectual life, and to schismogenic developments. Friendship is a central concern of classical philosophy, where it was considered as the foundation of both political and philosophical life. This is again not without significance, as for Plato and Aristotle the acquisition of knowledge was tightly connected to positive emotions. Friendship in philosophy did not imply favouritism or clientelism, rather the manner in which mutual benevolence could help to spark one idea off the other. Ideas are not formed inside the heads of individual monads, but rather develop out of the 'in between' of two or more spirits. Friendship therefore plays an important role in explaining why Hegel could have developed, as he did, in the company of two such outstanding talents.

In order to understand how he managed to overtake them, however, we need the term schismogenesis. While Bateson developed the term in the context of ethnographic fieldwork, he argued that it can be extended to larger and more modern societies, while at the same time also be applied to explaining psychological processes, including divorce or schizophrenia, an approach he personally pursued. At this point in this regard I can only suggest a conjecture. The facts that Hölderlin's mind became clouded in the years 1803-1806, exactly when Hegel was working on his *Phenomenology*, were so far no put together, evidently considered a mere coincidence. But it might be that the connections were quite tight. Evidently, the more Hölderlin lost his strength and sanity, the more Hegel gained influence, dynamism and power. The

hypothesis that the two facts were related gains strong support by the fact that *exactly* this phenomenon is at the centre of the most famous and influential idea of the *Phenomenology*, the dialectic between the master and the serf. That struggle has an eerie similarity with the reversal of fortune between Hölderlin and Schelling, who were originally the masters, and Hegel, the former serf turned master. If this dialectic indeed captures the links between the three former friends, then the substance of the book might be much related to the long conversations they conducted together in Tübingen. Evidently, Hegel was much more diligent in transforming the spiritual impulses into a coherent theoretical work, capturing the 'spirit of the times', and thus gaining widespread public success.

I would like to stress that this is just a hypothesis for work, to be explored further. In particular, I do not argue that Hegel simply 'stole' the ideas of his two former friends. The point is besides moral or legal categories; though it does involve ethical issues. Ideas that develop through long personal conversations cannot be 'copyrighted'. Yet, the ethical issue is indeed connected with publication, in the literal sense of how to bring an argument in front of the public. This is why the time and place is so central, with the French Revolution and the new concern with searching at any price for the favours of the 'public', which would find its first full development in the personality of Richard Wagner. Hegel did not 'steal' the ideas of Hölderlin, rather he was much more skilful and 'entrepreneurial' in turning the in between of their conversations into an intellectual 'capital'. This led to a schismogenic process in the sense that the more he did so successfully, the more Hölderlin refrained from doing so, until he became totally closed into himself; part of his thorough disillusionment with their earlier enthusiasm about Enlightenment and Revolution.

The conjecture of a schismogenic relationship between the three former Tübingen friends, with Hegel's development being dependent of the regression of Hölderlin and Schelling receives further support from a central aspect of Hegel's thought and character: the rejection of any immediate experience that would evoke an unbroken participation in the world; a desperate need to look for indirectness and mediation everywhere. This surfaced with particular clarity in his hostility to the philosophy of Schleiermacher, who posed the experiences of dependence and participation at the centre of his thought. Through the legacy of Hegel the rejection of participation and an exaggerated importance attributed to consciousness at any price became a central concern in European thought, preparing the space for the similarly excessive position of Freud about the all-encompassing importance of the 'unconscious', read in the key of sexual reductionism; another example for schismogenesis.

2. Neokantianism and German Sociology

Hegelianism dominated much of the 19th century in German thought, until the rise to prominence of Neo-Kantianism after 1871. The time and place is again of fundamental importance: it is Germany, in particular the Prussian Empire, just after the euphoric victory in the Franco-Prussian war; a great revenge for the Napoleonic defeats. If for Hegel Napoleon was the *Zeitgeist* on a horse, then now this spirit was certainly embodied in Prussian militarism and – as Nietzsche so well perceived it – Neo-Kantianism was the perfect intellectual vehicle of that spirit. This represented, at the level of ideas, a thorough reduction of thinking to precision, rigour, logic, and formal rationality, which in certain areas, and to some extent did produce positive results, but overall ended up in a thorough formalisation and mechanisation of intellectual life. This was complemented by the reorganisation of academic life on the principles of Prussian bureaucracy, resulting in the rise of the German 'mandarins' (Fritz Ringer). Both developments had close affinities with Neo-Kantianism,[3] and this had a lethal impact on intellectual life, in particular the rising discipline of sociology in Germany. This can be demonstrated through four figures, by far the four most important thinkers of the period: Nietzsche, Dilthey, Simmel, and Max Weber.

