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Disenchanting and Re-Enchanting German Modernity
with Max Weber and Rudolf Steiner

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation challenges the way scholars have defined modernity in terms of inaccurate dichotomies by comparing Max Weber (1864–1920), often considered the most important sociologist of the twentieth century, and Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), founder of *Waldorfpädagogik* and the esoteric social reform movement anthroposophy. While acknowledging that Weber and Steiner were different in several respects, this research illustrates that the individual histories of these men are more closely and complexly related than scholars have recognized. This includes the influence of esotericism on their thinking, as well as their profound concern with science and technological change and the effects both were having on human beings in terms of social, economic, and political relationships. These subjects are the focus of this dissertation, and investigating them through the lives of Weber and Steiner reveals that we need to re-evaluate how we draw comparisons and create categories in historical analysis.

Steiner and Weber have often been considered polar opposites, yet their core ideas are similar in important respects. Steiner expressed himself as a visionary narrator and Weber as a learned scholar, yet their education and the works they read and were inspired by were similar, resulting in a synthesis of natural science, romanticism, and esotericism. This explains their analogous reaction to technological progress, as well as their interest in Asian religion and culture as a way of shedding light on Western problems. Both feared that technological advance would eventually destroy society and human relationships unless it was carefully analyzed and rethought. For both men this involved imagining a human-centered science that took seriously the ideas of Far and South East Asia. They were both caught up in the social changes of their

time and passionate about shaping the future of Germany in ways that would enhance human dignity and freedom through the humane use of science and technology.

To understand their commonalities, this dissertation revisits the lives of Weber and Steiner from the perspective of a "sociology of generations," an idea introduced by Karl Mannheim in 1928. Weber and Steiner belonged to the same generation and therefore their lives, interests, and concerns can tell us a great deal about a particular moment in European history. Mannheim argued that historical generations were a sociological phenomenon in that cohorts or groups of people in their younger years could be similarly influenced by the same historical events, generating a sense of shared experience. It is crucial to recognize these similarities because they call into question the kind of dichotomies usually made by scholars—especially ones that marginalize esotericism such as "rational and irrational"—and they force us to rethink the problematic use of binary categories for interpreting early 20th century German history.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Introduction

This dissertation calls into question the way scholars have defined modernity largely in terms of inaccurate dichotomies. By comparing Max Weber (1864–1920) and Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), two individuals often thought to occupy opposing positions in these categorical binaries—for example, modern and anti-modern, religious and scientific, progressive and conservative, pseudo-scientist and authorized scientist, academic thinker and popular thinker, esotericist and secularist—this research illustrates that the individual histories of these men are more closely and complexly related than scholars have recognized. While acknowledging that Weber and Steiner were different in several respects—for example, in terms of their backgrounds, view of nature and especially of the supernatural—a closer examination reveals they had major interests in common. These include the influence of esotericism on their thinking, as well as their profound concern with science and technological change and the effects both were having on human beings in terms of social, economic, and political relationships. These subjects are the focus of this dissertation, and investigating them through the lives of Weber and Steiner reveals that we need to re-evaluate how we draw comparisons and create categories in historical analysis.

As J.Z. Smith pointed out in one of his earliest essays, there are good and bad ways to compare, and also comparison serves a specific function, namely, "as a means for overcoming strangeness."[1] Categories and concepts should never be reified because they require constant adjusting. The assumption that esotericists and spiritual reformers were/are irrational and anti-modern while scientists and academics were/are rational and modern will be shown to be too

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[1] J. Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 27.

simplistic and demonstrably false—even in such extreme and controversial cases as early 20th century Germany. This project will help scholars rethink the motivations of historical actors, especially those often labeled as "esotericists," to better understand their actions and opinions within the context of rationality and modernity versus irrationality and anti-modern.

Irrational Enchantment and Rational Disenchantment of Modernity

To provide background for the chapters that follow, this introduction includes a discussion of two interpretations of "modernity" that emerged at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. These apparently competing visions are generally assumed to be opposed and have been described in various ways as, on the one hand, "enchanted," "irrational," and "romantic," and, on the other, "disenchanted," "rational," and "liberal/democratic." Furthermore, it was assumed that the "disenchanted modernity" was victorious, a narrative that became instantiated in the academy through a triumphalist account of history culminating in secularization.

This is especially true for the ideological interpretation of the history of modern Germany. Many scholars during the 20th century interpreted the rise of National Socialism as the prime example for why an "irrational" or "enchanted" modernity is a dangerous mistake of historical progress and the process of modernization.[2] Yet recently scholars have revisited this

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[2] For example, George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964); Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961); Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik. Die politischen Ideen des deutschen Nationalismus zwischen 1918 und 1933* (Munich: DTV, 1983); Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997). Much of this debate revolved around the notion of a German *Sonderweg* or "special path," discussed below. For an account of the background of this debate, see David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

received narrative to reassess not only its accuracy, but its embedded biases.[3] Some have argued

that disenchantment never happened, that upholding such a narrative privileges a Eurocentric,

elitist interpretation of the world grounded *only* in science and rationality. Furthermore, they

have demonstrated that similar circumstances as Germany can be found in other nations at the

same time, such as Spain and Romania, as well as non-European contexts, for example, in

Argentina.[4] Rationality and science are both historical constructions traditionally confined to a

specific "Western" or European way of knowing, and thus the argument for disenchantment has

ethical implications in that it potentially excludes non-European and ostensibly non-rational

practices for producing knowledge. Other scholars continue to maintain that science and

rationality have, in fact, succeeded in mastering the world and that those who continue to be

informed by religious or non-objective knowledge practices are deluded. My focus in this debate

centers on an analysis of the thought of Weber and Steiner precisely because they are generally

thought to represent these two diametrically opposed interpretations. As this dissertation

demonstrates, such dichotomous thinking, characteristic of much religious and historical

scholarship, is largely unfounded. Embedded within this perceived division are ethical

implications that accompany the assertion that progressive worldviews are, or ought to be,

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[3] For example, Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Robert A. Yelle, *The Language of Disenchantment: Protestant Literalism and Colonial Discourse in British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017); Edward Ross Dickinson, "Not So Scary After All? Reform in Imperial and Weimar Germany," *Central European History* 43 (2010): 149–172.

[4] Geoffrey Jensen, *Irrational Triumph: Cultural Despair, Military Nationalism, and the Ideological Origins of Franco's Spain* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2001); Calin Cotoi, "Reactionary Modernism in Interwar Romania: Anton Golopentia and the Geopoliticization of Sociology," in *Nationalisms Today*, eds. Tomasz Kamusella and Krzysztof Jaskułowski (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 125–154; Julia Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

secular and science-oriented, as opposed to being concerned with revivifying or preserving elements (even religious elements) from our shared global past.

Edward Said's important work demonstrated that the conviction that Westerners became modern and the rest of the world must follow justified the spreading of an ethnocentric and elitist way of experiencing modernity.[5] As Gil Anidjar argues, "Secularism is Orientalism," meaning that secularism is a form of orientalism inasmuch as it dismisses, at best, any person or group that is not secular in a recognizably Western way.[6] In the worst case, secularism enacts epistemic violence against non-European conceptual worldviews and ontological understandings. In the words of another scholar, "disenchantment was simultaneously a mythical and a real event, in the sense that the discourses and tropes that we inhabit have real consequences both for our experience of the world and for how we live in it, particularly in relation to other cultures."[7] Despite the success of postcolonial studies, the assumed binary between a disenchanted and re-enchanted modernity remains insufficiently studied in the larger context of European intellectual history. Privileging the perspective of esotericism allows my project to demonstrate that, although Weber and Steiner seem to represent the disenchanted/enchanted or scientific/religious way of conceptualizing European modernity, a closer examination reveals that science and religion (or the rational and non-rational) are always hopelessly entangled. Both Weber and Steiner continue to exert an immense influence on interpretations of modernity in academic (Weber) and popular (Steiner) sectors. For my project, they are key figures in the history of esotericism, an under-researched aspect of religious studies and history of science that reconsiders forms of "rejected" or "non-prestigious" knowledge and religious philosophy

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[5] Edward Said, *Orientalism. 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).
[6] Gil Anidjar, "Secularism," *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2006): 52–77, 66.
[7] Robert A. Yelle, *The Language of Disenchantment*, x.

consigned to the "dustbin of history."[8] My reason for connecting these two apparently dissimilar European intellectuals hinges on a perceived division between the concepts of a secular modernity and an enchanted modernity. While Weber's writings have become internationally established in the field of sociology, Steiner has been largely dismissed from the academy, though his popular influence is evident. Thus, this dissertation endeavors to show that certain very important aspects of late 19th/early 20th century thought have been misrepresented or ignored, resulting in the inheritance of a truncated historical narrative.

In demonstrating the ways in which the education and intellectual backgrounds of these two thinkers overlapped, including to some extent their political experiences and later reception, my research breaks down established historical, philosophical and religious categories in novel and fruitful ways. The 19th and 20th centuries were tumultuous times for religion and philosophy in Europe as new scientific theories, growing nationalism, and the rise of individualism and capitalism transformed the physical and mental landscapes of Europeans. After the First World War, a pervasive pessimism urged Europeans to rethink their religious values, the ethical implications of science, the inequalities in the social system, and the effects of nationalism and imperialism in an increasingly global world. Weber and Steiner made distinctive contributions to the ensuing debates through their engagement with Asian religions and philosophies. As a result of their understanding of other cultures, they succeeded in reframing, reimagining, and re-envisioning what constitutes European modernity, and especially a German modernity. I have therefore chosen to trace and deconstruct key historiographical concepts in the intellectual history of Europe, such as the common view that the European Enlightenment was characterized by the growth of rationalism and the decline of magic and superstition, as Keith

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[8] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Thomas famously contended.[9] I do this with the aim of showing that Weber's idea of disenchantment (*Entzauberung* in German, literally the "de-magic-ing") was itself a product of esoteric thought. This is an important aspect of my argument that Weber and Steiner can no longer be seen as representing the diametrically opposed positions of rationalism and esotericism.[10] Demonstrating the ways in which Weber and Steiner were similarly influenced by esotericism and concerned about technology and rationalization—but also interested in non-European religions—contributes to a better and more nuanced understanding of modernity and our contemporary situation.

To date there is one work in English dealing explicitly with Weber and Steiner: Perry Myers's *The Double-Edged Sword: The Cult of Bildung, Its Downfall and Reconstitution in Fin-de-Siècle Germany (Rudolf Steiner and Max Weber).*[11] Myers argues that Steiner and Weber wanted to create a new definition of self-formation (*Bildung*) to fit the modern world. However, he fails to consider the impact of non-European knowledge and esotericism on their thinking as well as the role of advanced technology. The present dissertation provides a valuable companion to this work by foregrounding these neglected areas. In German, the literature on Steiner and Weber is likewise limited to a single academic text: Michael Ross's 1996 dissertation *Soziale Wirklichkeitsbildung. Erkenntnistheoretische, methodologische und anthropologische Grundlagen bei Max Weber und Rudolf Steiner.*[12] Ross deals in a similar way with philosophical

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[9] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971). More recently, see Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Michael Hunter, *The Decline of Magic: Britain in the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

[10] See also Allison Coudert, "Rethinking Max Weber's Theory of Disenchantment," in *Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 705–739.

[11] Perry Myers, *The Double-Edged Sword: The Cult of Bildung, Its Downfall and Reconstitution in Fin-De-Siècle Germany (Rudolf Steiner and Max Weber)* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004). Myers does address Steiner's interest in non-European religions in a separate article. See Myers, "Colonial Consciousness: Rudolf Steiner's Orientalism and German Cultural Identity," *Journal of European Studies* 36, no. 4 (2006): 389–417

[12] Michael Ross, *Soziale Wirklichkeitsbildung: Erkenntnistheoretische, Methodologische und Anthropologische Grundlagen bei Max Weber und Rudolf Steiner* (Marburg: Tectum-Verl, 1996).

and epistemological questions, failing to consider non-European influences, esotericism, and technology.

The Academic Study of Esotericism

A key motivation for analyzing two such seemingly different thinkers is to further uncover the important, but largely ignored, role esotericism played in shaping their lives and work. Until recently esotericism was excluded from the historical picture, and, in the relatively few cases it has been incorporated into intellectual or cultural history, its aspects and influences have been evoked to criticize and dismiss them. This assumption was true throughout the mid to late 20th century, during which occult/esoteric ideas were considered pseudoscientific, superstitious, spurious, and dangerous, and they were said to have led to psychosis and the emergence of authoritarian forms of government like National Socialism. However, esotericism's function in undermining, defying, and resisting the emergence of National Socialism and Nazi ideology has not been sufficiently recognized. The same is true for the influence of esoteric ideas in shaping the pre-modern and modern worlds, which includes the history of modern science, and even modern scholarship. Recent historians have demonstrated that esotericism drew on non-European sources during the 19th and early 20th centuries, which, in turn, had a considerable influence on European science and culture. Though a comprehensive survey of the field of esotericism would constitute volumes and is beyond the scope of this dissertation, a brief review is essential for the larger project of comparing Weber and Steiner and for rethinking the idea of an enchanted or a disenchanted European modernity.

The professionalized academic study of esotericism began developing in the 1990s, though it has deeper roots in the work of Frances Yates, whose books *Giordano Bruno and the*

Hermetic Tradition (1964) and *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (1972) drew attention to the importance of Neo-Alexandrian Hermeticism as a precondition for the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution.[13] Yates (and others) showed that many Renaissance Humanists, such as Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Johann Reuchlin, assisted in developing and professionalizing a form of Christian Kabbalah (a repurposing of Jewish Kabbalah) and Neo-Alexandrian Hermeticism (based on the mythical pre-Christian sage Hermes Trismegistus and the philosophical writings which were translated during this period and became known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*). The field has come a long way from merely pointing out influences and restoring visibility to marginalized traditions (although this activity still constitutes an important element). Larger theoretical questions concerning the production of knowledge, the conception of European modernity as a triumph of secularity or an "occult revival," and the relationship between binary explanatory frameworks—such as science and religion—now form a core part of the research activities of scholars of esotericism.[14] Although scholars have yet to agree on a precise definition of esotericism, there is a broad consensus that esoteric currents of thought are characterized by certain distinctive ways of thinking.

In the 1980s and '90s, Antoine Faivre redefined these currents and described them as a particular "form of thought" based on a number of shared characteristics: correspondences (i.e., correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm or a doctrine of signatures); a vitalistic

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[13] For an overview of the Yates thesis, see Allison Coudert, "From 'the Hermetic Tradition' to 'Western Esotericism,'" in *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years' Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam*, eds. Wouter Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijnenburg (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 117–122; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericism between Counterculture and New Complexity," *Aries* 1, no. 1 (2001): 5–37, 13–18.

[14] For example, Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*; Kocku von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800–2000* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*; Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*; Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, eds., *Contemporary Esotericism* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Egil Asprem and Julian Strube, eds., *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

conception of living nature, imagination and mediations (or imaginative cognition); the

experience of transmutation (i.e., experiential gnosis and personal transformation); the practice

of concordance (i.e., establishing links between separate spiritual traditions); and transmission (a

master/disciple transfer of secret knowledge).[15] Wouter Hanegraaff re-described many of these

currents again as the esoteric "wisdom traditions" of "Platonic Orientalism," demonstrating that

over the course of European history esoteric ideas were often "quarantined" or discarded through

practices of religious "othering," knowledge legitimization, boundary work, and formation of

academic disciplinary lines.[16] These ideas wound up in the proverbial "dustbin" of history, where

they lived on in popular culture and frequently occupied the minds of ordinary people but also

intellectuals of such caliber as Mesmer, Newton, Leibniz, and Swedenborg.[17]

As Hanegraaff has shown, the narrative elements of the "wisdom traditions" consist of

amalgamations of Platonic (and Neo-Platonic), Hermetic, and Gnostic forms of Christianity.

Elements of these traditions have been deliberately marginalized over the course of European

intellectual history. Early Church Fathers attacked them as heretical and heterodoxic, while

during the Protestant Reformation Luther accused the Church of retaining "pagan" rites and

rituals in their dogma.[18] Platonic Orientalism was criticized as superstitious and irrational by

Protestant Enlightenment scholars such as Jacob Thomasius (1622–1684) and Jacob Brucker

(1696–1770), and again by the French *philosophes*. The emergence of modern science in the

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[15] Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 10–15. See also *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, eds. Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman (New York: Crossroad, 1995); *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); *Western Esotericism: A Concise History*, trans. Christine Rhone (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).
[16] Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*.
[17] Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Matt Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1998); Allison Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* (Dordrect: Kluwer Academic, 1995); Marsha Schuchard, *Emanuel Swedenborg, Secret Agent on Earth and in Heaven: Jacobites, Jews, and Freemasons in Early Modern Sweden* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
[18] See Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 77–152.

early modern and modern periods saw the ancient wisdom narratives retreating into occult and

esoteric societies and groups, such as the Theosophical Society, finally coming to rest in the 20th

century in the "cultic milieu."[19] Hanegraaff's historical survey demonstrates that over time

esoteric knowledge was repeatedly constructed as the heterodox or deviant "other" opposing a

mainstream, normative orthodoxy.

Scholars of esotericism such as Hanegraaff, as well as Joscelyn Godwin, Corinna Treitel,

and Marco Pasi, have established not only the popularity of esoteric ideas throughout history, but

their complexity and transnational mobility.[20] Esoteric ideas did not fit the normative, rigid box

of Western-centric ways of knowing based on apparent objective observations, rationalism, and

experimental science—although they often did strategically "appeal" to the rhetoric of such

epistemologies in order to obtain legitimation. In response to the familiar trope that "esotericism

leads to fascism," Pasi argues that the "mutual attraction of esotericism and rightwing radicalism

would appear to be a contingent *reorientation* of the political color of esotericism, rather than an

inherent, structural necessity."[21] Instead, he offers an alternative perspective, in which

esotericism

> offered a social space where new conceptions of culture and society could be
> formulated and experimented with. This would be in itself a good reason—if there
> were no other—to argue that occultism, as part of the larger historical body of
> esotericism, has contributed significantly to the shaping of modernity, verging, in

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[19] The "cultic milieu" is a concept introduced by British sociologist Colin Campbell in the 1970s to describe a sub-culture that consist of radical, heterodox, and fringe ideas that mainstream culture has rejected. See Colin Campbell, "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization," *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, no. 5 (1972): 119–136.

[20] See Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Marco Pasi, "The Modernity of Occultism: Reflections on Some Crucial Aspects," in *Hermes in the Academy,* 59–74.

[21] Pasi, "The Modernity of Occultism," 61–62.

this case, rather towards the progressive, liberal pole of the cultural and political spectrum.[22]

Such "social experimentation" was noticeably facilitated in the areas of gender, sexuality, psychological investigations, and religion. Many works have appeared, which have solidified the concrete connection between esotericism and modernity (as well the aesthetic movement of modernism).[23] Such themes were of great interest to Weber and Steiner, occupying both their personal as well their literary activities. Weber's connections to Ascona, Switzerland, with its famous Monte Verità Sanatorium, will be explored in this dissertation to show that Weber was interested in the same issues as esotericists, and this incudes Steiner, who carried out his own activities just north of Ascona in Dornach. Connections between Dornach and Ascona remain understudied and little understood in the literature on esotericism. Steiner set up his imaginatively designed building called the Goetheanum (in homage to Goethe) in Dornach to escape the modern city, cultivating a spiritual lifestyle in harmony with nature. He visited and lectured in Locarno (but a ten-minute walk from Ascona), inspiring the founders of the Monte Verità Sanatorium, who attended these lectures. After his death, the medical doctor Ita Wegman (1876–1943), one of Steiner's closest students and co-founder of the alternative healing modality known as anthroposophical medicine (still popular in Switzerland), opened a second clinic in Ascona. While Weber was critical of some of the "social experimentation" found in such esoteric

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[22] Pasi, "The Modernity of Occultism," 63.

[23] See, for example, Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Per Faxneld and Jesper Aagaard Petersen, eds., *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); John Bramble, *Modernism and the Occult* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, Renko Geffarth and Markus Meumann, eds., *Aufklärung Und Esoterik: Wege in Die Moderne* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013); Tessel Bauduin and Henrik Johnsson, eds., *The Occult in Modernist Art, Literature, and Cinema* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018); Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic: Invoking Tradition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

milieus, he stayed in Ascona for considerable periods of time on two occasions. He was

motivated to stay there for the purpose of healing and a desire to connect with nature. He already

adopted nude sunbathing and in Ascona started writing about eroticism as mystical experience.

The rich cultural intermingling of esotericism informed Weber's writings on disenchantment, as

well as Steiner's philosophical "spiritual science," which will be explored in later chapters.

Another important scholar of esotericism, Kocku von Stuckrad, shifted the focus of the

field toward discourse analysis and the sociology of knowledge. His work decouples binaries and

traces *othering* practices in European intellectual history, decentering the problematic

Eurocentrism associated with the term "Western esotericism" as defined by Faivre.[24] Drawing on

Foucault, Stuckrad proposes that scholars speak of "esoteric discourses," rather than reifying

especially "Western esotericism" as a concrete historical philosophical tradition.[25] He cites the

importance of Jewish and Islamic forms of esotericism and their influence on European culture,

as well as problems attending the transposition of the term across temporal boundaries. I am in

agreement with Stuckrad on this point but wish to carry the argument further by urging scholars

of esotericism to consider the influence of the Far East and South Asia on the development of

modern esotericism.[26] This dissertation comparing Steiner and Weber offers what will hopefully

be a fruitful contribution to this ongoing problem, emphasizing the influences of Asian religions

and philosophy on a major esotericist (Steiner), while highlighting those same non-European

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[24] Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005); *The Scientification of Religion*.

[25] Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 11.

[26] Gordan Djurdjevic and Hugh Urban have already initiated this approach. See, for example, Hugh Urban, "Elitism and Esotericism: Strategies of Secrecy and Power in South Indian Tantra and French Freemasonry," *Numen* 44, no. 1 (1997): 1–38, and *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy Politics, and Power in the Study of Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Gordan Djurdjevic, *India and the Occult: The Influence of South Asian Spirituality on Modern Western Occultism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and *Masters of Magical Powers: The Nath Yogis in the Light of Esoteric Notions* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Müller, 2008) See also the work of Mriganka Mukhopadhyay.

influences on a canonical thinker (Weber). The hope is to unsettle the constructed East/West binary and the distinctions between legitimate and esoteric knowledge.