Nietzsche was arguably the first victim of the new kind of academic politics. Having recognised his unusual talents, Friedrich Ritschl, his supervisor helped him to a position of full professor in 1868, at the even then unusually young age of 24. Nietzsche took this as an invitation to pursue work as he thought best fit, searching without any restraint for the origins of Greek thought, and published in 1872 *Birth of Tragedy* as his first book. In between, however, the crucial liminal moment of the Franco-Prussian war took place (whose significance he would recognise in the Preface to the 1886 second edition), promoting Neo-Kantianism into guiding position over German academic life. One of the rising stars of this new generation, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, immediately capitalised on the opportunity given by Nietzsche's falling out of step with the new reality in scholarship. As a result, Nietzsche became an outcast in academic and intellectual life, not having students, thus not building up a school on his own, not selling books, not having readers, and eventually even losing his sanity. Even once his books suddenly became read, the Neo-Kantian mandarins made it sure that young academics were careful enough in not taking risks to actually make use of his ideas.

The case of Dilthey was both different and similar. Dilthey remained within the 'system' as one of the most important philosophers of his times, but his work was also caught in between the spirit of the times, meaning the obligation to present a fully coherent, rigorous and systematic philosophy, and his deep-seated convictions that something is wrong not simply with the neo-Kantian agenda, but even some ideas of Kant – an unspeakable heresy in German philosophy since then. He was trying to lay the foundations of a 'critique of historical reason', arguing that human experience itself has a structure, and therefore it is not necessary for the 'theorist' to impose invented categories on reality, thus 'constructing' experience. He thus came to emphasise

the inherent relevance of biographic and historical data for understanding movements in thought. However, faced with the obligation of 'strict science', he failed to fully pursue and substantiate his intuitions. The relentless and innovative character of his thinking did not allow him to complete the second volumes of those works whose first volumes he published, thus was both directly attacked by Neo-Kantians and positivists (the latter especially concerning his psychology), and ridiculed indirectly – a particularly efficient weapon in Germanic academic life, already fully used by Hegel in rendering the situation of Schleiermacher in the 1820s all but impossible. As a result, Dilthey acquired a bad reputation, had few students, and even those who read and used him bewared from making this too evident – up to Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, who strategically attributed the ideas he took from Dilthey to Hegel, enabling him a smoother academic career, and eventually Habermas to (mis)read him as a Hegelian.

The direct impact of these facts on sociology can be seen through the lives and works of Georg Simmel and Max Weber. Simmel's work was profoundly affected by Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer – the wrong kind of philosophers in the age of Neo-Kantianism. As a result, Simmel was seen with suspicion and apprehension, not receiving a full professorship until 1914, and even then only at the marginal outpost of Strasbourg; having few students to transmit his ideas. This is usually attributed to his Jewish origins; but one must be a bit careful here, avoiding anachronism. Many scholars of Jewish origins found a position in the German university at that time, with a good part of the Neo-Kantians themselves being of Jewish origins. The problem with Simmel was rather the *combination* of being also too independent minded – and, most of all, not being a *bona fide* Neo-Kantian.

All this had a major relevance for Max Weber as well, without the shadow of a doubt the most important sociologist of all times. As it is well known, though often ignored, Weber had to abandon in 1897 his position as a newly appointed professor of political economy at the University of Heidelberg for reasons of health. He was not teaching at all for the next twenty years, and died soon after he returned lecturing, having practically no students to transmit his legacy. This illness has been (mis)read through a Freudian lens, but the truth, arguably, was much more closely related to the nature of German academic life, where Weber found his ever changing and radically innovative interests difficult to accommodate. In particular, his work was strongly and directly influenced by Simmel and Dilthey, and through Simmel by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard as well, thus again all the wrong kind of philosophers, from the perspective of Neo-Kantianism, whose main intellectual spokesperson and academic pope was Heinrich Rickert, somebody Weber knew personally since childhood, just as he did Dilthey. As a result, he could not render public his strong dependence on the work of Nietzsche, and eventually also became apprehensive in referring to Dilthey. This is a particularly clear and revealing case, as while references to Dilthey's work abound in his earlier methodological writings, after a 1905 correspondence with Rickert, in which the latter was charging Dilthey being 'obscure', Weber

stopped evoking to his work, except in a very general manner. Weber was a towering figure in German intellectual life, but – especially being outside positions of academic power – even he could not afford to challenge the 'mandarins'. His caution paid off, as his work was not directly attacked by them, thus could exert an influence after he died – though, paradoxically, it lead to the opposite problem, being considered as Neo-Kantian in its methodology.

3. Durkheim, Mauss, and French Sociology

The combination of neo-Kantianism and neo-positivism exerted a major and detrimental impact on French sociology as well, through the figure of Durkheim. Durkheim was educated by the main French neo-Kantians, Charles Renouvier and Emile Boutroux; had a crucial semester-long stay in Germany in 1886; and set out to place the foundations of French academic sociology on strictly neo-Kantian and neo-positivistic grounds. The impact is visible at the very core of Durkheim's theory, a series of equally untenable claims that everybody knows are problematic and yet transmit as the canon: the idea that the central theme of sociology is the study of social *facts*; that these social facts can be best understood as external constraints (which means that they are both *negative* and *legalistic* – equally untenable and deleterious considerations, setting off sociology in a direction radically opposed to Simmel's interest in 'sociability'), and finally in the divinisation of an abstract and lifeless conception of 'society', through 'collective representations' – another example how Durkheim conceived the protagonists of social life in the model of neo-Kantian philosophers.

Durkheim's ideas were not unchallenged, but for a complex set of reasons, not least due to his extreme skills in academic politics, he prevailed over all opponents. The two most important cases were Gabriel Tarde and Arnold van Gennep, each of whom dared to challenge directly his ideas, and paid very dearly. While Tarde had a major impact on Simmel (who considered his work as much more interesting than Durkheim's), and through Simmel on the Chicago School, this was cancelled by Parsons in the US, while in France the Durkheim school always prevailed. Van Gennep was similarly kept outside and ignored, until Victor Turner picked up his ideas in the 1960s. In sociology the concern with rites of passage and the term liminality was not taken up until the last decade or so, and sociologists kept using Durkheim for the study of the anthropological foundations of social life, even though this was exactly what van Gennep sought to provide with his book on rites of passage – and he was a much more competent person to do so than Durkheim.

The most important case, however, is Marcel Mauss. Mauss was personally educated by Durkheim, his uncle, to become his successor. Still, he never finished his thesis, did not become a professor, failed to publish books, and altogether lived a puzzlingly reclusive and withdrawn life. For some reason sociologists since then are circling around the obvious facts but fail to state

that this was because Mauss soon realised that Durkheim's position is untenable, but for manifold reasons failed to attack and thus 'kill' his father figure. He could only go so far in marking the radical difference he gained in his position after WWI and the Russian Revolution that in 1924 he published two series of essays, the first showing that gift relations and not sacrifice constitute the foundation of social life – an idea having evident affinities with Simmel's concern with sociability; and the second containing his radical critique of the Bolshevik Revolution – a stunning insightful analysis of Communist power that remained completely unknown until after the collapse of Communist systems, even left out by the French editors of his collected works, published in 1968-9.

This point moves us to the next main theme, which is the impact of the schismogenic developments of world wars, revolutions and totalitarian systems on the social theory of the 20th century.