According to Stuckrad, a "pluralistic" approach to the study of esotericism will provide new vocabularies for speaking about the inherent complexities of cultural exchange.[27] I follow Stuckrad and his critique of the Eurocentric problems in the study of esotericism, but I disagree with his conclusion in an important essay, "Esotericism Disputed: Major Debates in the Field," that declares "the end of a discipline."[28] Suggesting scholars abandon the term esotericism and cease trying to define and recover esotericism as a monolithic historical tradition, Stuckrad proposes to focus on integrating esotericism "into a larger analytical framework that conceptualizes work on European and North American identity as an ongoing process since ancient times."[29] I agree on this point—indeed, the present dissertation seeks to accomplish precisely that—although it seems to me that esotericism as a body of knowledge *does not* change that much over time and is often constituted of similar elements, traditions, and practices. As Glenn Alexander Magee points out, the constructivist approach to esotericism "offers us a great deal of insight, but it does not follow from it that we cannot discern fundamental common features of things esoteric."[30] There are clear links across time among elements linked to esotericism, and many of the modern esoteric groups of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries in Europe operated "as if" there were such a tradition. Magee follows the "form of thought" thesis

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[27] Kocku von Stuckrad, "Esotericism Disputed: Major Debates in the Field," in *Religion: Secret Religion*, ed. April D. DeConick (Farmington Hills: Macmillan Reference USA, a Part of Gale, Cengage Learning, 2016), 171–181, 174. For a good overview, see Kocku von Stuckrad, "Esoteric Discourse and the European History of Religion," in *Western Esotericism: Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Western Esotericism, held at Abo, Finland on 15–17 August 2007*, ed. Tore Ahlbàck (Abo: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, 2008), 217–236.
[28] Stuckrad, "Esotericism Disputed," 179–180.
[29] Stuckrad, "Esotericism Disputed," 180.
[30] Glenn Alexander Magee, "Editor's Introduction," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, ed. Glenn Alexander Magee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), xiii–xxxv, xx.

introduced by Faivre, adding characteristic identifiers of his own, including "a qualitative approach to understanding nature" and "a reliance on subjectivity and subjective impressions," and he concludes that "the effect of the Enlightenment was not to 'construct' esotericism but to reveal it as a distinct current of thought, or worldview, with perceptible features."[31]

I would go further and claim that esoteric ideas were not rejected at all during the Enlightenment or after, but rather incorporated into the Enlightenment program. For example, some radical political movements such as anarchism, socialism, fascism, and liberalism were inspired by elements of esoteric thought, as recent research has documented.[32] It is crucial to remain attentive to such connections. Stuckrad urges scholars of esotericism to cease characterizing themselves as representatives of rejected or marginalized knowledge. While this is, perhaps, useful with respect to religion, in the case of modern science, which currently has a claim on being the only reliable source of "Truth," this seems less advisable. In modern Europe and North America, there have been clear instances of exclusion and marginalization of scientific ideas, for instance holistic medicine and parapsychology. I agree with much of Stuckrad's theoretical re-formulations, particularly his call for a culturally inclusive definition of esotericism, however I do not agree that we should eliminate the term. It is still useful, at the very least (as he also suggests) as a heuristic device.

Esotericism and Disenchantment

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[31] Magee, "Editor's Introduction," xxvi, xxviii.
[32] See, among many others, Julian Strube, *Sozialismus, Katholizismus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts. Die Genealogieder Schriften von Eliphas Lévi* (Berlin: De Gruyter 2016); Erica Lagalisse, *Occult Features of Anarchism: With Attention to the Conspiracy of Kings and the Conspiracy of the Peoples* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019); Arthur Versluis, Lee Irwin, Melinda Phillips, eds., *Esotericism, Religion, and Politics* (Minneapolis: Association for the Study of Esotericism, 2012); Marco Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics* (Durham: Acumen, 2014); Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Two recent monographs are directly relevant regarding the theme of esotericism and disenchantment. Egil Asprem's *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900–1939* and Jason A. Josephson-Storm's *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* both demonstrate the entangled relationship between esotericism and modern mainstream knowledge among academics, artists, and scientists. This dissertation builds directly on these two contributions and is indebted to their research. Therefore, a brief summary is relevant. Asprem argues that scholars should look at the *problem* rather than the *process* of disenchantment. Once we do, we find that post-Enlightenment Western culture was full of conflicting ideas competing to be classified as "proper knowledge," or normative knowledge.[33] Religious, esoteric, magical, and scientific concepts were constantly interwoven in the 19th and 20th centuries, as exemplified by the professionalization of parapsychology as an academic field. Parapsychology drew on surviving concepts of vitalism, mesmerism, psychical research, and psychology to lay claim to scholarly legitimacy. However, according to Asprem, these concepts emerged out of the intellectual framework of scientific naturalism itself in the 19th century, which, while normalizing, was still flexible enough to challenge the limits of reason and science. Additionally, an open-ended naturalism allowed those who attempted to refute the supposed fact of disenchantment to recombine the supernatural realm with the natural, material realm, asserting that apparently supernatural phenomena could in fact be scientifically investigated and validated.[34] It is worth mentioning the work Olav Hammer, who illustrated the way that modern esoteric currents thus "attempted to modernize, democratize and legitimize themselves, adapting themselves to an increasingly hostile cultural

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[33] Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 14.
[34] This section summarizes briefly Asprem's introduction, see *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 1–14.

environment."[35] By positing an esoteric "cognitive style," Hammer outlines specific strategies for producing and legitimizing the knowledge claims of esotericism. This insight forms an important part of the conclusion of this dissertation, which argues that rationality as a "legitimizing trope" was appealed to not only by esotericists such as Steiner but major scientists and academics, as well.

Asprem's re-framing of disenchantment in terms of *Problemgeschichte* ("problem history") allows for synchronic comparisons between mainstream scientists and marginalized esotericists over concerns about the limits and boundaries of scientific, religious, and esoteric knowledge. This approach facilitates a more sophisticated and interdisciplinary methodology, illuminating "affinities" and "disjunctions" across boundaries not usually crossed when making comparisons—such as professional science and pseudoscience or an occult underground and an academic establishment.[36] This move represents a key development in the study of esotericism and provides the basis for making a comparison of Weber and Steiner. According to Asprem, such comparisons reveal the constructed nature of the divisions between "accepted" and "rejected" forms of knowledge.[37]

Similarly, Josephson-Storm uses the examples of pseudo-science and parapsychology to reveal that mainstream scientists and academics have actively sought to disenchant the world and marginalize esotericism in order to establish and maintain intellectual and cultural authority. In this sense, he argues that the secularization and disenchantment narratives are *myths* created by those who argued for disenchantment in order to demonize an irrational Other. This "irrational"

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[35] Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), xiv; see also James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer, eds*., Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

[36] Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 535–548.

[37] Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 535. Randall Styers had already made this claim and argued that by definition modernity equals the rejection of magic. See Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Other was frequently connected to magic and occultism and both with non-Western cultures.

Even the concept of modernity, he argues, is a myth. The only way it was possible for theorists

to claim such a thing happened was by excluding everything (such as the persistence of magic,

religion, and occultism) that contradicted their claims.[38]

   The Myth of Disenchantment makes it clear that secularization and disenchantment are

both myths. To this end, Josephson-Storm reveals the entangled connections between esotericism

and authorized knowledge and the legitimizing practices involved in policing these boundaries.

For example, many scientists and academics on the intellectual cutting edge in Europe attended

séances and explored Spiritualism around the turn of the 19th century "not as a legacy of

medieval 'superstitions,' nor generally as a way to overturn science, but rather as a means to

extend its borders."[39] To advance his claims Josephson-Storm demonstrates that the very

theorists of disenchantment were thoroughly emmeshed in an enchanted world:

> the least likely people—the very theorists of modernity as disenchantment …
> worked out their various insights inside an occult context, in a social world
> overflowing with spirits and magic, and … the weirdness of that world generated
> so much normativity.[40]

Many individuals promoting disenchantment, including Weber, were themselves interested in

alternative spiritualities and involved in esoteric pursuits. They attended séances and associated

with esotericists who practiced magic, rejected Western religious traditions in favor of

Theosophy, Spiritualism, and Eastern religions, and believed in the therapeutic powers of nature,

dance, and music.

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[38] Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 10–14.
[39] Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 2.
[40] Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 6.

According to Josephson-Storm, what makes modernity modern is its apparent rejection of animism and magic, formed through the polemical practice of "occult disavowal."[41] The way Josephson-Storm reads Weber's concept of *Entzauberung der Welt* ("disenchantment of the world") is rather to say *disenchanting* of the world, by which he argues that Weber did not mean the completed project of getting rid of magic but an ongoing, deliberate marginalization of magic in the name of rationality and modernity. The foundational figures of Religious Studies, such as Marcel Mauss, Max Weber, and Max Muller, never traveled to non-European lands to study non-Western religions for themselves; instead they were deeply embedded in European occult milieus and accepted what many esotericists said about non-Western religions.[42] What is especially ironic about their work is that their initial forays into comparative religion and the anthropology of religion, while often articulating disenchantment and denigrating superstition, accomplished the opposite of their intention and their scholarly writings served as sourcebooks for those interested in re-enchanting the world and reviving magic.[43] But even more importantly, in many respects—some of which will be described in this thesis—their own work was itself enchanted in the sense that many of their ideas were influenced by occult and esoteric sources. This is not as difficult to document for Steiner as it is for Weber, but since the goal of this thesis is to highlight the unexpected similarities between Steiner and Weber, Weber's esoteric connections will be discussed at length.

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[41] Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 18.

[42] Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 6.

[43] Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 19–20. For example, the use of James Frazer's scholarship in the development of Aleister Crowley's magical system *Thelema*. Like Weber, Mauss, and Muller, Fraser was basically an armchair scholar, whose studies of non-Western cultures were based on sources that were not always reliable. On the theme of occultism and its role in the formation of Religious Studies, see Yves Mühlematter and Helmut Zander, eds., *Occult Roots of Religious Studies: On the Influence of Non-Hegemonic Currents on Academia Around 1900* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021).

What scholars now call New Religious Movements quite frequently owe their existence to the early field of religious studies, which were often connected to esoteric circles. Josephson-Storm discusses the esoteric roots of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, focusing on Benjamin primarily, showing that The Frankfurt School had ties to the Cosmic Circle in Munich and the esoteric philosopher Ludwig Klages, as did Max Weber. Weber was also connected to and influenced by the circle around symbolist poet Stefan George. The important point in connection to Josephson-Storm's claims is that those who promoted the idea of disenchantment were often in direct contact with centers of enchantment, producing "enchanting" texts (such as Fraser's *The Golden Bough*), which others utilized in their attempts to "reenchant" the world.[44] Josephson-Storm concludes by reminding us that Weber's concept of disenchantment is usually misunderstood, that he argued a type of "polytheism of values" would replace the old magical beliefs in modern Europe—in other words, that the disenchanted world was a polytheistic world of competing "modernities."

Josephson-Storm and Asprem build on the arguments of earlier scholars, such as Michael Saler and Corinna Treitel, who have illustrated the complex ways in which modernity, science, disenchantment, and occultism were mutually constituted.[45] These scholars have caused us to rethink disenchantment and secularization as stabilized, completed processes and to recognize that these ideas emerged as a result of the restriction of knowledge production, dissent, and difference. No one disputes that secularization occurred in many and important ways largely

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[44] Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 154, 175.
[45] Michael Saler, "Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review," *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 692–716; Joshua Landy and Michael Saler, eds., *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*. Among many others, see Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Christopher H. Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006); Winter, *Mesmerized*; Simon During, *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

because of religious institutions losing their intellectual authority and social function to secular institutions, a point made by Weber himself. The formulation of the disenchantment thesis in European history is part of a long and complex trajectory of intellectual, religious, scientific, and sociopolitical developments that transformed Europe from the 15th to the 20th century. Gripped by the aftereffects of the Protestant Reformation and the intellectual output of the *philosophes*, 19th century Europeans experienced the loss of a unifying intellectual and religious consensus. Advancements in modern science and academic scholarship, as well as exposure to non-European cultures, persuaded Europeans, especially intellectuals, to question the authority of the Bible and the essential nature of human beings. These developments stimulated a revival of religious expression in radical and conservative forms, and this includes the emergence of fundamentalism across the religious spectrum. Religion and enchantment never actually died out but simply emerged in new guises to fit or reject the prevailing scientific paradigm, and esotericism was an important element in this process.

"Irrationalism" and Technology

One overlooked area in which esotericism plays a key role is in the relationship between modernity and technology. It is generally assumed that esotericists were anti-modernists and, as such, against technology and the rationality that ostensibly went with it. This thesis complicates this picture by suggesting that this issue needs to be rethought. It was precisely the rejection of rationalism instantiated in technology that caused romantics and esotericists—Weber and Steiner among them—to seek the knowledge and cultural practices of non-European cultures in hope of ameliorating the crisis they saw facing Western civilization as a result of its over-reliance on reason and technology.

An important attempt to reassess the "problem of technology" in our understanding of modernity can be found in Jeffrey Herf's book *Reactionary Modernism*, which, as the title suggests, presents a revised and modulated view of modernity that takes full account of its regressive aspects. Herf's book isolates a different strand of cultural development, one that was both reactionary *and* modern.[46] In spite of the book's shortcomings, which have been adequately critiqued, Herf's thesis marks an important step in re-imaging modernity around the question of technology.[47] It is therefore instructive to revisit its claims and contributions because the problem of technology became an overriding issue for both Weber and Steiner and occupied much of their thought. In the process, I will specify other related strains of research that have added to the revaluation of *fin de siècle* Germany and modernity in general, since, once again, it is impossible to fully understand either Steiner or Weber, much less their similarities, without acknowledging these. This research has convincingly demonstrated that there is no "modernity" in the singular. Just as there was no single Enlightenment, modernity comes in multiple forms.[48]

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[46] Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[47] For a critique of Herf's thesis see, for example, Thomas Rohkrämer, "Antimodernism, Reactionary Modernism and National Socialism. Technocratic Tendencies in Germany, 1890–1945," *Contemporary European History* 8, no. 1 (1999): 29–50. Rohkrämer argues that technology has often been embraced by illiberal forces, including in Imperial Germany, and was therefore not unique to the Weimar period. Nevertheless, he agrees that in Germany the First World War "came as a shock because it fundamentally questioned the widespread belief that technology was an occasionally difficult but potentially obedient servant of humanity." This developed into an "ideology of technocratic planning," which held that the post-war state had to "accept responsibility for the running of the economy and large technological systems" or else Germany could destroy itself." See Rohkrämer, "Antimodernism, Reactionary Modernism and National Socialism," 30–32. John C. Guse suggests that the "reactionary modernist tradition" in fact faded away in response to the demands of the war, as the technopolitical romanticism was replaced by a movement that fully incorporated the scientists, engineers, and technocrats: National Socialism. John C. Guse, "Nazi Technical Thought Revisited," *History and Technology* 26, no. 1, (2010): 3–33. (In a "response" piece appended to this article, Herf rebutted Guse's criticisms and maintained his original position.) While Herf characterized those *Bildungsbürger* and engineers who sought to embrace technology as a part of culture as "reactionary modernists," Eric Schatzberg convincingly shows that "many apolitical, centrist, and left-leaning scholars embraced Technik as a potentially positive cultural force." See Eric Schatzberg, *Technology: Critical History of a Concept* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 108.

[48] See Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

In Herf's view a major problem with the "classical" interpretation of German modernity is that it fails to account for "how, if they had rejected modernity, the Nazis could have achieved political propaganda successes, economic recovery, the mobilization of society and spectacular military victories or indeed terror and mass extermination."[49] Herf sets out to answer this question by contrasting the rejection of European Enlightenment values with the embrace of technology. For Herf, the concept of reason extoled in the Enlightenment denoted more than means-ends rationality incorporated into an oppressive bureaucracy. Reason stood for modern science, liberalism, humanism, progressive, technological advancement, and industrialization. He claims the German Right distorted these Enlightenment values and incorporated them into their political program, creating something called "reactionary modernism" that developed during the interwar period and culminated in the rise of the Nazis. This new cultural movement was led by the "conservatives," who saw themselves as inheritors of an aggressive reactionary tradition of German romanticism battling against Enlightenment ideas and values. These conservatives revised "classic" romanticism in order to accept technological advancement, social welfare reforms, and efforts to build up the military. Coupled especially with ineffective neo-liberal economic and social policies, Herf insists this kind of conservatism and reactionary modernism was unique to Germany.[50]

The problem with Herf's argument is that it ultimately reproduces a version of the theory of the German *Sonderweg* (special path). The idea that Germany had a special history, or *Sonderweg*, when it came to becoming modern originally held a positive meaning for German

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[49] Rohkrämer, "Antimodernism," 29.
[50] See Steven E. Aschheim, *In Times of Crisis: Essays on European Culture, Germans, and Jews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 114–115. Herf has since revised his position and gone on to apply this term to the transitions in Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini, in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and to Islamic groups such as Al Qaeda. See Herf, "The Totalitarian Present: Why the West Consistently Underplays the Power of Bad Ideas," in *The American Interest* 5, no. 1 (2009): 31–36.

historians, but it soon came to signify something different in light of the events of World War II: namely, how, "in contrast to comparable, highly developed countries in the west and the north— Germany became fascist and/or totalitarian in the general crisis of the 1920s and 1930s."[51] This more "negative" or liberal-focused version of the *Sonderweg* emerging after 1945 "stressed the illiberal, undemocratic, authoritarian and pre-modern aspects of the German system as responsible for its particular problems before and after the first world war."[52] The debate around the *Sonderweg* thesis that followed concerned the extent to which the rise of National Socialism and the implementation of the final solution were due to the lack of a stable democracy in Germany and the persistence of pre-industrial, feudal remnants in the culture, or whether both Nazism and the Holocaust were in fact the result of increased industrialization, the disruptive results of introducing modern capitalism, and the formation of grassroots political groups who resisted the increased call for modernization on the part of modern, mainly middle and upper middle-class technocrats.[53]

Over the course of this debate, the mostly "positive" interpretation of modernity as a normative path of development was challenged by a darker analysis of modernity, culminating in scholars like Detlev Peukert, whose essay "The Genesis of the 'Final Solution' from the Spirit of Science" argued that the final solution was the result of taking a scientific and therefore rational approach to human beings. For the first time in history, breakthroughs in medical science had

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[51] For a detailed survey of the German historiographical term *Sonderweg*, see Jurgen Kocka, "German History before Hitler: The Debate about the German Sonderweg," *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, no. 1 (1988): 3–16, 4.

[52] Kocka, "German History before Hitler," 9. A characteristic example of such literature is Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche. Action francaise – Italienischer Faschismus – Nationalsozialismus* (München: Piper, 1963).

[53] As two representative examples, see Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973) and Blackbourn and Eley, *The Peculiarites of German History*. For an overview of this debate and the decline of the *Sonderweg* thesis, see Helmut Walser Smith, "When the Sonderweg Debate Left Us," in *Imperial Germany Revisited: Continuing Debates and New Perspectives*, eds. Cornelius Torp and Sven Oliver Müller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 21–36.

achieved great success battling epidemic diseases, giving "rise to the expectation that all the major diseases would be effectively combated, or even eradicated, in the foreseeable future"—the implication being that if the body politic or the body of the nation were sick, it too could be healed by expunging virulent elements.[54] As Peukert points out, such ideas became increasingly linked in the scientific literature, as academics, scientists, and social workers gained considerable prestige by claiming to be able to solve all social questions. Once the state became involved, such ideas were granted legal authority. A type of "logocidy"—as in the religious idea of theodicy, or how humans deal with the problem of suffering and death—inevitably led to the "utopic goal" of striving for the elimination of death, which increasingly drove "the sciences into irrationality."[55] The "final solution" was therefore a "systematic, high-technology procedure for 'eradicating,' or 'culling,' those without 'value,'" who were by implication considered the cause of individual and social maladies.[56]

Peukert's dark conception of a technocratic modernity added to a choir of other scholars from various disciplines singing a similar tune, for example, critical theorists such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, post-structuralists such as Michel Foucault, sociologists such as Zygmunt Bauman, and post-modernists such as Gilles Deleuze.[57] Rather than focusing on the liberation of the individual from traditional constraints through liberalization and social reform,

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[54] Detlev Peukert, "The Genesis of the 'Final Solution' from the Spirit of Science," in *Nazism and German Society, 1933–1945*, ed. David F. Crew (London: Routledge, 1994), 420–457, 428. The German original was published as "Die Genesis der ‚Endloesung' aus dem Geist der Wissenschaft," in *Max Webers Diagnose der Moderne*, ed. Detlev Peukert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 102–121. This is part of what Peter Gay called "the medicalization of society" during the 18th century. See Peter Gay, "The Enlightenment as Medicine and as Cure," in *The Age of Enlightenment: Studies Presented to Theodore Besterman*, ed. William H. Barbour (Edinburgh: St. Andrews University Publications, 1967), 375–386. This has become an important idea among sociologists. See Also Peter Conrad, *The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).
[55] Peukert, "The Spirit of Science," 434.
[56] Peukert, "The Spirit of Science," 426.
[57] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002); Michel Foucault*, Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*; Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (1992): 3–7.

this dark version of modernity identified the overwhelming feeling of chaos and anxiety that

accompanied a period of chaotic transition. In response to this situation, the modern sciences

(especially the "human sciences") were called upon to develop and implement disciplinary

measures of control particularly directed toward the body though the rationalization of society

and culture.[58] From this strand of argumentation arose a "biopolitical" explanation of modernity

in Germany, which drew on Foucault's idea about state power, discipline, and reason to account

for the atrocities of the final solution.[59] In this analysis, Germany in the early 20th century is not

seen as "a nation having trouble modernizing, but as a nation of troubling modernity."[60] Edward

Dickinson explains how viewing modernity in this way opens up the possibility for a multiplicity

of simultaneous positions:

> modernity is a product of choices between alternative possible ideas, and alternative
> possible policies. To make this kind of suggestion is not to argue that Nazism
> "perverted" a modern science that was itself value-free and "innocent." The point
> is rather that politicians, like scientists themselves, choose from among a broad
> range of ideas (of greater or lesser credibility) generated by the intellectual and
> institutional complex of modern science.[61]

Dickinson extends this narrative, suggesting it "explains" not only 1933 but other important

years and events in modern Germany. Rather than viewing biopolitics as a project of experts and

elites only, it is better understood as a complex discourse of cultural transformation and of social

behavior more generally.[62] This makes Nazism an "explainable phenomenon with identifiable

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[58] See Torp and Müller, eds., *Imperial Germany Revisited*, 5–9.
[59] See Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassen politik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen, 1986); Cornelie Usborne, *The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany: Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992). See also Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).
[60] Edward Ross Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy: Some Reflections on Our Discourse about 'Modernity'," *Central European History* 37, no1. (2004): 1–48, 5.
[61] Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy," 21.
[62] Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy," 1.

and direct historical roots in the general social and cultural development of modern Western

societies, rather than a barbaric and irrational anomaly."[63] In important ways, this view draws on

the work of Weber in outlining the more harmful influence of rationalization and scientism in

modern cultures, while leaving out Weber's own emphasis on a German *Sonderweg*. The

exemplification of this research can be found in Nikolas Wachsmann, who succeeds in

presenting a fully detailed account of the Nazi concentration camps without having to resort to

Nazi ideology as the primary cause.[64]

Kevin Repp has revealed the seeming obsession with reform projects at the turn of the

century that came to occupy an entire generation of Germans, to which, incidentally, Weber and

Steiner belonged.[65] Despite the broad range of ideas and approaches, the "Generation of 1890,"

as Repp describes them, was inspired by the proclamation of Kaiser Wilhelm II's social reform

decrees of 1890 and the "social question," which became a "central issue around which hopes,

fears, and expectations regarding modernity revolved."[66] While the Kaiser eventually came to

represent a conservative position, the essence of these decrees was entirely progressive, focusing

on a peaceful relationship between workers, a fair relationship between employees and

employers, and equal rights before the law. The "social question" also characterizes the greater

part of Weber's and Steiner's writings. Repp's portrayal of liberals and reformist Social

Democrats reveals individuals who were sincerely committed to establishing a humane political

and social order. The picture of modernity that emerges from Repp's detailed account is rich and

complicated, pushing "in many directions at once," and filled with individuals—again like

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[63] Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy," 5.
[64] Nikolas Wachsmann, *K.L.: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2015).
[65] Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890–1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 19–66.
[66] Repp, *Reformers, Critics*, 16.