4. Liminal moments and the absence of masters of ceremonies in European thought and politics

WWI was a major liminal crisis. Liminal situations represent a temporary suspense of order, where – in the case of rituals – stable structures are replaced by the 'absolute' rule of masters of ceremonies, who assure that the out of ordinary situation does not lead to chaos. It is by no means accidental that it was in the years around WWI that Max Weber developed his concept of charismatic leaders, by which he meant those individuals who are ready and able to step in and solve a crisis for which established, normal, rational procedures don't work. The term proved to be a mixed blessing, as Weber failed to distinguish between genuine charisma and its faking, not surprisingly given his general insensitivity to the problem of imitativeness – in this regard, he was indeed caught in the web spun by neo-Kantianism. While some charismatic leaders did appear in the 20th century, political events were, and are, increasingly dominated by figures who rather should be considered as tricksters (Horvath), or even demonic clowns, and who since the endgames of WWI systematically destroyed political life – meaning the search for a good society in the classical sense.

Social theory should have been keen to capture and analyse such developments, but it failed to do so, as it rather became itself a victim of the events, overwhelmed by the turbulent kaleidoscope of changes. To a considerable part this can be explained by a genuine but highly consequential coincidence: Durkheim died in 1917, Simmel in 1918, and Weber in 1920, so just around the end of WWI (even Troeltsch died in 1921 and Pareto in 1922). This meant that European sociology remained without masters of ceremonies exactly at the moment of the greatest collapse and danger of European culture; a fact whose significance was not fully realised, given that the standard history of ideas perspective fails to recognise the effective impact of liminal periods. Structures are not 'transcendentals', but are themselves formed under liminality.

The result was that the generation which came to maturity during WWI, those 'coming back from the front', on whom Max Weber was referring to in his 'Science as a Vocation' address, remained without a guidance.

This meant, first of all, that some of the best minds of this WWI generation were educated through friendship. The best example for this is the life-long friendship between Alfred Schütz and Eric Voegelin, both of them starting their university in 1919, just after WWI, in Vienna, just where Max Weber was lecturing the year before, and where everybody still vividly remembered his charismatic presence. Similar friendships had importance in the joint formation of Norbert Elias and Franz Borkenau in Frankfurt; or Károly Kerényi and Béla Hamvas in Budapest.

Second, it also implied that the actually leading figures of intellectual and academic life in the new fields of sociology and anthropology turned out to be rather secondary figures. A particularly clear case is Radcliffe Brown in England; but French sociology and anthropology, with the gradual withdrawal Mauss also remained without a proper leadership. In Germany, the cultivation of the legacy of Max Weber fell into the hands Alfred and Marianne Weber, given that Max Weber had no students, and of those who could play such a role Jaspers became a philosopher and not a sociologists, Robert Michels left for Italy and became compromised in Italian fascism, while Karl Mannheim was too young, and became an assistant to Alfred Weber. Both Alfred and Marianne were particularly badly suited to cultivate the legacy of Max, given that Alfred had a quasi psychic condition, due to his envy and resentment towards the towering figure of his older brother; while Marianne discovered among his husbands papers immediately after his death the correspondence with the two women he really loved, and of whom Else, in contrast to herself, had genuine intellectual talent. Concerning Alfred, I can only signal two main developments here: the first concerns the break between Alfred Weber and Karl Mannheim in 1928, as a result of which Mannheim moved to Frankfurt, together with Norbert Elias, then a young PhD student. This break, helped by the fact that a few years later, with the rise to power of Hitler, both Mannheim and Elias had to leave Germany, and also that around 1940 a major row and break took place even between them, due to a phenomenon that is evidently similar to the Hegel-Hölderlin problem, wiped the legacy of Mannheim out of German sociology, and left the 'Weberian' school to Alfred. The problematic nature of this can be best seen through the impact Alfred Weber had on Parsons' (mis)initiation into Weberian sociology.

This leads to the second point, a genuine comedy of errors. When Parsons came to Germany, he had every reason to believe that Alfred and Marianne Weber would provide him with a unique introduction into the thinking of Max Weber, given their extremely close personal relationship. It was never realised that *exactly* for this reason he should have bewared. The main interest of Alfred Weber was not to teach the key ideas of his older brother, rather to make it transpire that in actual fact *his* sociology was much more valuable. He also could not have been

bothered to read the works of Max Weber, relying instead on the two main common debates they had in the *Verein*, on 'bureaucracy' and 'value freedom'. Thus Alfred presented to Parsons an image of Max as a positivist, a methodological individualist and voluntarist, who was obsessed with the problem of bureaucracy, while he, Alfred, was a truly all-round sociologist, developing a comprehensive sociology of culture and civilisation. However, Parsons was exactly trying to escape, partly for reasons of individual career, this kind of sociology. So he came to decide that it was *exactly* this Max Weber he wanted to study: a good 'value free' sociologist, concerned with the rise of bureaucratisation and the 'iron cage'. The mistranslation was thus not so much due to Parsons's lack of competence in German, as his unintended reading into Max Weber's text what he was hearing about him from Alfred Weber.