Steiner and Weber—who "strove to correct the abuses and injustice of the modern world without relinquishing the promise of scientific and technological advance."[67] In other words, they do not fit neatly into the dark picture of German intellectuals painted by Peukert. Repp locates Weber within this sphere, composed of mainstream social groups, arguing that he was "part of this world, but … also stood apart from it in important ways."[68] As both Dickinson and Treitel have suggested, the "peripheral" reform movements played a crucial and often unrecognized role in this milieu. Treitel places Steiner among these "peripheral" reform movements (i.e. occultism) in Germany. Yet, as with Weber, Steiner stands apart from this world in important ways. The study of esotericism has added to awareness among historians that so-called "peripheral" reform movements were, perhaps, a) not as "peripheral" as once thought, and b) made much larger contributions to cultural debates than many scholars have recognized. Comparing Weber and Steiner makes this realization more apparent.

"Conservative Revolution"

Reactionary Modernism suggests that following the disaster of the First World War conservatives in Germany radicalized romanticism, rejecting pastoral expressions and subverting its repudiation of technology. According to Herf, radical political romantics glorified violence and war as "authentic," as many of the leading ideologues were war veterans who had experienced the front lines and longed for the "ineffable" intensity of the *Fronterlebnis* (front experience).[69] Among the leaders of reactionary modernism include people like Ernst Jünger,

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[67] Repp, *Reformers, Critics*, 14.
[68] Repp, *Reformers, Critics*, 53.
[69] For a background of the rejection of mere "words" and "theories" for the "ineffable" and "experiential" in Weimar Germany, see Eliah Bures, "The Ineffable Conservative Revolution: The Crisis of Language as a Motive for Weimar's Radical Right," *Modern Intellectual History* (2020): 1–25.

Carl Schmitt, Hans Freyer, Oswald Spengler, Werner Sombart and, to a lesser extent, later

Martin Heidegger. Opposed to reason and materialism, they viewed modern intrusions into the

social and cultural order as hostile to natural life, but rather than rejecting technology—which

would be logical, given that technology is the materialization of rational principles—these

"conservatives," appropriated it into the "reactionary" modernist worldview. They put the state

as the head of a *Volkish Gemeinsam* (people's community) and militarism in service of

mythopoetic vision and the pure, unmediated experience of battle and comradeship. Herf claims

that this combination of technological development and mythic romanticism is distinctly

German, and he describes it as "reactionary modernism." In this view, such thinkers married the

utopian romantic vision of a glorified German nation with the harsh realities of practical

politics.[70]

Herf is at pains to concretize an actual "European irrationalist tradition." In this group he

includes German romanticism and the *Lebensreform* movements, who in his estimation formed

the basis for the "conservative revolution." The notion of a conservative revolution is

problematic.[71] The concept was introduced as an analytical category by Armin Mohler in his

1949 dissertation *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland*.[72] Mohler described this

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[70] See, for example, Carl Schmitt, *Politische Romantik* (München: Duncker & Humblot, 1919), 162.

[71] This concept forms the framework of analysis in several works, including Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Martin Travers, *Critics of Modernity: The Literature of the Conservative Revolution in Germany, 1890–1933* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (London: Penguin, 1968). Stefan Breuer chose to replace the oxymoronic concept "conservative revolution" with "new nationalism" in *Anatomie Der Konservativen Revolution* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993). Peter Fritzsche was among the first to rethink this entire narrative, opting instead to present the Weimar period in terms of a "workshop" in which different radical visions of modernity and the future were continuously worked out and co-existed. See Peter Fritzsche, "Did Weimar Fail?" *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 3 (1996): 629–656. For further developments in this approach, see Peter Eli Gordon, John P McCormick, eds., *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Jochen Hung, Godela Weiss-Sussex, and Geoff Wilkes, eds., *Beyond Glitter and Doom: The Contingency of the Weimar Republic* (Munich: Ludicium, 2012).

[72] For an overview of the concept of a "conservative revolution," see Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, "Beyond Historicism: Utopian Thought in the 'Conservative Revolution,'" in *Alternative Realities: Utopian Thought in Times of Political Rupture,* eds. Paul Lerner and Joes Segal (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 2019), 57–71.

movement in terms of a cultural and spiritual regeneration that attempted to "clear away the ruins

of the nineteenth century and … create a new order of life."[73] To make this argument, he grouped

together all kinds of intellectuals, even Weber, at least in terms of some of his writings, which,

from a "different starting point" (*anderem Ausgangspunkt*), he claims belong to the philosophical

circle (*Philosophischer Umkreis*) of the movement (interestingly, nothing from Steiner is

included).[74] Scholars have pointed out that Mohler's inclusion of many liberal intellectuals to the

conservative revolution is historically incorrect and reflects his own ideological position.[75]

Mohler conceptualized the "conservative revolution" in conservative terms largely because he

supported political conservatism and the German Right, reifying an intellectual movement that

substantiated his own ideological belief in a middle way between fascism and communism—an

approach that informs the so-called New Right and Alt-Right until today.[76]

In addition to these problematic aspects of the idea of a "conservative revolution," Herf's

analysis relies heavily on the classical antithesis of rational and irrational and progression and

regression. His "irrationalist" tradition is opposed to Enlightenment values such as positivism,

liberalism, Marxism, and reason and champions life, experience, emotions, vitalism and

organicism.[77] As will be shown over the course of this dissertation, such ideas and alternative

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[73] Armin Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932. Ein Handbuch* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaf, 1972), xxviii.

[74] Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution*, 308.

[75] Matthias Schloßberger, „Rekonstruktion der ‚Konservativen Revolution': Nietzsche – Jünger – Mohler," in *Nietzsche Und Die Konservative Revolution*, eds. Sebastian Kaufmann and Andreas Urs Sommer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 537–572; Stefan Breuer, "Between 'Conservative Revolution', Aesthetic Fundamentalism and New Nationalism: Thomas Mann's Early Political Writings," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 2 (1998): 1–23.

[76] On Mohler's connection to and influence on right-wing movements, see Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, *The Rhythm of Eternity: The German Youth Movement and the Experience of the Past, 1900–1933* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 14–15; Karla Poewe, "Scientific Neo-Paganism and the Extreme Right Then and Today: From Ludendorff's *Gotterkenntnis* to Sigrid Hunke's *Europas Eigene Religion*," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14, no. 3 (1999): 387–400, 388–389.

[77] György Lukács famously criticized the back to nature movements as contributing to the "irrationalist" climate culminating in National Socialism, however Theodor Adorno later criticized this oversimplification. See György Lukács, *Die Zerstörung Der Vernunft Band 2–3: Irrationalismus Und Imperialismus* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1974); Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

movements were prevalent on *both* sides of the political spectrum and sometimes co-existed

simultaneously and harmoniously. This is true of Monte Verità in Ascona, where "anti-political"

passivists and nature-loving romantics co-habited alongside communists, anarchists, and fascists.

Weber visited Ascona and his visit there provides important evidence in support of my thesis that

Weber was influenced by esoteric and romantic thinkers and even took a personal interest in

mysticism. Repp has demonstrated that, contrary to early assessments, the *Anti-Politik* tradition

of the Wilhelmine reforms did not always signify an indifference to politics, but an attempt to

build bridges between political factions:

> Without smashing the barriers between hostile camps in the repressive and
> fragmented political culture of Imperial Germany, the [*Anti-Politik*] men and
> women of the milieu slipped past those barriers to explore possibilities for
> constructive resistance, achieving modest successes that informed the counters of
> modern life in subtle, but significant ways before the First World War, and in some
> cases well beyond.[78]

Thomas Rohkrämer has further criticized Herf's claims, arguing that technology has

often been embraced by illiberal forces, including in Imperial Germany, and was therefore not

unique to the Weimar period.[79] Nevertheless, he agrees that in Germany the First World War

"came as a shock because it fundamentally questioned the widespread belief that technology was

an occasionally difficult but potentially obedient servant of humanity."[80] This developed into an

"ideology of technocratic planning," which held that the post-war state had to "accept

responsibility for the running of the economy and large technological systems" or else Germany

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[78] Repp, *Reformers, Critics*, 15. Seth Taylor has even written that Nietzsche's anti-politics "stood against the developments in German history which reached their culmination in fascism." Seth Taylor, *Left-Wing Nietzscheans: The Politics of German Expressionism, 1910–1920* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), 2.
[79] Rohkrämer, "Antimodernism, Reactionary Modernism and National Socialism," 30–31, 49.
[80] Rohkrämer, "Antimodernism, Reactionary Modernism and National Socialism," 32.

could destroy itself.[81] John C. Guse suggests that the "reactionary modernist tradition" in fact faded away in response to the demands of the war, as the technopolitical romanticism was replaced by a movement that fully incorporated the scientists, engineers, and technocrats: National Socialism.[82] While Herf characterized those *Bildungsbürger* and engineers who sought to embrace technology as a part of culture as "reactionary modernists," Schatzberg convincingly shows that "many apolitical, centrist, and left-leaning scholars embraced Technik as a potentially positive cultural force."[83]

Still, while Herf's overall thesis may be limited in scope and excludes a number of important elements, such as the history of esotericism, his move to separate out a strand of the classical anti-modern position and redefine it as another form of modernism is sound. His book helps us to begin to disentangle the elements of modernism in Germany that eventually "led" to the rise of National Socialism. Herf also illustrates the crucial role that technology and technical knowledge played in these events, especially the collective assessment of their dangers and benefits. Weber and Steiner also belonged to this context, and using Herf as a starting point helps to make sense of why technology and technical rationality became an important theme for them.

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapters one and two provide biographical details from the lives of Weber and Steiner that help to explain why it is important to compare these two thinkers. The current view of Weber and Steiner, including the way they have been represented and interpreted in the academy, is incomplete because it sees them primarily as

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[81] Rohkrämer, "Antimodernism, Reactionary Modernism and National Socialism," 30.
[82] Guse, "Nazi Technical Thought Revisited." In a "response" piece appended to this article, Herf rebutted Guse's criticisms and maintained his original position.
[83] Schatzberg, *Technology*, 108.

oppositional figures. This is misleading and distorts the historical record. These chapters

highlight those aspects of their lives that correspond and overlap and led them in similar

directions.

While Steiner's association with radicals, mystics, and esotericists is well documented,

Weber's interaction with similar groups and individuals is not nearly as well known or

documented in the scholarly literature. This is why I have devoted chapter three to discussing the

two trips Weber made to the colony of artists, radical political anarchists, writers, poets, and

spiritual seekers in Ascona, Switzerland, in 1914 and 1915. His two stays have not attracted

enough attention from scholars in religious studies or the history of sociology.[84] I consider these

experiences central for understanding Weber's conception of science, nature, mysticism,

asceticism, eroticism, and re-enchantment, all of which informed his writings on world religions.

As I argue in this dissertation, this influence extends to such important texts as *Die*

protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus, in which Weber articulated his notion of

the "iron cage," his *Zwischenbetrachtung*, in which he discussed mysticism and disenchantment,

the *Religiöse Gemeinschaften* (Religious Communities) section of *Economy and Society*, his

"Science as a Vocation" lecture, and his later sociology of religion writings that engage Asian

religion and philosophies.

Chapter four examines Weber's and Steiner's ideas about technology and how they fit in

as well as how they differ from other fears and utopic visions concerning technology popular at

the time. This includes a comparison of the important role that the materiality of technology

played in each of their philosophical systems, which, for both thinkers, ultimately functions as

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[84] Exceptions include Sam Whimster, ed., *Max Weber and the Culture of Anarchy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Joachim Radkau, *Max Weber: A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009); Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*; and Martin Green, *Mountain of Truth: The Counterculture Begins: Ascona, 1900–1920* (Hanover: New England University Press, 1986).

the lynchpin for their pessimistic interpretations of modernity, revealing the tension between religion and science. The framework of this chapter is inspired by the theories and methods developed in Science and Technology Studies (STS) that call into question the binary oppositions between religion and science and magic and religion. Once these binaries are recognized as misleading, it becomes possible to take Steiner's ideas seriously, allowing for an enriching comparison to be made between Steiner and Weber. Such research has opened the history of science by unsettling entrenched assumptions about what science is, who gets to practice it, and for what purpose. By showing that scientific knowledge is socially constructed, STS scholars have demonstrated that there is not a final definition of science. In other words, "nature"—whatever that may be—is not something "out there," but is rather part of a complex network of power relations, both human and non-human, as well as institutional relationships and funding dynamics that reflect specific cultural values.

Chapter five explores Weber's and Steiner's use of Asian religions and philosophies in order to make sense of radical social and intellectual upheavals. They looked "East" to try and understand the historical trajectory of Western Europe, how it had reached its perceived crisis, and how it could be liberated and/or re-enchanted. Weber's and Steiner's reflections about European identity frequently resulted in notions of ethnocentrism—as well as culturally and racially linked power imbalances—but at the same time these "Eastern" constructions forced them to confront human sameness and the socially constructed nature of European history and identity. By emphasizing how contact with Asian philosophies and religions transformed Europe and influenced the definition of European modernity—rather than focusing solely on how this contact influenced non-Europeans through imperialism and colonialism (which it certainly did)—it becomes possible to reassert agency to non-Europeans and erode the entrenched notions

of Eurocentrism in the historical methods of the academy. My work comparing Steiner and Weber's encounter with a constructed "East" will also restore and emphasize the visibility and agency of non-European cultural influences, while not minimizing or underrepresenting the negative impact of colonization and Eurocentrism. The goal is to contribute to the ongoing conversation of postcolonial theory and help to guide it in what I hope will be new and instructive directions. As the history of esotericism is connected to identifying European modernity and culture, much of this discourse during the modern period appropriated elements of non-European cultures to erect boundaries and formulate definitions. The function of esotericism must be considered central to Weber's notion of "disenchantment," as well as the role of "the East" implicit in his argument. This chapter is followed by a conclusion that revisits interpretations of Germany's transition to modernity, we well as the role of esotericism, in light of the findings of this dissertation.

Steiner and Weber have been considered polar opposites by most scholars, however, their core ideas are similar in important respects. Steiner expressed himself as a visionary narrator and Weber as a learned scholar, yet their education and the works they read and were inspired by were similar, resulting in a synthesis of natural science, romanticism, and esotericism that had many elements in common. This explains their analogous reaction to technological progress, as well as their interest in Asian philosophy and culture as a way of shedding light on very Western problems. Both feared that technological advance would eventually destroy society and human relationships unless it was carefully analyzed and rethought. They were convinced this could be done, although it would be difficult, and for both men this involved imagining a human-centered science that took seriously the ideas of Far and South East Asia. They were both caught up in the social changes of their time and passionate about shaping the future of Germany in ways that

would enhance human dignity and freedom through the humane use of science and technology. It is therefore crucial to recognize these similarities because they call into question the kind of dichotomies usually made by scholars, especially the ones that marginalize esotericism.

<center>**Chapter One**</center>

<center>**Early Years:**</center>

<center>*Apprenticeship*</center>

Introduction

The goal of this biographical focus is threefold: 1) to show that Weber and Steiner, despite some differences in their lives, followed a similar trajectory of development and addressed similar intellectual problems in their work and lives; 2) to offer certain biographical connections between the two men which are unknown or not well-known; 3) to suggest that these supposedly radically different thinkers have important similarities that need to be highlighted in order to create a more accurate picture of the 1890 generation to which they belonged. Weber and Steiner had remarkably similar educations and were concerned with similar issues throughout their lives, and this informed their equally similar reactions to technological and social change. At the same time, they had unexpected differences that serve to undermine the modern/anti-modern and rational/irrational binary categories of analysis.

Terms and Designations

Steiner's life and works defy easy categorization, shifting between many polarities, positions and fields of interest. This has contributed to his having been neglected in the academy. His followers largely accept Steiner's claims and present their teacher as an esoteric philosopher working from within the modern scientific method. According to this interpretation, Steiner developed an entirely new approach to science—i.e. spiritual science—and he represents the first modern person (or scientist) to enter consciously into the spiritual world using this new science.

He then systematized the universal truths that he "read" there into a rational philosophical system that could be replicated by other advanced spiritual scientists who had cultivated new organs of perception to perceive in the spiritual (read: noumenal) world.[85]

Steiner's critics, on the other hand, past and present, view him at best as a pseudo-scientist who was delusional and potentially mentally unstable for believing that he had accessed Kant's realm of the noumenon, or at worst as someone who laid the ground work for Hitler and National Socialism.[86] All this has made it increasingly difficult for outsiders and academics to get a clearer understanding of what motivated Steiner and other esotericists like him.

A fresh approach is needed, and this dissertation therefore departs from these previous interpretations and presentations of Steiner. Instead, I build on the phenomenologist Ulrich Kaiser's recent approach to Steiner as a narrator or storyteller (*Erzähler*), whose narratives transcend the common construction of stories and offer an authentic understanding that may prove "true" in everyday life.[87] Rather than attempting to assert the scientific credibility of Steiner's philosophy, Kaiser takes inspiration from several of Steiner's remarks, such as the following: "*I do not teach*; I tell what I *lived through* inside. I tell it the way I lived it."[88] In this way, Steiner's legacy, including his teachings and philosophy, is re-represented by Kaiser in terms of its narrativity and performativity. Such a novel approach is not meant to characterize

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[85] See, for example, the work of one of Steiner's most devoted followers, Carl Unger.

[86] For example, the writer Siegfried Kracauer wrote to Theodor Adorno upon Steiner's death in 1925: "How fast this spook will be forgotten." Quoted in Harry T. Craver, *Reluctant Skeptic: Siegfried Kracauer and the Crises of Weimar Culture* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 184. Even those who nowadays might be classified as esotericists, such as Carl Jung, viewed Steiner in a similar way: "All the ideas that Steiner advances in his books you can also read in the Indian sources. Anything I cannot demonstrate in the realm of human experience I let alone … there is no reason to get excited about anything that Herr Steiner has said." Carl Jung, *C.G. Jung; Letters. Vol. 1*, ed. Gerhard Adler (London: Routledge, 1973), 203–204. On alleged connections between Steiner and the rise of National Socialism, see Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

[87] Ulrich Kaiser, *Der Erzähler Rudolf Steiner. Studien zur Hermeneutik der Anthroposophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Info 3, 2021).

[88] "*Ich lehre* nicht; ich erzähle, was ich innerlich *durchlebt* habe. Ich erzähle es so, wie ich es gelebt habe." From a letter to Rosa Mayreder. Rudolf Steiner, *Briefe. Band II* (GA 39; Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1987), 232.

Steiner as irrational, but rather to challenge his reputation as such. When Steiner is referred to as "irrational" in this dissertation, it is a reference to how Steiner is and has been evaluated by academics and people outside of his anthroposophical community. In the present study, on the other hand, Steiner is represented as a visionary narrator of his own experience, an experience of the world and reality that overruns the boundaries of what is considered scientifically possible.

Esoteric thinkers like Steiner need to be considered on the same footing as accepted academic thinkers like Weber. Referring the Steiner as a "mystic" and "visionary narrator," who often spoke in "mythopoetic" terms, allows scholars to more easily grasp and situate his anthroposophy and the peculiarities of his biography. This facilitates a comparison with Weber and shows that both thinkers asserted similar claims, only one did it more from within an accepted academic methodology (Weber), and the other employed a phenomenology of experience that could be narrated in the language not only of Western science but also implies myth and poetry, as well. Calling Steiner a "mystic" is possible in the sense that, contrary to Kant, he felt the numinous could be accessed through human cognition. While Steiner rejected the idea that he was practicing mysticism, rather doing spiritual science, outsiders and those who were not and are not his followers—especially those who adhered to a positivistic and reductionist form of science—absolutely did and do characterize Steiner in terms mysticism and irrationality. Steiner believed like many others at the time that he had access to the *noumenon*. In the minds of more scientific colleagues and academics, he did therefore appear as a mystic, even though he himself did not claim this. In other words, for outsiders and positivists and scholars, he was a mystic and irrational because he went against Kant. Critics of anthroposophy continue to characterize Steiner in this way.[89] The idea of mysticism will also be applied to Weber in certain

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[89] See, for example, the Dutch documentary by *vpro dok*, "Niederlande: Auf der Suche nach den Anthroposophen," video, 45:06, October 8, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wRYKrcOGC4.

contexts in order to denote a kind of romantic absorption into feeling and emotion, producing

experiences that go beyond the bounds of normative rationality. The concept of mysticism thus

allows for a further point of contact through which Steiner and Weber can be compared.

As previously mentioned, the description of the way Steiner presented his ideas as

mythopoetic is employed as part of the current reimagining of Steiner as a narrator of his own

visionary experience. Ernst Cassirer famously rejected the opposition between myth and reason,

claiming instead that myth is the basic language of all humanity that had to be decoded using the

kind of rational interpretation that philosophers were equipped to provide.[90] Cassirer posited an

underlying fundamental reality of unified consciousness that took expression through different

symbolic combinations. An understanding of the "pure" forms of experience underlying the

mythopoetic—or the "mythical-magical" and "mythical-religious" in Cassirer's language—was

necessary for making mythical thinking amenable to rational elucidation. Cassirer believed that

"different kinds of knowledge are different worlds" and that "a reflective consciousness serves as

a bridge between worlds … [as well as] between different spheres of human endeavor."[91] As

Cassirer explains:

> The mythical form of conception is not something super-added to certain definite *elements* of empirical existence; instead, the primary "experience" itself is steeped in the imagery of myth and saturated with its atmosphere. Man lives with objects only in so far as he lives with these *forms*; he reveals reality to himself, and himself to reality, in that he lets himself and the environment enter into this plastic medium, in which the two do not merely make contact, but fuse with each other.[92]

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[90] Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Volume I–III*, trans. S.G. Lofts (London: Routledge, 2019–2021).

[91] Gabriel Motzkin, "Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: A Foundational Reading," in *The Symbolic Construction of Reality: The Legacy of Ernst Cassirer*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Barash (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 73–90, 75–76.

[92] Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth* (New York: Dover Publications, 1946), 10.

Different worlds may well be rational and correspond to the fundamental reality. As scholars of esotericism have shown, theosophists were more open to modern science than the Fundamentalist Christians and many Catholics. Christopher White in *Other Worlds: Spirituality and the Search for Invisible Dimensions* reveals that many actual scientists and mathematicians at the time were attempting like Steiner to access the *noumenon* that Kant had sealed off from human cognition.[93] Steiner was thus not alone in his quest to penetrate the spiritual realm but should be placed among a score of other thinkers who were trying to extend the reach and ability of human cognition through everything from mathematics (hyperspace, the 4th dimension, quantum mechanics) to art and religion. As White argues, from the 19th century until today scientific theories have given people new ways to envision the supernatural, and this includes Steiner: "Scientific ideas have not just fostered secularity and religious decline but have also been used to help people believe in the existence of unseen, heavenly realms and recover an imaginative sense for the supernatural."[94]

Steiner claimed a middle path between "dreamy" mysticism and materialism, in other words a spiritual science or rational occultism.[95] As mentioned above, this project was not exclusive to Steiner but belonged to the long history of esoteric discourse.[96] Kocku von Stuckrad has argued that two knowledge traditions have competed with one another over the course of Western intellectual history: one current identified with esotericism, which is based on the belief that direct experience of the divine is possible and the more skeptical current that considers the

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[93] See, for example, Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*; Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*; Christopher G. White, *Other Worlds: Spirituality and the Search for Invisible Dimensions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).
[94] White, *Other Worlds*, 3.
[95] See Robert Sumser, "Rational Occultism in Fin De Siécle Germany: Rudolf Steiner's Modernism," *History of European Ideas* 18, no. 4 (1994): 497–511. Steiner often related mysticism to a dream-like state of consciousness.
[96] On this history, see Kocku von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion*.

attainment of knowledge beyond rational demonstration impossible.[97] In Steiner's own time, the project of rationalizing magic and occultism or combining science and religion was pervasive among other esotericists in Europe, e.g. the Theosophical Society, Aleister Crowley's *Thelema* , and more occult forms of freemasonry. There were, of course, more mystically inclined esotericists, such as Martinism in France.[98] At the same time, these internal distinctions did not preclude outsiders and more positivistic scholars from characterizing esotericists like Steiner as irrational mystics engaged in pseudoscience and promoting visionary delusions, an interpretation that Steiner struggled against. Scholars of esotericism have referred to the power relations involved in this discursive phenomena as the appeal to scientific authority.[99] The focus in the present study therefore highlights the ways in which Steiner's thought overlaps with secular thinking and intersects with the radical, forward-looking ideas of his time. This draws Steiner closer to Weber, a scholar who, to varying degrees, is often considered to be a secular and scientific thinker.

In the spirit of Cassirer, as well as Kaiser's rethinking of Steiner as a narrator of personal experience, I suggest a mythopoetic approach as a fruitful way to address Steiner's thought in the confines of current academic scholarship. For this dissertation, such an approach is introduced because it draws out the similarities between Steiner and Weber and reveals that they asked similar question and drew similar conclusions, only expressed and communicated in very different ways.

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[97] Kocku von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

[98] On the history of French Martinism, see David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005).

[99] See Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*; Lewis and Hammer, eds., *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*.

For example, both men agreed on the major problems facing Western civilization and the need for a solution, although they differed in the way they approached the problem and the solution: Weber took an academic and what was then considered a rational and scientific approach, while Steiner's approach seemed mythopoetic. Both of them believed that European civilization had reached a crisis point and sought to alleviated this crisis by bringing humanity back into some kind of meaningful relationship with the world. To a certain extent, Weber also expressed his ideas using mythopoetic language to describe this crisis by claiming that humans had imprisoned themselves in an "iron cage" of reason. Steiner suggested the demonic forces of technology and materialism were distorted human consciousness. These approaches emerged out of debates that dominated in the early-modern and Enlightenment periods, which had to do with the nature of human beings, their place and purpose in the universe, and their relationship to God and nature. It adds greatly to the historical record to analyze how these two figures developed, why they went in the directions they did, and why Weber's oeuvre was canonized, while Steiner's was not. This illuminates the academic canonization process and knowledge practices of the *fin de siècle* and allows us to understand the past in a more balanced and accurate way, recognizing that the oppositional categories theorized by many 20th century historians must be reconfigured.

Generation of 1890

The general view of Steiner is that he was a mystic who was rejected by the academy because his views were eccentric and based on spiritual experiences with no scientific basis. While it is certainly true that Steiner's thought was mystical in many respects, it is clear that from his earliest years at the Vienna technical school he was aware of the fact that he had to

present his ideas in a way that was scientifically valid and could be understood and verified by others. The basic thrust of Steiner's life-long work was to integrate the spiritual and material into a holistic philosophy. What is so striking about this for the purposes of my argument is that this was in many ways exactly what Weber himself was trying to do. The two men were therefore not poles apart; they did not represent two distinctly different worldviews, as scholars have claimed. Like the Romantics who preceded them, both Steiner and Weber wanted to present a unified theory, not in the sense of Einstein, but in the sense that it was impossible to separate the material and the spiritual. These were two sides of a single holistic reality.

To understand these commonalities, it is instructive to revisit the lives of Weber and Steiner also from the perspective of a "sociology of generations," an idea introduced by Karl Mannheim in 1928. Weber and Steiner were contemporaries: they belonged to the same generation and therefore their lives, interests, and concerns can tell us a great deal about a particular moment in European history. Mannheim argued that historical generations were a sociological phenomenon in that cohorts or groups of people in their younger years could be similarly influenced by the same historical events, generating a sense of shared experience and "a distinctive consciousness."[100] By problematizing the notion of historical generations, Mannheim argues that investigating such a phenomenon becomes essential to understanding the formation and appearance of social and intellectual movements across history.[101]

According to Mannheim, earlier approaches to the problem of generations functioned primarily according to a familiar binary that is reminiscent of the way Weber and Steiner have been interpreted: a "positivist" and a "romantic-historical" approach. The positivist approach,

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[100] Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Culture* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1956). Although the idea has been criticized for being partly Eurocentric, it nevertheless functions quite well in the case of Weber and Steiner who belong to the same context as Mannheim.
[101] Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology*, 286–287.

founded by thinkers such as Hume and Comte and then continued largely in the French context, believed that progress increased from generation to generation and could be measured quantitatively. That is, it could be assessed in biological terms based on age and life span. The "tempo" of progress was therefore a slow but gradual balance of conservative (parents) and reforming (youth) elements in (Western) history. Applying this principle, the increase in rationality over time could be shown with "mathematical clarity" simply by calculating the limited life spans of human beings.[102] The romantic-historical tradition, on the other hand, was representative of German thinkers such as Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) and Wilhelm Pinder (1878–1947) and contained a strong element of conservatism, which, according to Mannheim, held sway in the cultural sciences while only in the natural sciences could positivism develop. Where these two approaches apparently differed was on the question of time, that is, the belief (positivist) or disbelief (romantic) in the concept of a unilateral development in history. Did historical time develop in an empirical and objective unilateral direction, or was there, as Dilthy argued, a type of inner time that could only be experienced subjectively?[103]

Such a dichotomous analysis could apply to Weber and Steiner even within Germany, but only if the legitimacy of this neat interpretive binary is allowed. The following biographical chapters, however, reveal a messy and complex historical reality. Mannheim's solution to the problem is helpful in that he focuses on the role that creative social forces and processes play in shaping the personalities in each generation. These forces and processes constitute a shared contemporaneity of determining influences that fashion and form the individuals who experience the same events at the same time in their lives. The formation of generational identities is therefore not only the result of a consciously willed action to belong to a specific group or

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[102] Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology*, 277–278.
[103] Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology*, 281.

movement, but rather a reactive response to a specific social situation or "location," such as class position. As Mannheim explains: "the unity of generations is constituted essentially by a similarity of location of a number of individuals within a social whole."[104]

From Mannheim's perspective, then, two individuals such as Weber and Steiner, who were born at the same time and were part of the same generation, are to some extent endowed with a "common location in the historical dimension of the social process."[105] They are limited "to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action."[106] Mannheim refers to this as the "tendency" and "potential" inherent in a generation location. However, it is not only location, in both the geographic and social sense, but "*participation in the common destiny* of this historical and social unit" that forms a bond, which is the result of exposure to the dynamic process of historical de-stabilization and an active participation in processes of social transformation.[107]

Such insights are important for understanding Weber and Steiner as conscious actors engaged in their own process of cultural, spiritual, social, and intellectual transformation. From this perspective, their similarities seem less surprising—although no less important—and turn out to be instructive for reinterpreting German history at the beginning at 20th century without relying on binary categorization. The generation of 1890, to which Weber and Steiner belonged, experienced the profound transformations that came with the advent of modernity and the chaos, confusions, and problems that accompanied Germany's becoming an integrated and technologically and politically powerful nation. This particular generation was faced with novel

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[104] Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology*, 290.
[105] Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology*, 290.
[106] Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology*, 291.
[107] Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology*, 303. Mannheim is echoing Heidegger here.

and unsettling advances made in science and technology that brought the issue of truth, power, and the relationship between technical and humanistic knowledge to the forefront of their minds.

Childhood and Family

Steiner's life has been mythologized and by his own account was filled with unusual and rationally inexplicable experiences.[108] This presents a challenge for constructing a biography. Although he wrote an autobiography toward the end of his life, it is limited to a focus on his mental development and written in a detached style in which he refers to himself in the third person. It is as if he were wearing a lab coat and peering through a magnifying glass at his mental activity to study the individual path of his spiritual development. For example, when writing about his childhood, he refers to himself as "the boy" (*Knabe*), as if to tell his readers he no longer feels himself to be that person. This is indicative of Steiner's individualistic style. While the autobiography is informative in terms of his intellectual background and development,

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[108] There is a dearth of scholarly analysis of Steiner's oeuvre and a lack of academically produced critical editions of his writings and lectures (of which there are thousands), especially in English, although a recent exception are the excellent critical German editions brought out by Christian Clement. Scholars who have taken it upon themselves to analyze Steiner sometimes employ a "hermeneutics of suspicion," which is understandable given that almost everything published by and about Steiner has been produced by in-house presses, and which have been, in the words of Jennifer M. Gidley, "unrealistically uncritical." I have therefore been careful to choose a balanced array of emic and etic sources. However, I acknowledge the ongoing problems in this area. I rely primarily on Steiner's autobiography and utilize Christian Clement's online German edition, either translating the Germen myself or relying on the English translation of *The Story of My Life* (GA 28; London: Anthroposophical Publishing Company, 1928), available online from *The Rudolf Steiner Archive & e.Lib* at https://www.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028. In addition, I rely on Cees Leijenhorst, "Steiner, Rudolf," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter Hanegraaff, Antoine Faivre, Roel van den Broek, Jean-Pierre Brach (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1084–1091; Jennifer M. Gidley, "Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925)," in *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*, ed. Norbert M. Seel (New York: Springer, 2012), 3188–3191; Ursula B. Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner: An Intellectual Biography" (PhD Diss., University of California, Riverside, 1989); Helmut Zander, *Rudolf Steiner: Die Biografie* (München: Piper, 2011); Miriam Gebhardt, *Rudolf Steiner: Ein Moderner Prophet* (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2011); Christoph Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner: A Biography* (Great Barrington: Steiner Books, 2012); Gary Lachman, *Rudolf Steiner: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2007); Edward E. Tazer-Myers, "Rudolf Steiner's Theory of Cognition: a Key to His Spiritual-Scientific Weltanschauung" (PhD Diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2019); Jennie Louise Cain, "The Aesthetics of Rudolf Steiner and Spiritual Modernism" (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2016). Finally, throughout the dissertation I frequently make use of the online versions of Steiner's *Gesamtausgabe* (GA), which have been made available by the Freie Verwaltung des Nachlasses von Rudolf Steiner at http://fvn-archiv.net/.

it leaves out a great deal, including most of Steiner's personal life, which has been lost to history. Strangely, the autobiography omits important aspects of Steiner's esoteric life that one might expect to find there, although it does include experiences of a clairvoyant nature. For example, there is hardly any mention of his ritual and occult work. But the detached approach was deliberate, and Steiner says as much in the first chapter, adding that he was not interested in writing about himself but had done so at the request of friends.[109]

Even his birthday illustrates his reluctance to talk about himself, since Steiner offered two different dates. This is characteristic of another aspect of Steiner, which has added to the difficulty in approaching and understanding his work, namely, that he often seems to contradict himself and make different statements at different times. According to Steiner and his followers, this is because he always looked at things from a variety of perspectives. However, it must be added that this is due to Steiner's imbuing every event, even the simplest and most seemingly inconsequential, with spiritual meaning, a tendency that begins even with the recounting of his birth. According to his autobiography, as well as official documents, he was born on February 27, 1861. However, at least once in his earlier life he gave the date as February 25, a discrepancy many anthroposophists have puzzled over and typically reconcile by concluding Steiner was indeed born on the 25th but was baptized two days later.[110] While this might seem an insignificant detail, as Helmut Zander has suggested, it becomes important for viewing Steiner's

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[109] Rudolf Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang* (3. Auflage; Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 2009), 7. Available online at http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/schriften/028.pdf.

[110] See Rudolf Steiner, *From the Course of My Life: Autobiographical Fragments*, ed. Walter Kugler (Forest Row: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2013), 2; Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner*, 2. For the German, see Rudolf Steiner, *Selbstzeugnisse. Autobiographische Dokumente* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2007), 73; Zander, *Rudolf Steiner*, 13. For anthroposophists opting for the date of February 25, see Sergei Prokofieff, *Relating to Rudolf Steiner: And the Mystery of the Laying of the Foundation Stone* (Forest Row: Temple Lodge, 2008), 29; Ernst Katz, *Core Anthroposophy: Teaching Essays of Ernst Katz* (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2011), 2.

life because it reveals that, for Steiner, the spiritual world is the truth and more real than material facts and history.[111]

The place of his birth, however, remains consistent. Steiner was born in Kraljevec, Austria-Hungary, which is in modern-day Croatia. He grew up in a working-class environment. His father Johann Steiner (1829–1910) was working as a telegraph operator and stationmaster on the Southern Austrian Railway. His mother, Franziska Steiner (1834–1918), seems to have been more pious than her husband, and in Steiner's recounting she mostly concerned herself with household affairs because of the family's poverty.[112] Johann and Franziska had met while the former was employed as a forester and huntsmen by the local noble. When the Count refused his request to marry Franziska under the condition that his gamekeepers must remain single, the couple fled their Lower Austrian homeland in an act of rebellion that landed them in the border region between modern-day Hungary and Croatia. This family history created a feeling of "homelessness" that colored Steiner's childhood. As he recounts in the first pages of his biography, the place of his birth was far away from the world his family came from.[113] It could be suggested that although Steiner never mentions this, he followed in his father's footsteps by displaying a tendency toward rebellion and assertion of personal will throughout his early life.

The family continued to move about for some time, during which Franziska gave birth to Steiner's two siblings: Leopoldine (1864–1927) and Gustav (1866–1941). The latter was born deaf and with learning disabilities, thus requiring much of Franziska's—as well as young Rudolf's—time and attention. While his mother remained religious, Steiner describes his father

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[111] "…dass die geistige Welt die Wahrheit sei." Zander, *Rudolf Steiner*, 13.
[112] As a corrective to anthroposophical biographers, who tend to paint Steiner's life as a tale of "rags to riches," both Zander (17) and Gebhardt (36ff.) point out that despite the material hardships the family may have suffered, Johann's position with the railroad was ultimately a privileged one, granting social and intellectual capital to Johann, and through Johann, to his first-born son.
[113] Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter I, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c01.html.

as a "free-sprit" (*Freigeist*), who, though he had attended the regional church as a boy, wanted nothing to do with religion (although the family did tend to befriend the local village priests) and took more interest in politics. Even when Steiner acted as altar boy and was becoming increasingly interested in the ritual of transubstantiation, his father refused to attend the services, although he apparently became a "pious man" [*ein frommer Mann*] again after retiring later in life.[114] Ursula Marcum suggests the Catholic Church's support of the Count against Johann's petition for a marriage turned the young man against his religion.[115] Steiner claims that Johann was forced to work many days and long shifts at the railway station in a "colorless" existence that offered him only "grayness."[116] In Steiner's remembrance, though he was kind, his father had a temper that could become "passionately flared up" (*leidenschaftlich aufbrausen*).[117] As Zander points out, the impression one gets of Steiner's early family life seems to be one of the father as central patriarch, caring yet authoritative, with a loving though distant mother receding into the background.[118]

As an example of the centrality of his father in his life, when six-year-old Steiner was enrolled in the Pottschach village school, he was wrongly accused of committing mischief, and as a result his father pulled him out immediately, deciding to homeschool him instead. As Franziska was busy with the other children, Johann brought Steiner to the train station with him each day and attempted to school the young boy there. Steiner reports that he was unable to find any real interest in his father or his lessons and spent most of the time reading books, appreciating the beauty of the natural surroundings, and pondering over the mechanical nature of

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[114] Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 27.
[115] Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner," 26.
[116] "…das Leben nichts Farbiges, nur Grauheit." Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 9.
[117] Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 9.
[118] Zander, *Rudolf Steiner*, 16–17.

the railroad technology.[119] Without many friends, he ended up spending much of his time alone, and he describes himself as an awkward or difficult boy (*ein unbequemer Knabe*), a sensitive soul absorbed in a world of his own making.[120] Due to such experiences, Steiner excelled in reading in his subsequent education, yet struggled with writing and spelling.[121]

Many years later in 1913, not long after founding his Anthroposophical Society, Steiner gave a lecture to a group of "theosophical friends" in the tense atmosphere following his split with the Theosophical Society. In this lecture he recounted—also in the third person—his first clairvoyant experience, which he claimed took place during the many hours spent at the train station with his father. One day he was sitting alone in the waiting room of the station when a woman entered who he had never seen before, but who looked like a member of his family and who made hand gestures at him (*Gebärden*), saying something along the lines of "Do as much for me as you can!" before vanishing. It was only several days later that Steiner learned of an aunt who had committed suicide and learned that the women he had seen had likely been her.[122] This experience, along with others of a similar nature, drove a wedge between Steiner and his parents, for he claims he felt unable to speak to them about his clairvoyance because they were "rational people" and called him a "silly boy" when he spoke of such things.[123] However, this story also supplied the much-needed spiritualist *bona fides* Steiner needed to encourage other theosophists to participate in his separation from the Theosophical Society and his founding of the Anthroposophical Society in December of 1912.[124]

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[119] Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 12–13; Zander, *Rudolf Steiner*, 16;

[120] Rudolf Steiner, *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe. Band 83/84* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Nachlass-Verwaltung, 1984), 5.

[121] Zander, *Rudolf Steiner*, 13.

[122] Steiner, *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, 6; Zander, *Rudolf Steiner*, 27–28.

[123] Rudolf Steiner, *Self-Education: Autobiographical Reflections, 1861–1893*, trans. Alice Wulsin (New York: Mercury Press, 1985), 7; Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner*, 6.

[124] Gebhardt notes how Ernst Toller, who would become one of Max Weber's more radical friends and influences in Munich, recounts a similar childhood story in his biography regarding his uncle. Toller also later wrote for the

Steiner's earliest years were spent in a small town with easy access to the natural environment. He was therefore in a position to enjoy nature and perceive the spiritual reality behind it. At the same time, he gained first-hand knowledge of the technologies that were transforming that world. Zander describes this environment in terms of "*Geist und Materie*," or spirit and matter, the two separate realms that Steiner would spend his life trying to reconcile. Both realms fascinated him. Not only does he write reverently of the trees and mountains of the area ("the boy began to live to a certain extent with the spirits of nature"[125]), but he asserts that "I felt a very deep interest in everything about me of a mechanical character," and that "I was tremendously concerned with everything pertaining to the railroad. I first learned the principles of electricity in connection with the station telegraph. I learned also as a boy to telegraph."[126] Yet at the same time, he acknowledges that "this interest tended constantly to overshadow in my childish soul the affections which went out to that tender and yet mighty nature into which the railway train … must always disappear…"[127] This relationship between nature, machines, humans, and the spiritual beings who create behind them, is one that drove Steiner's intellectual and occult interests from childhood to the end of his life.[128] He recognized early on that certain technologies proved to be less harmful than others, for example, when he speaks of the friendly mill and the unfriendly factory.[129] In other words, his childhood set the stage for his life's mission to create a holistic worldview integrating nature and culture as he later understood them.

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magazine *Individualität. Vierteljahresschrift für Philosophie und Kunst*, which aimed at bridging the gap between anthroposophists and non-anthroposophists, and which Steiner also wrote for. Gebhardt's insight is that "Während Ernst Toller seine Kindheitserzählung in die Lebensgeschichte eines Sozialisten und Revolutionärs eingebaut hat, hat Steiner daraus die Initationsgeschichte eines Okkultisten gemacht…" See Gebhardt, *Rudolf Steiner*, 34.

[125] Quoted in Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner*, 7.
[126] Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 10, 30.
[127] Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 10.
[128] "…den schaffenden Wesenheiten hinter den Dingen." Steiner, *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, 7.
[129] "…der freundlichen Mühle und der unfreundlichen Spinnfabrik." Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 16.

Weber's childhood was, to some extent, more conventional, taking place in an urban and more societal context. He was born in Erfurt on April 21, 1864, to Max Weber Sr. (1836–1897), a prosperous lawyer and politician, and Helene Fallenstein (1844–1919), a moralistic and strict Protestant. His brother Alfred (1868–1958) was born in 1868, followed by his other brother Karl. In 1869 the family moved to Berlin, where, through his father, Weber found himself among many prominent German liberal academics and politicians, who often visited the Weber household. These years were dominated by his father's involvement with the pro-Bismarckian National Liberal Party as well as his mother's Calvinist orthodoxy. Weber's mother and father were two individuals with very different personalities, and their differences became a source of continual conflict between them and proved to be a terrible strain on the children. This was especially true of the eldest son Max, whose later theories of rationality and religion were deeply influenced by his family situation. This pattern mirrors Steiner's upbringing, for as Joachim Radkau has pointed out, Weber was also born into a household with a liberal-anticlerical father absorbed in worldly affairs and an austere and pious mother.[130]

Marianne Weber's biography of her husband offers additional insight into the family dynamics, especially Weber's mother's mythologizing of Weber's grandfather, whom she compared to Weber and described in terms of "manly strength" and "crusty frankness" with an "easily inflamed temper."[131] He was apparently a stern moralist who angered easily but was gentle to weaker persons, especially young girls, yet he remained barbaric toward them as well in order to toughen them up. According to Marianne, Max's mother Helene viewed sex as sinful and only justified by procreation, and she was obsessed with his moral and physical

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[130] Radkau, *Max Weber*, 61.

[131] Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988.), 2. See also Roslyn W. Bologh, *Love or Greatness: Max Weber and Masculine Thinking: A Feminist Inquiry* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1990), 27–30. Similar to Steiner's biography, Marianne refers to herself and Weber in the third person.

development, especially after he contracted meningitis at a young age.[132] Following the death of a daughter, Weber's mother became inconsolable, at which point her husband grew more and more distant. Max apparently harbored a secret contempt for his mother, and Max's grandmother suggested that Max needed to be treated with more love. In other words, Helene was moralistic and controlling, and Max responded by being aloof like his father.[133]

Steiner and Weber were thus raised in families in which the father represented a rational, non-religious attitude, while the mother represented religious piety and salvific emotions. Both men subsequently led lives in which bringing these two polarities together was crucial and remained a source of constant struggle and torment, but also of creativity.