The impact of Marianne Weber on the reception of Max Weber's work was no less disastrous. Marianne not only managed to lose practically all of Max Weber's manuscripts, for reasons that probably will never become clear, but also managed to mislead the secondary literature by systematically omitting and purifying Simmel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche out of the work of Max Weber – authors Weber tried to have Marianne read, but whom she could not understand and thus did not like.

As all this renders it evident, the separation of biography, philology and 'pure' ideas, characteristic of a Kantian and Hegelian legacy for the history of thinking is untenable. Dilthey was profoundly right: life and work are inseparable. The truth of Weber's work certainly cannot be reduced to aspects of his life experiences, but elements of such experiences can be vital to understanding this work, while accidental matters of context related to its transmission can codify and institutionalise a *false* image.

Social theory was decapitated as a consequence of events around WWI, just when clear and balanced minds were most needed. As a consequence, the situation became ready for a trickster logic to infiltrate and eventually take over social thinking, just as political life.

Anthropology as the foundation of social theory

1. experience

Experience is one of the most important terms in modern thinking. It played a central role in Descartes' fight against bookish learning. It was taken further by Kant, who emphasised the activity of the mind in 'constructing' experiences, and not simply mirroring reality, but this was based on his problematic stance that reality is chaotic out of which the mind must make an order

by imposing its own categories. Dilthey's fundamental intuition was that something was wrong with this idea, and human experience has its own structure, but never managed to conclusively substantiate his point.

This was accomplished by Victor Turner, who – unfortunately only towards the last years of his life – accidentally picked up the work of Dilthey, just as previously that of van Gennep, and realised that rites of passage and liminality provide the solution for Dilthey's problem. This encounter, arguably, was one of the most important events in the thought of the 20th century; a crucial step in retrieving connections between classical and modern anthropological thinking. One can integrate into this framework the approach of Voegelin on the experiences that engender symbols, much relying on Plato's ideas about *metaxy* and *apeiron* (see especially the *Symposium* and the *Philebus*), which resumed a central concern in Greek thought about the limitlessness and the in-between, which go back to the philosophy of Anaximander, and beyond.

2. home and participation

Through liminality, it is possible to capture the formative role and thus foundational significance of periods of transition and contingent events. Still, a period of transition, just as a liminal crisis or ritual assumes that something was already there before in the first place, which was not simply taken for granted in an intellectual or legal sense, but provided meaning for human existence. This shifts the experience of home and participation at the centre of human existence, ignored by the formal systems of Kant, the mediated and alienated dialectics of Hegel, and the excessive and foundational importance attributed to conflict by Marx. A concern with such an original or primordial experience of home has become a central preoccupation of the philosophy of Heidegger, much following here again Dilthey, especially the concern with *Lebenstimmung*; but after WWI Heidegger could not avoid to place the opposite experience of *thrownness*, linked to anxiety, at the foundation of his philosophy of existence. In spite of the importance of his reading of Nietzsche, Heidegger failed to avoid the trap Nietzsche pointed out. Heidegger's philosophy simply extends the experience of living through a liminal crisis into a cosmological account on the human condition, which was then further altered by Sartre and Arendt.

Here again, great steps forward were made by anthropologists, in particular the works of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Colin Turnbull, though given the enormous hostility of post-Hegelian and neo-positivist modern thought against participation, these ideas remained much marginalised, and often even ridiculed as romantic excesses. The most important, indeed foundational related work is Marcel Mauss's essay on the gift, complementing Simmel's sociability and Tarde's concern with the concrete social. However, even here, the standard and reference point is not romanticism but Plato and Greek thinking in general, where the world was

considered and lived as being fundamentally a *cosmos* and not a *chaos*, its central aspect being overwhelming beauty (considered as the foundational philosophical experience of marvel about the world by Plato; see especially the *Timaeus*); which is only visible in the modern world through being the etymological origin of the term 'cosmetics', exclusively use for tricks to enhance personal, desire-evoking 'beauty'.