Early Education

Steiner's family soon moved to Neudörfl, Austria, where Steiner returned to public school. At this time, he began to meet teachers and other mentor figures he respected, including the assistant teacher of the school's headmaster who tutored him in geometry. Steiner fell in love with geometry and claims it helped him rationally make sense of the world beyond the senses and assured him that such a world existed, illustrating how one could differentiate "between things and beings 'which one sees' and those 'which one does not see.'"[134] He describes his fascination with the local freemason's lodge and befriended the village's Hungarian priest, Franz Maráz, who exposed him the mysteries of Catholic ritual as well as astronomy and Copernicus.[135]

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[132] Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography*, 33.
[133] Bologh, *Love or Greatness,* 27–30.
[134] "Ich unterschied Dinge und Wesenheiten, «die man sieht» und solche, «die man nicht sieht»." Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 22.
[135] Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 25–27; Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner*, 10; Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner," 31–34.

Though Johann appears to have tolerated his son's spiritual interests, he had a technical career in mind for his son and decided he should attend the *Realshule* (as opposed to the *Gymnasium*) in nearby Wiener Neustadt. Steiner spent the next seven years commuting by train to the school. From the very beginning, Steiner was following a course of education in what were then the advanced natural and technical sciences, a course that culminated in his studies at the Vienna Technical School. This is important for understanding his later concern with integrating the spiritual and material because it reveals that he wasn't a mystic out of disdain for and ignorance of science. The *Realschule* (secondary school) in the European context functioned primarily as preparation for admission into a technical college, followed by a technical career or apprenticeship (e.g., as a stationmaster). As Gary Cohen points out, the first *Realschule* was founded in Vienna in 1809 in order to "give greater emphasis than did the *Gymnasien* to mathematics, physics, chemistry, and modern languages and help prepare future engineers, technicians, and businessmen."[136] In other words, the *Realschule* was intended to develop modern or scientific alternatives to the classical education model.[137] *Gymnasium* (grammar school), on the other hand, is preparatory for attending university and focuses more on the classical humanities, although the *Gymnasium* curriculum also included the natural sciences in a more theoretical sense.[138] Thus, Steiner may have had a better education in the technical sciences than Weber, who attended *Gymnasium* and is remembered as a academic rationalist.

As Steiner's family continued to struggle financially, he began tutoring mathematics and other subjects to earn extra income. But even at this early age, it is clear that Steiner's interests

[136] Gary Cohen, *Education and Middle-Class Society in Imperial Austria, 1848–1918* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1996), 12.

[137] Cohen, *Education and Middle-Class Society in Imperial Austria*, 22; Robert Anderson, "The Idea of the Secondary School in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 40, no. 1-2 (2004): 93–106, 95.

[138] See also Manfred Eckert, *Die Schulpolitische Instrumentalisierung Des Bildungsbegriffs: Zum Abgrenzungsstreit Zwischen Realschule Und Gymnasium Im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: R.G. Fischer, 1984).

also went beyond the technical sciences. In his autobiography he describes the day when he saw

a copy of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in a bookstore and used his tutoring money to buy it.

Because he found the lectures of the history teacher at the *Realshule* so boring, he would read

"single sections of the little Kant volume, placed … inside the history book, which I there kept

before me during the history lesson."[139] He grew increasingly absorbed by Kant's ideas and used

them to try and make sense of the insights he gained about the existence of two worlds, the

noumenal and the phenomenal, through his study of geometry. One of Kant's most famous

passages from this book runs: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration

and awe … the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."[140] One can imagine

Steiner reading such lines with a sense of wonder for the existence of two such worlds, which,

according to Kant, were forever to remain separate in the human experience. Kant described the

noumenal realm, as opposed to the sense world of phenomena, as "a concept problematic that

contains no contradiction but that is also, as a boundary for given concepts, connected with other

cognitions, the objective reality of which can in no way be cognized."[141]

It was the idea that human cognition could never truly know the "world-in-itself" and

must rely on mediating concepts that Steiner rejected and would spend the rest his life arguing

against. Several years later in his major philosophical work, the *Philosophy of Freedom*, he

argued that "[d]ualism rests on a false conception of what we call knowledge. It divides the

whole of existence into two spheres, each of which has its own laws, and it leaves these two

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[139] Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 38–39.

[140] Paul Guyer, "Introduction: The Starry Heavens and the Moral Law" in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

[141] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 350.

worlds standing apart and opposed."[142] To solve this problem, Steiner offers a type of meditative process of observing and thinking about one's own thinking in order to arrive at the *essence* of thinking through a process of intuition.[143] He would eventually transform this process into an inner formation of a clairvoyant organ, which can perceive in spiritual realities. Thus, his discovery and reading of Kant was crucial: it served as Steiner's major introduction to German literature and philosophy and laid the groundwork for his career as a philosophical thinker. Zander confirms this, suggesting that following his first exposure to Kant, Steiner's biography becomes "a lifelong attempt to reverse the expulsion from the paradise of immediate access to the world that was initiated by Kant."[144]

Weber similarly followed the footsteps of his father, becoming comfortable with the steady stream of politicians and academics that frequented the Weber home, and he would later identify himself as a member of the bourgeois class.[145] Unlike Steiner, he excelled in his studies, however like Steiner he began reading philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Kant, and Goethe at a young age. In fact, he purportedly read all 40 volumes of Goethe's collected works secretly during class time, and indication of his profound and deep connection.[146] We thus have a picture of the young Steiner secretly reading Kant during his classes, and Weber secretly reading Goethe during his—precisely the opposite of what one might have expected, given that Weber is well-known for his connection to neo-Kantianism and Steiner for his connection to Goethe. Following

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[142] Rudolf Steiner, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* [The Philosophy of Freedom]. *Fundamentals of a Modern World Conception* (GA 4; London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing Company, 1949), Chapter VII, available online at https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA004/English/RSPC1949/PPSA_c07.html

[143] See Steiner, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* [The Philosophy of Freedom], Chapter IX, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA004/English/RSPC1949/PPSA_c09.html.

[144] „Man kann Steiners Biographie als einen lebenslangen Versuch lesen, die von Kant in die Wege geleitete Vertreibung aus dem Paradies eines unmittelbaren Zugangs zur Welt wieder rückgängig zu machen." Zander, *Rudolf Steiner*, 22.

[145] See, for example, Max Weber, "The Nation State and Economic Policy," in *Weber: Political Writings*, eds. Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–28.

[146] Kieran Allen, *Max Weber: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 16.

his graduation from the Kaiserin-Augusta-Gymnasium in Charlottenburg (a district of Berlin), Weber went to Heidelberg to study law. He was active in student fraternity life, drinking beer and participating in duals, and after two years left to perform his military service in Strasbourg.

During this time he stayed with his uncle, the political historian Hermann Baumgarten (1825–1893), who exerted a strong influence on Weber's intellectual development, especially his dissertation on the history of medieval trading companies that formed part of his first book, *The History of Commercial Partnerships in the Middle Ages*.[147] Baumgarten was a liberal like Weber's father and the two men's thought was similar. However, Baumgarten had never reconciled himself to Bismarck in the way Weber's father had. Baumgarten's wife, Ida, was quite religious and exposed Weber to the "apostle of Unitarianism," the American theologian William Ellery Channing, whose liberal theology Ida greatly admired. Channing, it should be noted, helped shape transcendentalism in the US, to which Ralph Waldo Emerson—one of Steiner's favorite Americans—also belonged.[148] Thus, it seems likely that when Weber returned to Berlin at his father's behest following this period, he now identified more with his mother and her religious and moral convictions, at least in terms of seeing the value of religion, even though he did not necessarily share her Christian beliefs.[149] This is important for understanding Weber's conflict later with his father.

Later Education

Steiner graduated in 1879 and was given a scholarship to attend the Vienna Technical College, which was founded in 1815 by Emperor Franz I for the purpose of training military

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[147] Lutz Kaelber, "Max Weber's Dissertation," *History of the Human Sciences* 16, no. 2 (2003): 27–56.
[148] See Rudolf Steiner, *Menschenschicksale und Völkerschicksale* (GA 157; Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1981), 273–278.
[149] Allen, *Max Weber*, 16-17.

engineers, mining, and civil engineering. He followed his reading of Kant with Fichte and other philosophers as he prepared for the first school year, hoping to become a mathematician or a natural scientist. Yet he continued having psychic episodes that involved seeing the recently deceased, with those around him reacting negatively to such experiences whenever he spoke of them.[150] During the Vienna years, however, he encountered important figures who helped him make sense of his occult sensibilities. One such figure was Professor Karl Julius Schröer (1825–1900), who introduced Steiner to Goethe and Schiller. Another was a local herb collector who had studied the writings of mesmerist Joseph Ennemoser (1787–1854) and who taught Steiner herbology and a type of folk plant alchemy.[151] Years later in a special document Steiner wrote for his fellow occultist, the French writer and theater critic Édouard Schuré, he claims to have been initiated during this time by the "Master M."[152] The "M" represented a quasi-materialized personality he later believed to be the reincarnation of Christian Rosencreutz, who in many ways resembles one of the "ascended masters" of the theosophical pantheon.

In 1882, the family moved to the Gliedererhof in the small village of Brunn am Gibirge that was nearer to the Vienna city limits. Not only was Steiner able to learn from Schröer at the technical school during this time, but he also audited courses at the university from several important philosophers, including Robert Zimmermann (1824–1898) and Franz Brentano (1838–1917).[153] Brentano introduced him to positivism and his critique of it. He also introduced Steiner

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[150] Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 59.

[151] One of Steiner's students, the Christian Community priest Emil Bock, is thought to have identified the herb gatherer as Felix Koguzki. See Emil Bock, *Rudolf Steiner. Studien zu seinem Lebensgang und Lebenswerk* (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1961).

[152] Steiner visited Schuré in the Alsatian village of Barr and at Schuré's request penned an autobiographical sketch, in which he mentions his experience with the "M" and which has become known as the "Barr document." See Robert A. McDermott, *The New Essential Steiner: An Introduction to Rudolf Steiner for the 21st Century* (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 2009); on Steiner believing it was Christian Rosencreutz, see N.V.P. Franklin, "Prolegomena to the Study of Rudolf Steiner's Christian Teachings with Respect to the Masonic Tradition" (PhD Diss., University of Wales, 1989), 265.

[153] Heiner Ullrich, *Rudolf Steiner. Leben und Lehre* (München: Beck, 2011), 15–17.

to the early formulations of Phenomenology, which would be taken up by Edmund Husserl, as well as to major developments in the psychology of the time, which were taken up by Freud.[154] The focus of such courses was on sense perception and its relationship to the truth and illusion of the reality we experience. Once again, this shows how broad Steiner's interests were and how eager he was to educate himself in areas besides the sciences proper. He even reports that he completed the entire curricula of the *Gymnasium* on his own and tutored on the subjects.[155]

While Steiner was engaged with new developments in philosophy and psychology, Schröer brought his attention to the idea that a "Volk" (a people) could have a unique spiritual quality of understanding. At the same time, Zimmermann introduced him to the idea of a wisdom of the human and the concept of *Anthroposophie*, which he would later formulate into his expression of *Anthroposophie* (human wisdom). He also encountered the writings of Nietzsche for the first time. Miriam Gebhardt has suggested that during this period Steiner was learning that in order for his ideas to be taken seriously, he had to appeal in some way to the authority of natural science and not merely interpret his experiences in terms of a subjective mysticism.[156]

Impressed with Steiner, Schröer got him a job editing Goethe's scientific writings for Joseph Kirschner's German National Literature series. This event may have encouraged him to quit the Vienna Technical College possibly due to his financial difficulties. Whatever the reason, he decided not to take the final exams and focused on editing instead. After making this decision, he continued his regular trips to Vienna and started collecting notes for a full-length work, *The Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception*, in which he would develop his own interpretation of Goethe's scientific ideas. Steiner's belief was that, for Goethe, the essence

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[154] Both Husserl and Freud learned from Brentano, as well.
[155] Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 198.
[156] Gebhardt, *Rudolf Steiner*, 53–55. See also Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*; Lewis and Hammer, *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*.

of the world was expressed in thought, and that this phenomena could be experienced directly and even studied empirically, a complete refutation of Kant. Such an interpretation has been criticized, both in Steiner's time and today.[157] It would get him into trouble when he was hired by the Goethe-Schiller Archive in Weimar and came up against the traditional interpretation of Goethe as the pillar of German classicism, an interpretation that tended to dismiss the scientific writings as dilettantish and focus on the literary output. "Epistemology," Steiner would write in this book, "leads to the positive conclusion that thinking is the essential being of the world and that individual (*individuelle*) human thinking is the individual (*einzelne*) form of manifestation of this essential being."[158] The notion that the activity of thinking is the connecting link between what is perceived and what is conceptualized—implying that reality is generated through this process—was fully developed in *The Philosophy of Freedom*, a text which, according to Steiner, formed the foundation of his later esoteric teachings.[159]

Weber, meanwhile, had been studying for the German bench or bar, during which time he became interested in Roman agrarian history and law, a subject that formed the basis of a second thesis in 1891, allowing him to teach commercial, German, and Roman law. In 1893 he married his cousin Marianne Schnitger, a prominent figure in the women's movement, and the same year joined the Society for Social Politics (*Verein für Socialpolitik*), forming a deep interest in the

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[157] For example, Astrida Orle Tantillo, *The Will to Create: Goethe's Philosophy of Nature* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), x: "A final difficulty in examining Goethe as a philosopher is that many have treated his science as a kind of mysticism or religion. While many of Goethe's earlier readers attempted to find religious overtones within the natural writings of their hero, the propensity of treating Goethe's scientific texts as mystical rather than philosophical is best illustrated in the works by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) and his followers, the anthroposophists. The anthroposophists, who often write on Goethe's science, tend to look within his texts for messages of personal/spiritual guidance and fulfillment."

[158] Rudolf Steiner, *The Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception with Specific Reference to Schiller* (GA 2; Spring Valley: Mercury Press, 1988), Chapter 13, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA002/English/AP1985/GA002_c13.html.

[159] Steiner claims this in the Forward to later editions of *The Philosophy of Freedom*, which were published after he become known as the head of the anthroposophical movement.

labor conditions of agrarians east of the Elbe River. This research culminated in his support for

the German process of industrialization and staunch opposition to the Prussian Junkers.[160] He

became known as a public speaker and an advocate for displaced German farmers. This period

has sometimes been framed in terms of Weber as the "rural sociologist" or "applied

anthropologist."[161] His work brought him into contact with various other religious, political, and

academic groups, some of which he joined, including the Evangelic Social Congress and the Pan

German League. He remained a member of the latter until 1899. Upon resigning, he cited the

League's conservative agricultural interests, on the one hand, but also their leniency on closing

the border to Polish immigrants on the other (later in life he also attempted to distance himself

from the antisemitic views of the League).[162]

    Based on these social connections and professional successes, Weber was appointed to a

chair for political economy in Freiburg, where he gave an academic inaugural address in 1895

about the nation state and national economic policy, which was published that same year.[163]

During these years when he worked primarily on economic and agrarian matters, there appears

one of the most important keys to understanding Weber, namely, his concept of the "magic of

freedom" (*Zauber der Freiheit*). He used this expression in relation to the real driving force of

history, as the subjective motivation of human actors, in order to explain the mass exodus from

rural areas especially to Berlin. In Weber's reading, German farmers had exchanged economic

security for personal freedom by disobeying the oppressive employers of the Junker estates

where they were treated like slaves, while at the same leaving a space for migrant Polish workers

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[160] See, for example, Max Weber, "Developmental Tendencies in the Situation of East Elbian Rural Labourers," in *Reading Weber*, ed. Keith Tribe (London: Routledge, 1989), 158–187.

[161] Paul Honigsheim, *The Unknown Max Weber* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2000), 1–32.

[162] Allen, *Max Weber*, 17–18. See also "Max Webers Brief an den geschäftsführenden Vorsitzenden des Alldeutschen Verbandes, Ernst Hasse, vom 22. April 1899," in Marianne Weber, *Max Weber. Ein Lebensbild* (München: Piper, 1989), 237.

[163] Weber, "The Nation State and Economic Policy," in *Political Writings*, 1–28.

to fill who, according to Weber, could more easily adapt to difficult working and living conditions.[164]

As José M. González García points out, Weber's description of the "magic of freedom" in this sense signifies a primeval force, an elemental drive inherent in human beings, which acts as the positive force of history: "This powerful psychological enchantment of the yearning for freedom … leads to the emergence of the free individual from a situation in which he was subjected to patriarchal forms of organization and social domination."[165] In the inaugural Freiburg lecture, Weber answers his own question "Why do the German day-labourers move away?" by citing this "mighty striving . . . for freedom":

> In this inarticulate, half-conscious urge towards far off places there lies hidden an element of primitive idealism. Anyone who cannot decipher this does not know the *magic of freedom*. Indeed, its spirit seldom touches us today in the stillness of the library. The naive libertarian ideals of our early youth have faded, and those of us who have grown prematurely old and all too prudent even believe that one of the most elemental drives in the human breast has been laid to rest…[166]

As Peter Ghosh points out, Weber believed that only awakening from the "dull resignation" on the part of the suffering laborers explained how some of them could choose a lifestyle that was oftentimes *worse* in terms of material stability than their previous circumstances.[167] Writing of her husband in the years following his death, Marianne recounted that during this period of his

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[164] J.M. Barbalet, "Weber's Inaugural Lecture and Its Place in His Sociology," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (2001): 127–150, 132. See also J.H. Clapham, *The Economic Development of France and Germany, 1815–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 205.
[165] José M. González García, "Max Weber, Goethe and Rilke: The Magic of Language and Music in a Disenchanted World," *Max Weber Studies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 267–288, 281. Weber used the phrase "magic of freedom" on two occasions in reference to the rural exodus of German laborers to the west of the Elbe and to cities such as Berlin: in the lecture *Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik,* published in 1895, as well as in his *Die Verhältnisse der Landarbeiter im ostelbischen* Deutschland published in 1892. See also Sam Whimster, *Understanding Weber* (London: Routledge, 2007), 18. For a recent monograph on this theme, see Christian Marty, *Max Weber. Ein Denker der Freiheit* (Weinheim; Basel: Beltz Juventa, 2020).
[166] Weber, *Political Writings*, 8-9.
[167] Peter Ghosh, *Max Weber and the Protestant Ethic: Twin Histories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 61.

life Weber began to understand the importance of "intellectual and moral freedom, [of] 'self-determination' of the personality by a *Soll* [moral obligation], [which] remained a basic law for him all his life…"[168] Steiner's answer to the problem of materialism similarly relied on his *Philosophy of Freedom*. Both Weber and Steiner gestured to this impulse to human freedom in order to highlight the negative aspects of modernity. This pattern places both Weber and Steiner in the current of Nietzsche, a connection that will be explored further below. In the case of Weber and Steiner, we find in the background the profound influence of Goethe and Nietzsche, which helps to explain why both men focused on the issue of entrapment and confinement in the modern world and mutually posited individual action and subjective moral development as the potential psychological "way out."[169]

Early Influences

Not only did Schröer land him his first serious editing work, but he introduced Steiner to Pauline and Ladislaus Specht, members of a prominent Jewish family in Vienna, who hired him to tutor their four boys.[170] Steiner gave the first three children preparatory instructions for their *Volkschule* years, but the fourth boy was mentally disabled, and the Spechts entrusted Steiner with his entire education. The challenges that Steiner had experienced with his younger brother, as well as those he faced tutoring the Specht's son Otto, who had been diagnosed with hydrocephalism, were instrumental in shaping his later conviction that education had to be tailored to the individual needs of students. This conviction became a cornerstone of Waldorf curriculum, Steiner's alternative pedagogy. Steiner accompanied the family on holidays, and he

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[168] Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography*, 88, 106. Quoted in Barbalet, "Weber's Inaugural Lecture," 136.
[169] The theme will be further explored in the chapter on technology.
[170] Peter Selg, *Rudolf Steiner: Childhood, Youth, and Study Years: 1861–1890*, *Vol. I*, trans. Margot Saar (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2014), 162–165.

recounts experiencing the tension and anxiety suffered by the family in response to growing waves of antisemitism that were spreading through the city. During this time, Steiner wrote an essay, a review of Robert Hamerling's *Homunkulus*, in which he also criticized "not the Jewish religion," but the Jewish "way of thinking" that he took to be isolationist, separatist, and pre-modern and therefore resisted full modernization.[171] The father of the Specht family confronted Steiner, remarking that the essay was unfriendly to Jews, something Steiner seems to have been oblivious to and to have disagreed with. As Steiner reports, at that time many of his closest acquaintances were becoming increasingly antisemitic and even attacked him for siding with the Specht family and continuing to help their children. Thus, he may have written this unflattering essay partly in response to social pressure.

Despite this tense situation, Steiner remained close to the family, especially the mother, Pauline, to whom he wrote in confidence when he lived in Weimar and experienced many setbacks and failures.[172] It is possible Pauline and the family failed to take offense because the years Steiner successfully spent tutoring Otto. However, Perry Myers argues that although Steiner was connected to the nationalist and populist context in Vienna—and arguably wrote nationalistic essays—he was not in fact an overt racist in his embrace of German culture, as, for example, he later denounced the 1895 election of the antisemitic Karl Lueger as the mayor of Vienna. According to Myers, Steiner "did not judge the question of the need for spiritual ideals to be an ethnic question, but rather one of individual nobility and self-acknowledgement within

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[171] Rudolf Steiner, "Robert Hamerling: '*Homunkulius.' Modernes Epos in 10 Gesängene*," *Deutsche Wochenschrift*, no. 16/17 (1888), http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/aufsaetze/l104.pdf. Steiner had many Jewish friends, teachers, and students throughout his life, and he primarily held an assimilationist position to Judaism, even when he later spoke out more harshly against the antisemitic outbreaks across Europe during his Berlin years when he wrote for the Anti-Semitism Defense Association (*Abwehrvereins*) and openly condemned all forms of antisemitism.
[172] On the Specht family, Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 191–194; Lindendberg, *Rudolf Steiner*, 71; Zander, *Rudolf Steiner*, 52–54.

the community and the world."[173] It is therefore perhaps best to think of the relationship between Steiner and the Specht family as constantly shifting and adjusting to the major historical events of the time. Steiner's years with the Specht family were important because it was during this time that he began formulating his ideas about a new kind of pedagogy. Otto Specht would go on to become a doctor following Steiner's six years of tutoring, which foreshadowed prominent aspects of the anthroposophical movement, namely, the focus on mentally disabled and autistic children and the alternative approaches to medicine at places such as the Camphill communities and the La Motta Institute in Brissago, Switzerland.