3. imitation

The dissolution of the *cosmos* represents a step back towards *chaos*, which could be either redressed, or exacerbated. This is what the study of liminal experiences tries to capture. But for understanding the dynamics of liminal situations a further terms must be introduced: imitation. This is another aspect of human life completely ignored by rationalist and institutionalist approaches, which fail to realise that under liminal conditions the very suppositions of rationality do not work. Kant assumed maturity as the precondition of reason, which on the one hand excluded the experiences of children from thinking – a disastrous omission, which Huizinga or Bateson attempted to mend, without much success; and on the other simply confused maturity and liminality. Imitative processes can easily get hold of adults as well, once they enter a liminal state, and the effects can spread like a forest fire – as the highly liminal experience of going to movies can illustrate it. Some key though by no means mainstream figures of modern thought like Girard, Tarde or Tocqueville tried to call attention to the importance of imitation. However, even here, the classics provide a certain ground, especially Plato, who founded rational thought as an effort to *resist* the overwhelming power of imitation which, as he increasingly came to realise, was the real source of the corruption of Athens and the imminent collapse of democracy there.

The anguishing and imitative nature of liminal situations imply that those who are overtaken by the events find it very difficult to maintain composure and a sense of judgment necessary to overcome a crisis. Weber argued that out-of-ordinary situations are resolved by the rise of charismatic leaders, but he did not understand imitativity, and gave no hint about what happens if such charismatic leaders fail to materialise. This problem was again answered by anthropologists, by introducing the figure of the trickster.

4. trickster

The trickster can be conceived of as a fake charismatic leader: an outsider who is not touched by the emotional involvement of the events, and who can therefore insinuate himself at the centre of attention, pretending to hold the key to the solution while he is only interested in proliferating confusion, as his power is conditional upon the rest of the population being kept in a state of

limbo. This can help us to understand the nature of the totalitarian systems of the 20th century, and even the manner in which capitalism uses 'passionate interests' (Tarde, Latour, Horvath), and cannot be reduced to exploitation or oppression. The more European thinking became rationalistic, mechanical, formalistic, structural and institutional, the more social and political life became ready to be infested with imitative processes, like mimetic desire, presented by trickster figures as the nature of the human condition.

Here again Plato's times and thinking rhymes perfectly with this problem, as the Sophists were closely comparable to the tricksters of folktales, mythologies, and ethnographic accounts. Their combining of externalising rationalism, leaning towards cultural relativism with flattery and the luring with both wealth and a life of pleasure easily tricked and trapped the hubris-filled inhabitants of the city, intoxicated with themselves due to the success of Athens.

However, as Plato came to realise – and this represents a partial break with the 'historical Socrates' – there were greater enemies of the good life than the Sophists in decadent Athens: they were those men of theatre who were ruthlessly and unscrupulously only interested in gaining money by entertaining their public, pursuing the line of the least common denominator. It is for this reason that Plato argued in the *Laws* that his previous classification of political forms should be complemented with a new one, *theatrocracy*.

Here we come to touch upon another theme discussed by anthropologists, in the context of their analysis of rituals: the use of masks.

5. masks

When trying to come to terms with the use of masks in social life, we stumble upon one of the single most important and also most perplexing areas of anthropological research. While the widespread use of all kinds of masks in non-Western societies was one of the most evident and striking aspects of intercultural encounters since the 16th century, anthropologists notoriously failed to give a satisfactory account about the reasons for wearing masks; and by now even gave up on theorising it.[4]

This failure and omission to treat in a satisfactory manner such a central question is by no means accidental, as it points to another weak point of modern rationalism; this time concerning the Kantian dogma about the public use of reason. The public sphere, it is assumed, is fundamentally the realm of rational discussion. However, this approach fails to give justice to one of the most important aspects of human existence: appearing in the public is always risky; it can undermine one's own identity; therefore anybody entering the public arena is bound to wear a mask. To confuse such public masks with one's true identity as an egregious error, comparable to – and indeed closely related to – the ignorance of the specificity of liminal moments and

imitative processes. It is a precondition to the theatrification, indeed commedification of politics in modern societies – again strikingly comparable to Plato's *theatrocracy*.