Through his involvement with the Spechts, Steiner encountered writers and artists who formed a major portion of the Viennese modernism scene. One wonders how Steiner could have believed at this time that there was such a thing as a Jewish way of thinking that was actively anti-modern after having met all these people through a Jewish family. For all his thinking out of the box, this incident suggests that Steiner was not immune to some of the less progressive ideas of his contemporaries, which just shows how pervasive antisemitism was becoming at the time. Steiner (and in some ways Weber) was in fact greatly influenced by modernist culture and is, perhaps, best described as a type of modernist, owing to his interest in creating new forms of art and culture to harmonized with the scientific and social developments of his time.[174]

Steiner frequented the Café Griensteidl in Vienna, a famous meeting point of two rival literary groups, the Jung-Wien and Iduna, who were at the time engaged in debates over the direction that modern Austrian literature should take.[175] The young Stefan George was also

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[173] Myers, *The Double-Edged Sword*, 112.

[174] A recent dissertation by Jennie Louise Cain advances this exact claim, that Steiner is best situated among the other "spiritual modernists" of his time, such as Wassily Kandinsky and the members of the *Blaue Reiter* group, Hugo Ball, and Johannes Itten. See Cain, "The Aesthetics of Rudolf Steiner and Spiritual Modernism," 31.

[175] Gotthart Wunberg, ed., *Das junge Wien: Österreichische Literatur- und Kunstkritik 1887–1902, I–II* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1976).

known to frequent Griensteidl.[176] Steiner was thus in the center of a thriving and contentious literary scene, which influenced the course his early career would take as a critic and magazine editor. In this context he befriended the Jewish occultist, vegetarian, and theosophist Friedrich Eckstein (1861–1939) (an acquaintance of Blavastky), who likely introduced Steiner to an esoteric circle around Alois Mailänder that worked a Rosicrucian system of masonic Western yoga based on the meditation techniques of Johann Baptist Krebs (1774–1851) (known by his pen name, J. B. Kerning), a famous freemason and opera singer.[177] Eckstein took Steiner under his wing and mentored him in occult studies and theosophy in a study group in Vienna, which he led, and this relationship laid the foundation for Steiner's later embrace of occultism.

The feminist writer Rosa Mayreder (1858–1938) was a member of Eckstein's group, and she and Steiner became friends as a result of Steiner's encouraging her to write.[178] This is one of his first close female intellectual relationships, of which there would be several throughout his life. Such connections played a part in later facilitating the substantial female representation in the leadership roles of the Anthroposophical Society. Eckstein's group also included the younger poet, Marie Eugenie delle Grazie (1864–1931), whom Steiner became fascinated and to whom he dedicated several essays. Steiner wrote an essay titled "Die Natur und unsere Ideale" for her in 1886, addressed to the "Honored Poetess," which later he reported in his autobiography was the "Urzelle" (first cell in a process of spontaneous generation) of his *Philosophy of Freedom*.[179]

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[176] We will return to George throughout the dissertation, as he plays an important role in the esoteric context that influenced Weber.

[177] For a full description of these events, see Karl Baier, "Yoga within Viennese Occultism: Carl Kellner and Co.," in *Yoga in Transformation: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Karl Baier, Philipp A. Maas, and Karin Preisendanz (Göttingen: V & R Unipress), 389–438.

[178] Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner*, 112–113.

[179] Rudolf Steiner, "Nature and Our Ideals," *Rudolf Steiner Archive & e.Lib*, June 23, 2010, https://wn.rsarchive.org/GA/GA0030/English/MP1983/NatIde_letter.html. See also Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 130. Steiner additionally credits his concept of a philosophy of freedom to his intense discussions with Rosa Mayreder. See Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner*, 112–113.

In other words, these independent modernist feminists played a significant role in shaping

Steiner's views about philosophy and intellectual development, as he himself acknowledges:

> it is only out of a deep feeling of gratitude if I say that the loving way in which the Specht house in Vienna accommodated me during the time I had to take care of the education of their children provided me with the uniquely desirable "milieu" for the development of my ideas; furthermore, I owe the mood for the final shaping of some of the thoughts … of my *Philosophy of Freedom* to the stimulating conversations with my highly esteemed friend Rosa Mayreder in Vienna…[180]

Weber similarly encountered many new ideas while living in Freiburg. Here he was

introduced to the Southwest school of neo-Kantianism and the so-called value philosophy

(*Wertphilosophie*) of Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936). Rickert's influence can be seen in Weber's

inaugural lecture, in which he formulated his early idea of value-freedom and the notion that

science cannot determine people's values because values are subjective and can only be *chosen*,

not determined.[181] Alongside other notable colleagues such as Emil Lask, and especially

Wilhelm Windelband in Heidelberg—who participated in Weber's intimate literary circles—the

influence of the Baden or Southwest school of neo-Kantianism is significant. This school has

typically been differentiated historically from the Marburg school because of an assumed rivalry

between the two factions during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[182]

Yet while both schools concerned themselves with going "back to" and "beyond" Kant,

the scholars in Marburg, led by figures such as Hermann Cohen (1842–1918), sought to

reconnect philosophy with the natural sciences and reject the speculations of the idealists,

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[180] Rudolf Steiner, *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft Vorspiel einer „Philosophie der Freiheit" 1892* (Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 2010), v, http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/schriften/003.pdf.

[181] Barbalet, "Weber's Inaugural Lecture," 129–130.

[182] See Samantha Matherne, "Marburg Neo-Kantianism as Philosophy of Culture," in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer: A Novel Assessment*, eds. Sebastian Luft and J. Tyler Friedman (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 201–232. For an earlier treatment of this theme, see Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860–1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), 131–152.

concentrating instead on empirical and mathematical data (*Naturwissenschaften*). The Southwest

school, on the other hand, privileged the humanities and focused on issues of personal values and

normativity (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Put generally, the former represented the sciences and

emphasized the internal structures of logic within the mind, while the latter represented the

humanities and investigated the transcendental or even "spiritual" conditions of values.[183]

This means the Southwest school was attempting to legitimize a field of "scientific"

inquiry into cultural, societal, and human actions, which was distinguished from, and importantly

on equal footing with, the natural or hard sciences. As some scholars have noted, Weber's

attempts to legitimize the field of social science, as well as his development of the "ideal type" as

a heuristic tool and his focus on value judgments, can be traced to the influence of the Southwest

neo-Kantians.[184] Significant for this study, Steiner would refer to his esoteric methodology also

as *Geisteswissenschaft* and sought to legitimize *his* field of "spiritual science" in relation to the

"materialistic" natural sciences. Although it is not a precise alignment, there is a parallel here

with Weber's lifelong intellectual activities that needs to be recognized, namely, that Steiner and

Weber both endeavored to carve out a respectable scientific methodology that eschewed a

reductive approach in favor of including spiritual, cultural, and subjective elements. What is so

interesting is that, contrary to what one might assume, it was Steiner who believed in the

limitless ability of science to apprehend all levels of reality, including spiritual and/or

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[183] There is, of course, reason to doubt this neat binary distinction as a scholarly creation. See Matherne, "Marburg Neo-Kantianism." For a more detailed background of these positions, see "Editor's Introduction," *The Neo-Kantian Reader*, ed. Sebastian Luft (London: Routledge, 2015).

[184] Acknowledging this association began with Alexander von Schelting, *Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre: Das Logische Problem Der Historischen Kulturkenntnis, Die Grenzen Der Soziologie Des Wissens* (1934; Arno Press, 1975); See also Fritz K. Ringer, *Max Weber's Methodology: The Unification of the Cultural and Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Bjarne Jacobsen, *Max Weber Und Friedrich Albert Lange: Rezeption Und Innovation* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts Verlag, 1999); Mark R. Rutgers and Petra Schreurs, "Weber's Neo-Kantian Roots," *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 26, no. 1 (2004): 103–111. For a counter-reading, see H.H. Bruun, "Weber on Rickert: From Value Relation to Ideal Type," *Max Weber Studies* 1, no. 2 (2001) 138–160.

metaphysical, and Weber who endeavored to form strict boundaries around the limitations of scientific knowledge, as we shall see.

One year after his Freiburg address, Weber retuned to Heidelberg after accepting the chair position in economics and finance as the successor of his academic teacher Karl Knies (1821–1898), who was one of the best known economists in Germany. Here Weber would become an enduring fixture in the small town along the river Neckar for many years to come. However, although he was making a name for himself as a lecturer and activist in the latter half of the 1890s, things were about to take a drastic turn.

The Young Radical

This section, which focuses solely on Steiner's experiences in Weimar, is comparable in certain respects to the chapter on Weber's two stays in Ascona, Switzerland, in that it contradicts the manufactured image of Steiner as a mystical all-knowing prophet. Weber's time in Ascona is so important that a separate chapter of this dissertation is devoted to it, which will include an in-depth analysis of Weber's complex relationships with women, another topic that unites Weber and Steiner. However, before moving on to Weber's and Steiner's intriguingly similar mental struggles, it is important to have the full picture of Steiner's less well known time in Weimar.

Steiner had been hired by Bernhard Suphan (the first director of the Goethe-Schiller Archive) for a seven-year collaboration as a *Mitarbeiter* (employee) on the Sophien Edition (*Weimarer Ausgabe*) of Goethe's *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* (natural science writings). From the start, there were problems between Steiner and his new boss, and he took refuge among new friends and intellectual circles, including the writer Gabrielle Reuter, with whom he established another strong intellectual connection. Steiner struggled at work and lived a

penurious life. He arrived in Weimar hoping to promote Goethean science and put it into

practice, but he later claimed the editors of the *Sophien* Edition were only interested in a

philological approach to Goethe's science writings.[185] As Marcum points out, Steiner's ideas

about Goethe's scientific writings were unorthodox by Weimar standards.[186] Steiner would come

to see Goethe's concept of morphology as providing crucial insight into his later

Geisteswissenschaft (spiritual science), which claimed that higher organs of perception could be

developed to observe a hidden and spiritual part of nature that was creative and alive and not

mechanical. This conception of nature, Steiner argued, was the correct interpretation of Goethe's

"archetypal phenomena," namely, that by staying with the phenomena itself one could observe

the spiritual essence of the world without having to resort to abstract metaphysical systems that

explain the hidden truth—i.e., natural science—but rather one could experience such spiritual

essences phenomenologically and empirically.

    To deal with this frustration over not having his ideas accepted, Steiner wrote a

dissertation thesis (on his own accord) and published philosophical works, in which he put

forward his own ideas and interpretations of Goethe's science, as well as his *Philosophy of*

Freedom and a book on Nietzsche. The work on Nietzsche is secular and politically radical,

while the work on Goethe is spiritual, which complicates the later picture of Steiner as a purely

enchanted thinker. These publications confirm that from his earliest years he was, rather,

working on the secular and spiritual together. Steiner hoped his dissertation on Fichte would

secure him a job as a *Privatdozent* (lecturer) in Jena. In his dissertation, he continues his

engagement with and rejection of Kant, ultimately arguing that Fichte's theory of science with its

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[185] Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner," 169–173. See also Wolfhard Raub, "Rudolf Steiner und Goethe" (PhD Diss., University of Kiel, 1989); Renatus Ziegler, *Geist Und Buchstabe: Rudolf Steiner Als Herausgeber Von Goethes Naturwissenschaftlichen Schriften* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2018).
[186] Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner," 171.

notion of the "I" and "intuition" suggested that human beings could have direct access to the thing-in-itself. The opening lines of Steiner's dissertation make this clear: "Present-day philosophy suffers from an unhealthy faith in Kant. This essay is intended to be a contribution toward overcoming this."[187] Steiner sent this "dissertation" to Professor Heinrich von Stein at Rostock University in order to satisfy the requirements for a doctorate. Professor Stein actually accepted it. However, during the oral defense, even he observed something slightly unorthodox about Steiner's ideas, remarking that Steiner's thesis had clearly not been written under proper supervision.[188] Despite being awarded the degree, his job application to the University of Jena was rejected, apparently because of a negative recommendation letter from Suphan, his boss in Weimar. This left Steiner sour and depressed about the whole experience, and his letters to friends back in Vienna paint the picture of an increasingly depressed, alienated, and rebellious individual.[189] Around this time, he met Anna Eunike, who would become his first wife. Steiner moved into her house and started tutoring her daughters. As Edward E. Tazer-Myers observes, Steiner relied on female relationships (e.g., Eunike and Pauline Specht) as "mother substitutes," or perhaps better stated, relied on them for emotional support, a trait to be found in Weber's life as well.[190]

Steiner's ideas and social connections, even his behavior, became increasingly radical as he gravitated toward Nietzsche, whose philosophy of individualism he identified with, and also to the individualist anarchism and existentialism of Max Stirner, a thinker who may have also influenced Nietzsche.[191] Steiner's connection with Nietzsche and growing interest in his writings

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[187] „Die Philosophie der Gegenwart leidet an einem ungesunden Kant-Glauben. Die vorliegende Schrift soll ein Beitrag zu seiner Überwindung sein." Rudolf Steiner, *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft*, i.

[188] Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, 201.

[189] Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner," 171–174.

[190] Tazer-Myers, "Rudolf Steiner's Theory of Cognition," 80.

[191] For the ongoing the Stirner-Nietzsche debate see, for example, Bernd A. Laska, "Nietzsches initiale Krise. Die Stirner-Nietzsche-Frage in neuem Licht," *Germanic Notes and Reviews* 33, no. 2 (2002): 109–133.

is attested to by the fact that he nearly took over responsibility for the archive from Nietzsche's

sister Elisabeth and Fritz Koegel, although this relationship ultimately turned sour and Steiner

publicly criticized Elisabeth for misunderstanding her brother's works.[192] In the chapter on

Nietzsche's development in Steiner's *Fighter for Freedom*, he refers to Stirner as "the freest

thinker modern humanity has produced," and claims Stirner produced the same worldview as did

Nietzsche, but earlier and with a clearer presentation.[193] Steiner's ideas about the importance of

individual freedom expressed through his philosophy of ethical individualism and anarchism are

placed alongside those of Stirner and Nietzsche, as it is Steiner's "individual" who owns his own

personality and ego. According to Steiner this is Nietzsche's *Übermensch*.[194] Later, Steiner

positioned himself at the midpoint between Marx's focus on material and Stirner's focus on

consciousness (ego), arguing that his own version of *Geisteswissenschaft* provided a type of

middle path.[195]

 Although Steiner claimed to have developed his thoughts about individual freedom and

ethics on his own, before having read Nietzsche, a certain influence or at the very least kinship is

nevertheless strongly present.[196] As Steven Aschheim points out, Steiner was among those who

accepted Nietzsche's attack on Christianity and search for a new spirituality outside

supernaturalism. He thus joined a group of people composed of atheists, socialists, monists,

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[192] David Marc Hoffmann, *Zur Geschichte Des Nietzsche-Archivs: Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, Fritz Koegel, Rudolf Steiner, Gustav Naumann, Josef Hofmiller: Chronik, Studien Und Dokumente* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991).

[193] Rudolf Steiner, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Ein Kämpfer gegen seine Zeit. 1895* (Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 2010), 65–66, http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/schriften/005.pdf. Steiner suggests Nietzsche was not influenced by Stirner directly but worked his way to the same views, however it has now been shown Nietzsche was indeed directly influenced.

[194] Steiner, *Fighter for Freedom*, 69. As Richard Hinton Thomas argues, Steiner was among one of many who used Nietzsche to "nourish" their own ideas. See Richard Hinton Thomas, *Nietzsche in German Politics and Society, 1890–1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 3.

[195] See Rudolf Steiner, *Boundaries of Natural Science*, Lecture II, *Rudolf Steiner Archive & e.Lib*, July 31, 2007, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA322/English/AP1983/19200928p01.html.

[196] See Christian Clement, "Einleitung," in *Schriften. Kritische Ausgabe/Band 2: Philosophische Schriften: Wahrheit Und Wissenschaft – Die Philosophie Der Freiheit* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2016), lxvii–lxviii. See also Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, Chapter XVIII.

artists, anarchists, and bohemians, all of whom shared an interest in Nietzsche and longed for a

new form of religiosity or spiritualty that transcended dogmas and traditional religious beliefs.

Owing to Nietzsche's multi-perspectival and erratic approach to philosophy, it was possible for a

variety of worldviews to be projected onto him. According to Aschheim, perhaps this is how

Steiner came to perceive himself in the stormy philosopher, as the title of his book on Nietzsche,

A Fighter Against his Time, seems to suggest.[197] Steiner saw in Nietzsche someone who believed

as he did that people had to create their own worldview and set of values from out of their own

being because modern scholarship and science had begun (and would continue) to strip away the

old religious illusions of the Church. When Steiner finally encountered Nietzsche in person long

after the philosopher had fallen ill, it provoked another clairvoyant experience for him, in which

he described seeing the true spiritual form behind Nietzsche, which had struggled but not been

fully able to achieve its spiritual work in this lifetime:

> Nietzsche's soul as if floating above his head, infinitely beautiful in its spiritual
> light … [a] soul which from previous earthly lives bore rich wealth of light, but
> which could not in this life cause all its light to shine. … In my thoughts I could
> only stammer over what I then beheld; and this stammering is in effect my book, *A
> Fighter Against his Time*. That the book is no more than a stammering conceals
> what is none the less true, that the form of Nietzsche I beheld inspired the book.[198]

While Steiner's book presents a positive picture of Nietzsche's philosophy, after his

embrace of esotericism his view of Nietzsche changed. Steiner then claimed that Nietzsche was

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[197] Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 213–214.

[198] Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, Chapter XVIII. English translation taken from Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XVIII, https://wn.rsarchive.org/GA/GA0028/TSoML/GA028_c18.html. Such experiences were uncommon for followers of Nietzsche who were permitted into his "death chamber," as it came to be called, and set eyes on the fading philosopher for the first time. *The Philosophy of Freedom*, Steiner's major philosophical work that bears the most resemblance to the ideas of Nietzsche, was published in 1893, while Steiner first visited the Nietzsche Archive in 1895 and 1895, and the meeting described above took place around that time. For an article about Nietzsche's dementia, which the author claims was not the result of syphilis, see Leonard Sax, "What was the cause of Nietzsche's dementia?" *Journal of Medical Biography* 11 (2003): 47–54.

possessed toward the end of his life by the spirit of inhuman technology and evil materialism, which he called Ahriman, who wrote through Nietzsche, especially in such works as *The Antichrist* and *Will to Power*.[199] The tragedy of Nietzsche was thus due to the philosopher's inability to attain the new form of religiosity he was so anxious to find. Steiner's philosophical contribution, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, would accomplish what Nietzsche sought but failed to find, namely a new basis for a new spirituality. This was what Steiner later formulated as anthroposophy. This text offers a radical philosophical project, especially in its first edition, and bears a close relationship to Nietzsche's ideas, while at the same time revealing a mystical undercurrent in the final chapter.[200]

The Philosophy of Freedom presents a monistic worldview predicated on the activity of thinking, in which the observation of one's own internal knowledge-formation leads to a type of "sense-free" thinking and the understanding that the spiritual and essential nature of humans and the world are interconnected—the opposite of Kant's conclusion. In other words, by attempting to exclude personal judgements and scientific concepts, Steiner foregrounds the lived experience of thinking, which he claims is an objective spiritual reality that can be experienced by an individual.[201] Attainment of such an awareness allows for true freedom and the ability to act out of one's inner knowing instead of acting mechanically based on an external philosophical system of morals, for to do so would be equivalent to following Kant's categorical imperative, which Steiner rejected. He was against the idea that empiricism alone could produce genuine

[199] Rudolf Steiner, *Esoterische Betrachtungen karmischer Zusammenhänge. Sechster Band* (GA 240; Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1992), 196.
[200] See Clement, "Einleitung," in *Schriften. Kritische Ausgabe/Band* 2. Others have argued that this last chapter underscored his atheistic and his radical beliefs, which were substantially altered in later editions. See Helmut Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland. Theosophische Weltanschauung und gesellschaftliche Praxis 1884–1945. 2 Bände* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 535; Gebhardt, *Rudolf Steiner*, 127.
[201] For a useful exposition of Steiner's ideas in *The Philosophy of Freedom* as phenomenological in nature (a term Steiner did not use), see Iddo Oberski, "Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy of Freedom as a Basis for Spiritual Education?" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16, no. 1 (2011): 5–17.

knowledge of the world, especially because it reduced everything to individual material entities

from a holistic, polyvalent whole. Thoughts are therefore key because in Steiner's system they

exist prior to the subjectivity/objectivity dichotomy and belong to both realms simultaneously.

The human being is, for Steiner, an "active co-creator of the world process," and cognition

represents "the most perfect link in the organism of the universe."[202] Based on this theory,

Steiner argues for the authoritative power of individual action based on the motive of personal

intuition and the conscious application of one's ideas.[203] He referred to this process as "ethical

individualism," a concept which, for Steiner, implied that the ethical value of one's actions had

to be decided for oneself, by the individual.[204] By acting in this way, the individual expresses his

or her own unique contribution, which combines and harmonizes with the unique contributions

of other individuals, forming a coherent whole.

While Steiner had hoped his writings would land him the position of a respectable

philosophy professor in Jena, he was in reality increasingly construed as a radical, a Stirnerian

individualist anarchist (a label he himself used on occasion to describe his philosophy) and a

member of the mystical "Nietzsche cult," a charge leveled by Weber's later sociologist

colleague, Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936). Tönnies claimed that Steiner was ignorant of history,

deriving his individualistic philosophy from an uncritical Nietzschean devotion.[205] In letters from

the time, Steiner confesses to being surprised by this charge, asserting that his *Philosophy of*

Freedom is not based on Nietzsche but on an anti-teleological monistic way of observing the

world, and claiming that Tönnies accuses him of seemingly everything, including adhering to

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[202] Rudolf Steiner, *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft*, iii.
[203] For a concise yet comprehensible description of Steiner's ideas in *The Philosophy of Freedom*, see Tudor Georgescu, "Rudolf Steiner – Moralist, Libertine or Amoralist?" Paper for *Hermetica I* (2006/2007), online at https://www.academia.edu/225985/Rudolf_Steiner_Moralist_Libertine_or_Amoralist.
[204] Steiner explains this quite well in a letter to Rosa Mayreder. See Rudolf Steiner, *Briefe. Band II*, 40–46.
[205] Ferdinand Tönnies, *"Ethische Cultur" und ihr Geleite* (Berlin: F. Dümmler, 1893).

Orthodox Judaism.[206] Steiner did not reply in print until 1900, calling Tönnies's pamphlet "worthless" (*wertlos*) and laughing at him for having referred to Nietzsche as Steiner's "Hermes" because in reality his Hermes had obviously been Goethe, something that, according to Steiner, was symptomatic of a misunderstanding of Goethe (and, by implication, of Steiner) prevalent in intellectual circles.[207]

While it is true that if anyone was Seiner's "Hermes," it was Goethe, Tönnies was correct to highlight Nietzschean qualities in Steiner's approach. Nietzsche believed Christianity ended in nihilism and that humanity needed to build new values out of themselves because neither science nor philosophy could provide a universal system of values and morals. In a certain sense, Steiner agreed. The *true* world, according to Nietzsche, Steiner, as well as Goethe, was the actual world that we experience, not the one upon which any type of system is imposed.[208] Science could thus account for only one aspect of this new worldview, but certainly not as the new authoritative truth holder. Tönnies disagreed and was therefore an ardent supporter of the ethical culture movement and a member of the Society for Ethical Culture, the organization Steiner originally criticized, drawing Tönnies's attention.[209] The Society, along with other members like Tönnies, sought to replace the traditional religious instruction with a secular system of ethics that was "objective" and underpinned by modern science. Tönnies held that reason and science could

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[206] See Christian Clement, "Einleitung," in *Schriften. Kritische Ausgabe/Band 2*, lxvii–lxviii; Steiner, *Briefe. Band II*, 163–165.

[207] Rudolf Steiner, "Goethe-Studien," *Magazin für Literatur* 69, no. 30 (1900): 201–224, 209.

[208] On this theme, see Andrew Milne, "Nietzsche, Mysticism and the God who isn't one" (PhD diss., The University of Western Australia, 2019).

[209] Rudolf Steiner, "Eine Gesellschaft für ethische Kultur," *Die Zukunft* 1, no. 5 (1892): 216–220. Tönnies ideas would evolve, but at the time he saw Steiner as representative of type of thinking that he was fighting against, namely a type of Nietzschean individualism, which stood in contrast to his own conception of "community" and its social importance.

indeed be used as justification for value judgments, that scientifically "objective" values could be instantiated within a society.[210]

Steiner did not attack Tönnies directly or the idea that scientific knowledge could provide a basis for ethics. He instead questioned the philosophical possibility that ethics or values could be taught, arguing that something like moral values could only be decided individually within oneself, as opposed to mechanically following the moral dictates and mandates of some higher authority.[211] As Steiner later explained: "Act in such a fashion, according to your special individuality, as only you yourself can act; only then do you contribute the most to the whole; for only then do you accomplish what no one but you can accomplish."[212] Weber and Tönnies would clash over the same philosophical question years later.[213] Weber became irritated with the Society for Ethical Culture over these same issues, and he essentially agreed with Steiner that values were subjective and individual. Science could, therefore, never underpin a system of ethics in any type of "objective" way.[214] Tönnies criticized Weber and Steiner on the ground that they adhered to Nietzsche's ideas in their methodological individualism. Weber and Steiner agreed that the scientific legislation of values was logically impossible, and Steiner remarked that such a project would merely replace one set of moral imperatives (those of the church) with another (those of Tönnies's ethical culture movement).[215]

Tönnies condemned Steiner for his individualist anarchism, which he saw as being in service of the strong over the weak and in direct conflict with the ideas he set forward in his

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[210] Niall Bond, "Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber," *Max Weber Studies* 12, no. 1 (2012): 25–57, 30.
[211] Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner," 181.
[212] Steiner quoted in Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner, " 182.
[213] Bond, "Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber," 48.
[214] Max Weber, "Politik als Beruf," *Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), 553.
[215] See Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner," 182–185; Bond, "Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber," 30–31. See also Max Weber, „Der Sinn der ‚Wertfreiheit' der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaflslehre*, ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), 508.

Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft (1887). In this work Steiner argued that religion and ethics were inherent in human beings (and therefore empirically verifiable) and flourished best within tiny communities through the organic unification of an expressed will, whereas science and its inhuman atomizing power best served the purpose of making reforms in the social sphere.[216] Although, as previously mentioned, Steiner did not immediately defend himself in print, another thinker who was coming under attack at the same time, Ernst Haeckel, had placed himself on Steiner's side, remarking that he agreed with Steiner that "the great ethical questions cannot be solved without relating them to *Weltanschauung* and religion. Not the outdated mystical dogmas of the church, but the clear, rational findings of science give us the foundation for this desired new *Weltanschauung* [worldview]."[217] To grossly oversimplify, Tönnies believed in the separation of the sacred and the profane, while Steiner and Haeckel sought to synthesize them. In such a situation, these thinkers seemed frequently to be talking past one another, yet Haeckel and Steiner nevertheless agreed that science and the sacred (which included the individual) must be combined to provide a new worldview that could replace the dying dogmas of Europe. Tönnies was convinced, at least at the time, that science alone could facilitate a new worldview at the social level, leaving traditional communities to flourish among themselves in their organic fashion. In his own way, Weber later stood on the side of Steiner and Haeckel, writing in a letter to Tönnies that he found it absurd that Tönnies could believe the idea that monarchy was damaging could be presented as scientific fact in any objective sense.[218]

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[216] Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner," 185; Bond, "Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber," 33–35.

[217] Ernst Haeckel, "Ethik und Weltanschauung," *Die Zukunft* 1, no. 5 (1892): 309–315. It seems Steiner did not even subscribe to a mystical Nietzschean superman, as evidenced by his critique of Lou Andreas-Salomé's portrayal of Nietzsche as erotic mystic in the forward of his *A Fighter against his own Time*, though this was apparently lost on Tönnies. On Haeckel, see Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner," 186–187.

[218] Weber quoted in Bond, "Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber," 31.

Stirner, Nietzsche, Haeckel, and his radical interpretation of Goethe were bound to put

Steiner into conflict with the stilted court manners still in vogue at Weimar, and it did. For

example, in 1893 he gave a talk strongly criticizing the crime-theories on Lombroso, whose ideas

were highly esteemed at the time, which earned him a reprimand:

> I was told that, before going to Jena to take part in the Haeckel-festivities (on the
> occasion Ernst Haeckel's sixtieth birthday), that under no circumstances was I to
> offer any inflammatory words in the form of a toast, because the Goethe-and
> Schiller archive would be in no position to stand behind my convictions.[219]

As Marcum points out, Steiner had succeeded in acquiring the reputation of a "non-conformist"

and reported in a letter to Pauline Specht that he had become known as a "destroyer of ideals,"

despised not only by the pastors but his boss at the Goethe-Shiller-Archive.[220] Up to this point,

Steiner had remained predominantly a scientific student and a classical scholar, however his

failed attempt to influence the *Sophien-Ausgabe* with his interpretation of Goethean science, his

failed job application to Jena, and Tönnies's attacks (representative of the larger academic

community) had shaken his intellectual objectives and his confidence as a scholar.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented aspects of Weber's and Steiner's early life, education,

and the influences that would shape their adult lives. My goal has been to show how these early

years help to account for their similar approach to many of the problems facing their

generation—the generation of 1890. As we have seen, they were both raised in families with

parents who had very different views when it came to religion. In both the Weber and the Steiner

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[219] Steiner*, Briefe. Band II*, 237–239.
[220] Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner," 188; Steiner, *Briefe. Band II*, 180.

households, the fathers were the more liberal thinkers, while the mothers remained more closely tied to orthodox religious beliefs. This helps us to understand Weber's and Steiner's common concern with bringing the material and spiritual aspects of life into holistic harmony. Their attempt to forge a holistic worldview was exacerbated by their exposure from a very early age to the profound transformations that turned Germany from a backward, largely agricultural patchwork of independent political entities into a powerful, technologically advanced, and united nation state. Like other members of the generation of 1890, their attention was fixed on technology. They were intensely aware of its positive and detrimental effects on communal and individual life during a period when religion and science appeared to be at loggerheads and philosophy was incapable of offering a solution to life's great existential questions. In the following chapter, I turn to their adult lives and offer further examples of how the thought of two such seemingly different individuals converged in important and illuminating ways.

Chapter Two

Later Years:

Mastery

Matriarchy and Patriarchy

Intense yet strained encounters with women often resulting in jealousy and conflict is a theme that Weber's biography shares with Steiner's. In fact, in the lives of both men, the women they were connected with often shaped their motivations and actions, as well as their literary legacies after their deaths.[221] This can be explained, to some extent, by the intense polarity that existed between the patriarchal and matriarchal roles in their families—a polarity that was common during this time. The men and women of this period experienced extremely fast changes in social conventions, especially when it came to the role of women and the emergence of the first wave of feminism with women reformers, activists, and suffragettes. This was accompanied by a radical rethinking of sexuality and marriage. The emergence of modern capitalism and the growth of the middle class had created a group of women with leisure but no real occupations and diminishing power, who wanted to gain entrance into the public sphere. In the German context, this became known as the *Frauenfrage* or "Woman's Question."[222] Many

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[221] The significance of these two married couples—Max and Marianne and Marie and Rudolf—was the subject of a recent dissertation, which highlighted some of these similarities, especially the idea of the marriages in terms of "comradeship" (*Kameradschaft*) and "brotherhood in arms" (*Waffenbrüderschaf*). Katrin Brandt, "Marie von Sivers" (PhD Diss., University of Groningen, 2014), 141–146.

[222] For an overview of the women's movement in Germany at the turn of the 20th century, see Catherine Leota Dollard, *The Surplus Woman: Unmarried in Imperial Germany, 1871–1918* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009); Kirsten Leng, "An 'Elusive' Phenomenon: Feminism, Sexology and the Female Sex Drive in Germany at the Turn of the 20th Century," *Centaurus* 55, no. 2 (2013): 131–152; Helen Boak, *Women in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 2015); Marsha Meskimmon and Shearer West, eds., *Visions of the "Neue Frau": Women and the Visual Arts in Weimar Germany* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1995). This situation can also be seen outside Germany, for example, in Great Britain. See Kathrin Levitan, "Redundancy, the 'Surplus Woman' Problem, and the British Census, 1851–1861," *Women's History Review* 17, no. 3 (2008): 359–376.

middle-class men such as Steiner and Weber became well-meaning, if slightly confused

feminists, while others resolutely resisted women gaining access to any prominent social

positions.

Marco Pasi points out that sexual and erotic experiences were also increasingly becoming

incorporated into esotericism in the late 19th century, largely as a response to the breakdown of

the traditional Christian society and its policing of sexual behavior.[223] At the same time,

following the decline of the established norms of religious institutions, the secular norms arising

in their place had their own models of public middle-class decency and proper enlightened

behavior that exerted immense social pressure. This created a complex social interplay between

embracing the sexual and erotic, typically confined to the private sphere and associated with the

anarchic or spiritual, and the emotional restrain and rational action that belonged to the public

sphere of established law and order.[224] According to Helmut Zander, movements such as

anthroposophy and theosophy provided a space for spiritually inclined, self-confident women

who were searching for new societal roles, many of whom were unmarried. Women were

therefore central to the Theosophical Society and made up more than half of its new members in

the years before the First World War. Many of these women assumed leadership and managerial

roles, which had been all but nonexistent in Wilhelmine Germany, even in the churches.[225] As

Allison Coudert points out, "esotericism provided a crucial space for the articulation of

unorthodox politics of all sorts, and this includes unorthodox gender politics."[226]

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[223] Marco Pasi, "But what does esotericism have to do with sex?" in *Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions About Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Peter J. Forshaw, and Marco Pasi (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 209.

[224] Pasi, "But what does esotericism have to do with sex?" 209–210. This was especially true in Germany during the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. See Stephen Kalberg, "The Origin and Expansion of Kulturpessimismus: The Relationship between Public and Private Spheres in Early Twentieth Century Germany," *Sociological Theory* 5, no. 2 (1987): 150–164.

[225] Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland*, 391–408.

[226] Allison Coudert, "There's not much room for women in esotericism, right?" in *Hermes Explains*, 72.

Steiner and Weber, like many of their male contemporaries, were caught up in these changes. However, despite this being a generally widespread social phenomenon in Europe, the way in which such influences unfolded throughout their biographies, as well as how they attempted to deal with them, provides another point of comparison as well as insight into the generation of 1890. Roslyn Bologh has described Weber as representative of "masculine thinking," suggesting that Weber was himself an almost perfect embodiment of the Protestant ethic for which he is known, and furthermore that he was ultimately unable to bridge the gap between the public work of ruthless, do-eat-dog capitalism and the private world of love and nurturance.[227] Arguing from a psychoanalytic perspective, Bologh claims that in patriarchal households, women lack emotional fulfillment in their marriages and consequently may turn to their sons for love and support, which only exacerbates the father's hostility to his sons. She goes on to suggest that

> where the woman is simultaneously contemptuous of her husband (the situation in Max Weber's home), the son is likely to develop a contempt for the patriarchal, dominating figure and a desire to become a hero who fights the patriarch on behalf of the woman, a desire to replace the father, to become a patriarchal hero who deserves a woman's respect as opposed to the patriarchal tyrant who evokes her contempt.[228]

Furthermore, in a patriarchal household, the mother wants to control the son for her own needs and desires. The boy has therefore to protect himself against for the patriarchal father and the mother, a confusing situation that faced both Weber and Steiner, along with many contemporary males in the generation of 1890.[229]

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[227] Bologh, *Love or Greatness.*
[228] Bologh, *Love or Greatness*, 11.
[229] Bologh, *Love or Greatness*, 11.

Bologh argues that this tension between the "masculine" desire to rationally control and the "feminine" desire to erotically and romantically surrender is crucial to understanding Weber's sociology.[230] In fact, she claims the division between the public sphere of men and the private domain of women is a basic aspect of Weber's thought:

> Weber's social and political thought epitomizes modern patriarchal masculine thinking. His thought assumes and reproduces, wittingly or unwittingly, a social order in which the public, political world of power and greatness represses and oppresses a private, domestic world of caregiving and home-making. Both the public world and the private world were premised on such oppression.[231]

It was this division which created "the iron cage" of reason that Weber believed imprisoned the inhabitants of the modern world, leading to the dysfunctional and disenchanted world he himself so desperately wanted to escape. However, while Bologh acknowledges that Weber did consider potential alternatives to the problem of disenchantment and the iron cage of reason—for example, through his interest in eroticism and Asian cultures—she concludes that Weber, like so many of his contemporaries, failed to realize that in society struggle for public greatness and love cannot be relegated to separate realms, that there are times in which different social strata or interests come into conflict, but this has to be followed by periods in which compromise—love and fellow-feeling—must come into play to resolve these issues.

Following Bologh, this dissertation similarly does not argue that Weber was successful in discovering a way to escape the iron cage, but rather that his intellectual interest in and personal connections with eroticism, esotericism, and East and South Asian religions were motivated by a desire to *try and find* a way out. This differs from the the way scholars have generally viewed these aspects of Weber's life. Moreover, this is one important area that makes a comparison of

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[230] Bologh, *Love or Greatness*, 140.
[231] Bologh, *Love or Greatness*, 2.

Weber and Steiner so illuminating. They were both searching for solutions to the problem of disenchantment at the same time and in similar ways. In this sense, Weber does not appear as a fatalist but a conflicted and psychologically afflicted seeker—as all good seekers should be—a tragic figure who was unable to find a way out of an iron cage that in many ways he himself created. He went to the edge of his comfort zone but couldn't take a leap of faith as Steiner and so many others did, whether into religion, socialism, anarchy, or esotericism.

At the same time, it is important to note that these binary categories, such as love and greatness, private and public, masculine and feminine, become unhelpful at a certain point in interpreting the Weber's and Steiner's biographies. To read Weber as a pro-masculine, pro-rational, pro-capitalist, pro-Western figure, for example, is based on outdated interpretations of Weber. This dissertation seeks to correct such interpretations, especially in the chapter focusing on Ascona. There I argue that for all Weber's talk of rational action and sublimation, he was never totally successful in repressing his desires (although he tortured himself over them). Weber may have talked like a man of action but frequently acted like a man of love. This can be seen in his (at least) two affairs, as well as his passionately devotional letters to Elsa Jaffé (explored in the chapter on Ascona). It is therefore possible to interpret him as a male trapped in the masculinity of his time who desired to be "feminized." Weber, more so than Steiner, repeatedly gives in to this "feminine" desire throughout the entire second half of his life. However, as we shall see, this dynamic struggle between pleasing and overcoming the father in the outer world, and embracing the intimate and private nurturing world of the mother as a form of refuge can be seen in the biographies of both Weber and Steiner, especially in terms of their relationships with women, career struggles, and attempts to gain social influence. It furthermore produced agonizing psychological effects, resulting in varying degrees of mental illness and depression.

Descent into Hell

      The tale of Weber's famous breakdown is as follows: In 1897, he decided to stand up to his domineering, patriarchal father at their home in Heidelberg. Weber interposed himself between his father and his mother in defense of women's right to freedom, especially from him, the patriarch.[232] As Martin Green recounts, Frau Weber and those present at the scene begged Max to stop, but he would not relent, attacking his father for being brutish and selfish.[233] He commanded his father to leave for the last time, writing to his younger brother Alfred afterward that as far as he and Marianne were concerned, "Papa doesn't exist for us." Max Weber junior held to his position. However, four weeks after this dramatic episode, Max Weber senior would be dead, possibly from a bleeding ulcer, and without reconciling with either his son or his wife.[234] This tragic series of events would lead to Max's severe breakdown and subsequent illness, which Marianne describes enigmatically in her *Lebensbild* as Max's "decent into hell," in which "an evil thing from the unconscious underground of life stretched out its claws toward him."[235] Throughout the biography, Marianne uses the word "demons" or simply "demon" to refer to Weber's breakdown, which lasted almost seven years and colored the remainder of his life.[236]

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[232] Lawrence A. Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage: Culture, Politics, and Modernity in the Thought of Max Weber* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 73–75.

[233] Martin Green, *The Von Richthofen Sisters. The Triumphant and the Tragic Modes of Love: Else and Frieda Von Richthofen, Otto Gross, Max Weber, and D.H. Lawrence, in the Years 1870–1970* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 117.

[234] Arthur Mitzman, *The Iron Cage: An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber (*New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 151. Green says seven weeks. See Green, *The Von Richthofen Sisters*, 117.

[235] Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography*, 234, 237.

[236] As Radkau points out, the use of the word "demons" was likely a euphemism to refer to Weber's nocturnal emissions, which plagued him even in the years following his breakdown. Weber himself used the word demon to refer to his psychological problems, as well. See Radkau, *Max Weber*, 173.

During this dark period, he was unable to read, write, lecture or function within the social and marital spheres, so he traveled through various parts of Germany as well as parts of Italy. He suffered perpetual insomnia and his hands trembled all the time. He was utterly exhausted, turning to sleeping aids to help him sleep through the night. As he could barely speak, he was forced to cease his lecturing, remaining at home while his wife went out and lectured on the women's movement, reversing their normal roles.[237] According to Marianne, Weber became totally dependent on her during this period.[238] Taking into account these afflictions and ailments, it is entirely reasonable to think that this "decent into hell" is what led Weber to seek redemptive healing at places so seemingly antithetical to his personality, such as in Ascona, Switzerland, the popular alternative healing site he visited in the years following his recovery.[239]

It is also possible to read these years of darkness as an initiatory experience, one that required a kind of rebirth and resurrection that enabled Weber to envision new forms of spiritual and artistic rejuvenation.[240] Following these tragic years, did Weber become a shaman, a mystic? Had he experienced the "dark night of the soul?" There is some evidence to cautiously suggest this possibility. In her *Lebensbild*, Marianne refers to this event as Weber's "descent into hell," evoking the theme of a later novel of the same name by occultist author Charles Williams, which explores encountering one's doppelganger, facing one's fears through experiencing and bearing the burdens of the Other, and a downward spiral to madness that produces profound theological

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[237] Green, *The Von Richthofen Sisters*, 118–119.

[238] Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography*, 236–237.

[239] This is discussed in the next chapter devoted to Weber's experiences at Ascona and his extra-marital romantic experiences.

[240] Marianne suggests as much by referring to Weber's post-breakdown life as "The New Phase," and when she wonders whether or not this "decent into Hell" would not "prepare the way for a greater *harmony* of his vital powers in the future?" Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography*, 236. The philosopher Karl Jaspers had believed something similar: "I would say that, before he fell ill, he showed *no sign* of being interested in erotic matters. There was *no sign* that Max Weber turned his attention to the content of religious belief … or to its effects. *No sign* previously of a passion for the tension in 'truth'. The quarrelling with God – (his) existence or non-existence – the experience of having no solid foundation." Quoted in Radkau, *Max Weber*, 175.

insights. Could this be the type of experience Marianne had in mind for Weber when she referred cryptically to his having experienced a "descent into hell?"

When Weber's former colleague at Freiburg Friedrich Meinecke reviewed Marianne's *Lebensbild* in 1927, he compared Weber to Orestes, the Greek figure associated with madness and purification, and interpreted this period of Weber's life as possessing "the classical, mythic dimensions of a Tantalus-like family genealogy, with the oldest son fated to be hounded by the furies of bad conscious."[241] As family members of the Webers were still alive at the time, Meinecke was at pains to offer a fully psychological Oedipal account of Weber's life, ultimately casting him as a pioneering social scientist and staunch German Liberal. However, the frantic period of intellectual output following Weber's dark years of depression and scholarly inactivity—the second phase of Weber's life and work, a "quite singular life-achievement"—was, in Meinecke's reading, seemingly possible only because of his "descent into hell" and the successful resolution of the inner conflict Weber experienced. When Green later revisited the Oedipal theme, he remarked that though it might appear that Weber murdered his father to get closer to his mother and the maternal sphere she represented, in truth "Weber's deepest feelings toward his mother, his letters suggest, were hostile. It was *her* he wished to destroy; his father was, beside her, a trivial figure."[242] Indeed, according to Green, Weber refused to speak to his mother when she turned up at the house during the evenings, and she was forced to sit across from him in silence. He was the only one of her children to miss her seventieth birthday celebration.[243] This suggests that, while the Oedipal lens is a useful way of interpreting these events, there was more going on beneath the surface. In Marianne's explanation, as well as

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[241] Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage*, 74.
[242] Green, *The Von Richthofen Sisters*, 120.
[243] Green, *The Von Richthofen Sisters*, 119.

Green's reading of Weber's letters to his mother, it was his mother who "implanted in him indestructible inhibitions against a surrender to his drives."[244] Perhaps Weber experienced this as his own personal "iron cage of reason" from which his extramarital love for pianist Mina Tobler and his later love-affair with his doctoral student and friend Else von Richthofen offered release (discussed in the Ascona chapter).