It also renders strikingly visible the central problem with the contemporary world, which concern attitudes with respect to submitting to the judgment of the public; a great dividing line between noble and base spirits, in the terminology of Nietzsche. The problem, of course, is not with turning to a wider audience 'as such', rather a failure to realise the very delicate nature of judgment, once it is moved out of the level of personal and concrete acquaintance and familiarity – the only condition under which proper judgments can mature and be expressed; relying on a broad and anonymous mass public instead. In this public a face must necessarily worn. A failure to realise this results in a full rule of hypocrisy, deceit, dissimulation and flattery, hidden under the cloak of full and transparent truth.

6. schismogenesis

If liminal crises are not solved, and imitative processes proliferate, infecting social life with toxic emotions, then the breakdown of order will be complete: the previous unity of a whole will be replaced by fractions or fragments fighting each ever on an ever ascending scale.

Such developments might result in two different outcomes. In the first, these fragments are forced to live together, without ever mending the unity, surviving at an extremely low level of violent, anxiety-prone existence. It is exactly for such a situation, intractable either by the structuralist or Marxist anthropology into which he was educated, that Gregory Bateson developed his concept of schismogenesis; a concept that can help to further illuminate Reinhart Koselleck's pathogenesis of Enlightenment and modernity, focusing on the formative role of the civil and religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe, and even having affinities with his analysis of the links between critique and crisis. A particularly clear parallel case is provided by Plato's analysis of *stasis* in Athenian politics, which has been taken up in contemporary social and political theory by Eric Voegelin.

7. sacrifice

The other possibility was particularly significant for anthropology, though confusion here was also rampant. It is one of the central argument of anthropologists, from the times of Robertson Smith and Durkheim up to the recent theories of Girard, that social cohesion is assured, or a full-scale breakdown of the social order is prevented or mended, by rituals of sacrifice, or the sacrificial mechanism. While the idea, whether in the original version or in its reformulation by Girard, does capture an important mechanism, its extension into the very foundation of culture is unacceptable, as it reduces social life to the mere maintaining of order, paradoxically justifying

gruesome violence as necessary to avoid violence. At the theoretical level, it has been overcome by the work of Mauss, which has been ignored by Girard; while at the historical level, recent archaeological evidence helps to connect the emergence of rituals of sacrifice involving animal and even human blood to technological developments, first the rise of agriculture (see Çayönü), and especially the invention of metallurgy (see Arslantepe), justifying the intuitions of Heidegger concerning the inherently problematic character of technological progress, where something concrete and singular is destroyed in the name of an abstract and general 'other', following a purely quantitative logic.[5]

Conclusion

Notes

[1] This paper grew out of a very long-standing exchange of ideas with Agnes Horvath, whose contribution to the ideas expressed here is invaluable.
[2] Two recently published asides contained in letters written by Eric Voegelin to Alfred Schütz are particularly instructive in this regard. In a 6 January 1949 letter, written concerning a lecture he gave at Yale, he had the following to say, quoting inside information transmitted and commented by an acquaintance: 'Yale is an "intellectual slum" [sic in English] and some people have a deadly fear that someone might come along whose presence would invite comparison'; the problem with the talk he gave being that he 'was shamelessly well-informed on the topics under discussion and could speak about them from memory freely and with great precision. This scared people off. If I had just read a "paper" and had acted as though I was engaged in the most difficult of labours, and that I didn't know anything more about it than I had put together, everything would have been fine.' (Schutz and Voegelin 2010: 120). A 28 September 1953 letter contained the following reference to Santayana's *My Host, the World* (1953): 'Equally appropriate is his genteel characterization of Harvard as an "intellectual brothel." ' (Ibid.: 186).
[3] For further details, see Szakolczai (2011).
[4] See Pizzorno (2010).
[5] For more details, see Horvath (forthcoming).