During this long period of recovery, Weber wrote a self-analysis of his state of being, which was apparently extremely self-conscious and honest. Marianne later destroyed the papers during the Nazi period for the sake of managing Weber's reputation.[245] Before they were destroyed, she had sent some of the writings to Karl Jaspers, who later reported that Weber's first experience of sexual arousal came when he was beaten by a maid servant.[246] Radkou argues that such a severe punishment was likely administered by Weber's mother, rather than a servant. At any rate, despite his battle with impotence, which was partly responsible for his breakdown—although his marriage was never a celibate marriage, as some (including Radkau at one point) have claimed—he would find an outlet for his sexual frustrations in his extramarital infatuations.[247]

When Weber arose from his chthonic tomb, his patricidal inclinations continued in the form of a disorganized and unfinished *fragment* in which he railed against two of his former academic influences and mentors Karl Knies and Wilhelm Roscher.[248] As such, his process of

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[244] Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography*, 91; Green, *The Von Richthofen Sisters*, 120.
[245] Radkau, *Max Weber*, 171. Again, there are parallels with Marie Steiner in that after Steiner's death Marie purged a great deal of Steiner's documents in order to placate the Nazis and avoid being targeted.
[246] Radkau, *Max Weber*, 171. Radkou suggests that Weber's self-analysis was undertaken very much in the vein of Freud and that this potential association was the reason she destroyed the papers during the Nazi period.
[247] See Eberhard Demm, "Max and Alfred Weber and their Female Entourage," *Max Weber Studies* 17, no. 1 (2017): 64–91.
[248] Wilhelm Roscher was another influential economist, whose writings Weber had read. Weber did eventually publish an essay on Knies and Roscher, which appeared as "Roscher und Knies und die logischen Probleme der historischen Nationalökonomie," in *Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft im Deutschen Reich* 27 (1903): 1181–1221.

purification happened first on an intensely personal level, confronting his father, and then more broadly in what Karl Löwith called "a radical demolition of illusions."[249] Following his breakdown, Weber became increasingly interested in epistemological and scientific questions regarding the production of knowledge about reality and how that informed one's orientation to life, especially as it related to issues of meaning, truth, and religion. This suggests a new approach to existence and the experience of the world, a new outlook and perspective. Weber concludes his *fragment* by claiming that modern science is, in fact, without a firm foundation in any ultimate sense.[250] As this line of thinking continues to develop in Weber's life, the second part of it at least, we begin to see someone searching for the ultimate ground of being or the ultimate reality, free of illusions, a quest that in important ways mirrors the spiritual quest for the Absolute that characterized Steiner's work.

The Abyss

Steiner's first major love interest, an eighteen-year-old girl named Radegunde Fehr, appeared in the course of his expanding social connections in Vienna. Their relationship (or really the ultimate lack of one) is characteristic of the type of dynamic described by Bologh above, namely, a conflict between a private, feminine world of love and a social, masculine world of pursuing a career and the intellectual conflict and consequent struggle this involved. Steiner shared an intense yet unconsummated love with Radegunde, which he describes in his autobiography as both innocent and mutual: "We loved one another and both knew that very

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[249] Karl Löwith, *Max Weber and Karl Marx* (1932; London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 34. Weber once confessed in a letter to his sister in 1915 that "I wish to be without illusions for the rest of my life." Quoted in Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage*, 77.
[250] See Max Weber, *Roscher and Knies: The Logical Problems of Historical Economics* (New York: Free Press, 1975).

clearly; but neither of them could overcome their fear of telling each other that we loved each other."[251] However, as some biographers have noted, when Steiner moved to Weimar and eventually married his first wife, he had completely left Radegunde behind and she later died at the age of thirty-five, a spinster living alone in Vienna.[252] Steiner's desire for independence and success in the outer world required that he leave Vienna to focus on his career. When he then experienced setbacks and disappointments in Weimar that thwarted these career aspirations, his desire for success in the outer world was shaken, and he followed his new wife when she moved to Berlin in 1897, landing himself a job editing a literary magazine.

In Berlin, he began to associate with known radical anarchist and Stirner popularizer John Henry Mackay (1864–1933), garnering the attention of other known anarchists, such as Benjamin Ricketson Tucker (1854–1939). He kept company with rowdy literary types like Peter Hille (1854–1904) and Otto Erich Hartleben (1864–1905), the latter Steiner's co-editor at *Das Magazin für Literatur* who had a reputation as a literary radical and heavy drinker.[253] Hartleben founded a branch of the radically democratic, progressive and anti-bourgeois group called the *Verbrechertisch* (Rougue's Table) in Berlin, of which Steiner was a member, and which was also attended, on occasion, by Stefan Zweig, Else Lasker-Schüler, Erich Mühsam, and other radical artists and thinkers.[254] Steiner further participated in the lectures and meetings of the Giordano Bruno-Bund, a literary society dedicated to monism and free-thinking, and he wrote for their

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[251] Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter VII, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/English/APC1928/GA028_c07.html.
[252] Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner*, 84–85; Tazer-Myers, "Rudolf Steiner's Theory of Cognition," 70–71.
[253] Zander, *Rudolf Steiner*, 101–122; Emil Bock, *Rudolf Steiner: Studien zu seinem Lebensgang und Lebenswerk* (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1990), 133–147.
[254] Rolf Parr, „Die Verbrecher/Der Verbrechertisch [Berlin]," in *Handbuch literarischkultureller Vereine, Gruppen und Bünde 1825–1933*, eds. Rolf Parr, Wulf Wülfing, and Karin Bruns (J.B. Metzler: Stuttgart-Weimar, 1998), 456–459; Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland*, 123.

flagship publication *Der Freidenker*, as well as the "free" reading group started by Jewish poet Ludwig Jacobowski called *Die Kommenden*, which met weekly.[255]

Through associating with progressive, individualistic, and anarchistic thinkers, Steiner's concept of freedom through ethical individualism was on the verge of forming the basis for a radical political ideology. Yet Steiner's enchanted interpretation of Goethean science remains inseparable from this radical influence, as he still considered it foundational to his belief in the individual ability to go beyond the limitations Kant had set to human knowledge. Nevertheless, these two positions seem to have come into conflict for Steiner while he was in Berlin, a time he described in his autobiography as "an abyss." It could be that Steiner was also reacting to the chaotic urban and industrial conditions in Berlin that contrasted so markedly to what he was accustomed to in Weimar.[256] During this time, he recounts reading Mackay's novel *Die Anarchisten*, which he described in his autobiography as "a noble work" that "describes penetratingly and with great vividness the social condition of the poorest of the poor," while simultaneously setting forth "how out of the world's misery those men will find a way to improvement who, being wholly devoted to the good forces, so bring these forces to their unfolding that they become effective in the free association of men rendering compulsion unnecessary."[257] Steiner was thus deeply affected by the social conditions of the underprivileged classes yet nevertheless retained the Nietzschean ideal that the individual must work to develop his or her own thinking. At the same time, he began a lecture course at the Marxist and Social-Democrat Berlin Workers' School in order to teach the "mature men and women of the working

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[255] For more on this, see the „Giordano Bruno-Bund" entry in *Handbuch literarischkultureller Vereine, Gruppen und Bünde 1825–1933.* Ludwig Jacobowski was close friends with Steiner and entrusted his literary estate to him, from which Steiner produced an edited volume of Jacobowski's poetry.

[256] The subject of urbanization and industrialization will be discussed in the chapter on Technology.

[257] In other words, making compulsory force—or *arche* in the sense of command and authority—unnecessary, hence, *anarchy*. See Steiner, Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXVII, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c27.html.

class," even though he did not necessarily subscribe to the Marxist view of history.[258] Steiner was increasingly conflicted as to whether to take the individualist path prescribed by Nietzsche and Stirner or the collectivist path of Marx and Hegel, and he was desperately trying bring the two polarities together: "What exists in humanity lies only in the juxtaposition of single personalities. … I dared not just at that time fall into one-sidedness. As I stood completely within Hegelianism experiencing this in my soul as my own inner experience, so must I also wholly submerge myself inwardly in this opposite."[259]

Steiner recounts that immersing himself in this problem while participating in the radical Berlin milieu was a "spiritual testing," which resulted in the opening of "a sort of abyss" in his mind and "a state of inner movement, which drove into billows and waves all the forces of my soul, [and this] was at that time my inner experience."[260] He was conscious of an "inner struggle against the demonic Powers who would cause to come about from the knowledge of nature, not perception of spirit, but a mechanistic-materialistic form of thinking," implying that he was tempted to give up his spiritual Goethean side altogether.[261] Yet he confides that "he who seeks for knowledge of spirit must experience these worlds," and thus this time of trial and testing was spiritually required for him to advance along the path: "At that time I had to save my spiritual perception by inner battles."[262] The result of these battles was a Christian mystical experience that was wholly unique and did not exist in any other extant creed. This eventually blossomed into the esoteric Christological core of his anthroposophy.

[258] Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXVIII, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c28.html.
[259] Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXVII, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c27.html.
[260] Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXVII, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c27.html.
[261] Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXVI, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c26.html.
[262] Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXVI, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c26.html.

It is crucial to note that Steiner experienced this life-changing mystical event when he

was at the lowest point in his life, in Berlin amongst alcoholics and literary radicals, what he

describes politely as "really questionable *milieus*" among those who were creating art that was

"outside the usual taste and tendencies."[263] It is possible he was in the throes of a mental struggle

with no clear idea about the direction of his life and suffering from an inner state of confusion.

Such an experience is in keeping with the mystical notion of a "dark night of the soul," as well as

the idea more commonly encountered in esoteric circles as "crossing the abyss."[264] This seems

especially true in terms of what happened next in Steiner's life, namely, that he emerged as a

different person, rejuvenated, and energized with new ideas, going on to produce a gigantic

corpus of material over the rest of his life.

Steiner experienced his abyss at this same time Max Weber was experiencing his dark

night of the soul and would similarly emerge as the bearer of powerful new ideas. Like Weber,

he severed ties with many important former connections during this period. His increasing

interest in esoteric topics repelled his more secular readers, which was readily apparent in their

reaction to his esoteric commentary on Goethe's fairytale published in 1899. He also came into

conflict with the leadership of the Giordano Bruno Union when he delivered a paper on monism

and "set even scholasticism higher than Kantianism."[265] But while secularists found Steiner's

retreat into esotericism and mysticism repellent, others applauded it. In 1900 he delivered a

lecture on Nietzsche to the local theosophical society, who invited him back to speak on

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[263] For more background, see Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXIV,
https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c24.html; Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXV,
https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c25.html.
[264] For example, the idea of crossing the abyss in the golden dawn magical rituals, which is connected to going
through the Daath sphere of the Kabbalistic tree of life. See Israel Regardie, *The Original Account of the Teachings,
Rites and Ceremonies of The Golden Dawn* (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 1989).
[265] Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXIX,
https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/English/APC1928/GA028_c29.html.

Goethe's fairytale and mysticism in the Middle Ages. Steiner recognized an audience here that was eager to consider his ideas and therefore gave another lecture series on *Christianity as Mystical Fact*. When he decided to join the Theosophical Society in 1902, he essentially ended his career as conventional scholar and damaged his reputation as a respectable philosopher.[266]

Even Steiner's old esoteric teacher, Friedrich Eckstein, seems to have abandoned him during this period because of Eckstein's "earnest conviction that esoteric spiritual knowledge should not be publicly propagated like ordinary knowledge," which was the opinion of "almost all experts in the 'ancient wisdom,'" and which the Theosophical Society had violated by making their esotericism public.[267] The traditional approach to esotericism held, according to Steiner, that the esoteric and the exoteric were to remain separate, with the former knowledge confined to select groups of "initiates." Steiner was determined to break with this tradition, which he viewed as an "anachronism," recounting in his autobiography that "it was quite clear to me that in coming before the public with spiritual knowledge I should be doing the right thing."[268] What this suggests is that Steiner at least believed in his new purpose in the Theosophical Society and did not merely join for the sake of opportunism.

One of the audience members of the new theosophical milieu was an artist from St. Petersburg, Marie von Sivers (1867–1948), who would join forces with Steiner to lead the German Branch of the Theosophical Society and become his next (and closest) female partner. Steiner parted with ways with his first wife and began interacting with von Sivers. In a description that echoes Bologh's of Weber's inner conflict between masculine thinking and the feminine world of love and feelings, Steiner reports the following about this situation:

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[266] Tazer-Myers, "Rudolf Steiner's Theory of Cognition," 91.

[267] Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXIX, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c29.html.

[268] Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXIX, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c29.html.

My friendship with Frau Eunicke was soon thereafter transformed into a civil marriage. Only this shall be said concerning this private affair. Of my private life I do not wish to introduce anything into this biography except what concerns my process of development. Living in the Eunicke home enabled me to have an undisturbed basis for a life of inner and outer movement. Otherwise, private relationships do not belong to the public.[269]

With von Sivers as his new partner-in-arms, he accepted leadership of the German section and they starting a new journal entitled *Luzifer-Gnosis*. Following this move, he was apparently excommunicated from all his former teaching and literary associations and was free to pursue his radical and controversial theosophy and his new love interest von Sivers.[270]

A similar pattern reemerged years later when Steiner met Alice Sprengel (1871–1949), a young occultist and amulet maker who was close to both Steiner and von Sivers. Sprengel had performed the lead role of Theodora in the first staging of Steiner's *Mystery Dramas*, and Steiner had given her the occult name "Keeper of the Seal. "Frau Sprengel," as she came to be known in the history of anthroposophy, was a also member of Steiner's Mystica Aeterna freemasonry lodge, and Steiner and von Sivers had put her up for a time in Munich. She had a breakdown triggered by jealousy when Steiner married von Sivers in 1914, having received a vision that confirmed that Steiner was actually destined to marry her (Frau Sprengel).[271] She joined another follower of Steiner, Heinrich Goesch (1880–1930), and the two were expelled from the society for causing a commotion. They fled Dornach and took up residence in Ascona. This incident has

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[269] Steiner, *The Story of My Life*, Chapter XXVII, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c27.html.
[270] Peter Selg, *Rudolf Steiner: Childhood, Youth, and Study Years: 1861–1890, Vol. III,* trans. Margot Saar (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2014), 70.
[271] Steiner had never officially divorced from his first wife, and he and von Sivers did not marry until after Anne had passed away in 1911. Interestingly, they claimed their eventual marriage had been contracted partly in order to thwart the romantic interest of Sprengel and other young anthroposophist women who had their eyes on Steiner. In other words, to keep the cooperative anthroposophical project strictly focused on occult work. See Rudolf Steiner, *Probleme des Zusammenlebens in der Anthroposophischen Gesellschaft Zur Dornacher Krise vom Jahre 1915. Mit Streiflichtern auf Swedenborgs Hellsehergabe, Anschauungen der Freudschen Psychoanalyse und den Begriff der Liebe im Verhältnis zur Mystik*, eds. Hella Wiesberger und Ulla Trapp (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989). See also Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland*, 240–242.

become known as the *Dornacher Krise von 1915* (Dornach Crisis). Goesch left because he claimed Steiner was anti-Christian and casting black magic on him and his daughter.[272] Goesch's wife, Gertrud, was a mistress of Otto Gross—whose wife, Frieda Gross, was Weber's close friend, whom he visited many times in Ascona—Goesch was even being treated by Gross.[273]

The pattern emerges yet again toward the end of Steiner's life, when his wife—by then Marie Steiner—engaged in a bitter conflict with Steiner's closest colleague in the medical section of the Anthroposophical Society and personal doctor, Ita Wegman. When Steiner died, this conflict, largely motivated by jealousy, exploded over the direction the Society should take, resulting in Marie expelling Wegman and several others. As we shall see in the Ascona chapter Weber's life is similarly filled with jealousy, interpersonal conflict, and extra-marital relationships between confused men and women trying to find new ways to relate in the modern Western world.

Doppelgangers

The life-course of both Weber and Steiner up to this point is strikingly revealing: each man spent the 1880s and early 1890s as professional and conventional intellectuals, working intensely to secure a respectable academic career. During this period, each developed an

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[272] Rudolf Steiner, *Probleme des Zusammenlebens*, 137–146.

[273] After breaking with Steiner in 1915, Sprengel joined the OTO and became Theodor Reuss's private secretary, staying with him in Ascona. She quickly rose up the ranks of the order, becoming part of the executive council, and by 1937 had become the leader of the Locarno OTO lodge. Sprengel was a major presence at the 1917 Ascona O.T.O. Anational Congress, and afterward she went on to be an influential member of the O.T.O., initiating both Eugen Grosche and Hermann Metzger, two major occultists of the 20th century. She also attended the first official Eranos conference in 1933, along with such other luminaries as Carl Jung, Heinrich Zimmer, Friedrich Heiler, and Ernesto Buonaiuti. See Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order* 1887–1923 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) and Helmut Möller and Ellic Howe, *Merlin Peregrinus: Vom Untergrund des Abendlandes* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1986). For the Eranos references, see Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 68.

understanding of the importance of the "philosophy" and the "magic" of individual freedom. In 1897 they entered periods of darkness, doubt, and severe depression, which lasted until approximately 1902 for Steiner (when he embarked on his new theosophical mission), and approximately 1903 for Weber, as he recovered from his mental and physical debilitation. Following their metaphorical "rebirths," the world took on a form of re-enchantment through novel forms of "science," social and spiritual, respectively, which were to counteract the loss of meaning that had been heralded by Nietzsche's cry of the death of God. Both men would go on to produce not only a seemingly endless amount of material in the following years on this theme, but also their most important work.

Steiner's Berlin period has encouraged some scholars to conceive an "other" Steiner.[274] This is especially true of Helmut Zander, who presents Steiner at this time as a drinking, partying rebel, increasingly disaffected and issuing harsh critiques of the works he reviewed as the editor of the *Das Magazin für Literatur*. The picture of this "other" Steiner, which is contrary to the image of Steiner created by his second wife and endorsed by his followers, is comparable to the "other" Weber presented by Radkau and Storm, a Weber who contradicts the manufactured image created by his wife and perpetuated by his scholarly adherents. Weber's courtship with anarchists and radicals, such as Ernst Frick and Raphael Friedeberg in Ascona, is comparable to Steiner's experiences in Berlin's "questionable milieus." While some scholars present the doppelganger version of Steiner, referring to an inconsistent and contradictory break between pre-theosophical and post-theosophical activities (the former characterized as praiseworthy liberalism, the latter as condemnable conservatism), in reality joining the Theosophical Society in Germany during this time is best interpreted as the next step in the development of Steiner's

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[274] See especially the Steiner biographies of Zander and Gebhardt.

radicalism.[275] Even today in Germany, believing in concepts like karma and reincarnation as "facts" is frowned on, owing to both the long history of Protestant Christianity and the privileging of modern science, which both place human reason in an elevated (read: European) position. At the time, the members of the German Theosophical Society were seen as dilettantes at best and anti-intellectuals at worst.[276] Steiner therefore acted out of some form of personal moral position likely triggered, in part, by his dark night of the soul.

Much like the "other" Steiner thesis, Weber's life is conceived as two conflicting polarities: on the one side, the rationalist academic who espoused an objective and "value-free" sociology that could be considered equal to other empirically scientific disciplines; on the other, the manly and heroic politician, charismatic public speaker, and impassioned lover.[277] These were times in which both men entertained ideas and relationships that seem to contradict our inherited image of them as respectively enchanted and disenchanted thinkers. However, rather than interpreting their lives through his apparent dichotomy, their thoughts and actions are best viewed as being part of a logically consistent whole. It is only when we uncritically accept biographical details from, in the case of Weber, for example, Marianne Weber, Talcott Parsons, or Karl Löwith, that this seemingly contradictory feature arises. It is fruitful to allow Weber and Steiner to be who they were.

Esoteric Connections

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[275] This point is made by Kaj Skagen in *Anarchist, Individualist, Mystiker. Rudolf Steiners frühe Berliner Jahre 1897–1902* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2020).

[276] Selg, *Rudolf Steiner: Childhood, Youth, and Study Years, Vol. III*, 20.

[277] For example, Michael W. Cuneo, "Values and Meaning: Max Weber's Approach to the Idea of Ultimate Reality and Meaning," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 13, no. 2 (1990): 84–95, 85.

Weber never fully went back to teaching but remained active in Heidelberg through his writing and his intellectual circles, surviving on his pension and full dispensation from teaching duties. However, he was a type of outsider. Students in Heidelberg commonly referred to Weber as the "myth of Heidelberg" because he was highly respected by all their professors but seldom seen in public.[278] Instead, Weber participated in private and privileged gatherings of scholars, for example, the Eranos Circle, which met to discuss the study of religion, and regular private salons at his home, attended by some of the most influential young intellectuals of pre-war Europe. He took over the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* with his colleagues Edgar Jaffé (1866–1921) und Werner Sombart (1863–1941), which would serve as a major outlet for his ideas. His *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* appeared in its pages in November 1904 and June 1905. This work famously draws a connection between modern capitalism and the work-related ethics of Protestantism and Luther's idea of "calling" or "vocation," establishing religion as one of the direct catalysts for industrialization and Western capitalism.[279]

The Heidelberg Weber rejoined as he emerged from his breakdown was one that had been busy continuing its transformation into an intellectual center and securing its reputation as one of the most liberal universities in Germany. It enthusiastically accepted foreign students from a variety of countries, particularly young Russian revolutionaries who were persecuted in their homeland, many of whom Weber knew personally, befriended, and entertained at his home.[280] This moment is important for understanding Weber's later association with the

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[278] Karl Loewenstein, "Persönliche Erinnerungen an Max Weber" (1920), in *Max Weber Zum Gedächtnis: Materialien Und Dokumente Zur Bewertung Von Werk Und Persönlichkeit*, eds. René König and Johannes Winckelmann (Köln und Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963), 48. See also Joshua Derman, *Max Weber in Politics and Social Thought: From Charisma to Canonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17–20.
[279] A heavily revised version that now featured his theory of disenchantment was published by Weber in 1920.
[280] Honigsheim, *The Unknown Max Weber*, 101; Guenther Roth, "Max Weber's Generational Rebellion and Maturation," *The Sociological Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (1971): 441–461. On Heidelberg's development, see Hubert

Tolstoians, communists, and anarchists in Ascona, as well as his interest in the writings of Dostoyevsky. The connection to the Russian students in Heidelberg throws light on aspects of Weber's later life that have been treated as anomalous but in fact were an important part of his post-breakdown intellectual development. Weber even learned Russian in order to better follow and understand the changes happening in Russia and to interact with the students in Heidelberg.[281]

Through these students and a his study of Russian authors, Weber learned about the concept of spiritual brotherly love, which he later formulated in terms of a mystical "world-denying" or "acosmic" love, a spiritual ethic in which "only the suffering of other human beings is deemed important in this world."[282] He was also introduced, via the conversations with these students, to ideas popular in Russia at the time surrounding, for example, Dostoyevsky's writings. Symbolist poet Viacheslav Ivanov had recently described the posture of Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* as a "rejection of the world," and this notion had become the inspiration for Ivanov's movement of "mystical anarchism," about which he had published an essay in 1906.[283] Weber would have been aware of Ivanov's work and other similar ideas in Russia concerning mysticism and anarchism, as he paid close attention to the religious and revolutionary developments transpiring there during this time. He composed two essays on the subject, "Bourgeois Democracy in Russia" and "Russia's Transition to Pseudo-

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Treiber and Karol Sauerland, eds., *Heidelberg Im Schnittpunkt Intellektueller Kreise: Zur Topographie Der Geistigen Geselligkeit Eines Weltdorfes, 1850–1950* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995).

[281] Honigsheim, *The Unknown Max Weber*, 108.

[282] Robert N. Bellah, ''Max Weber and World-Denying Love: A Look at the Historical Sociology of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no. 2 (1999): 277–304.

[283] Fabian Linde, "The Spirit of Revolt: Nikolai Berdiaev's Existential Gnosticism" (PhD Diss., University of Stockholm, 2010), 125.

Constitutionalism," both of which appeared in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft*.[284] By observing Tolsoyans in Ascona during his visits in there 1913/14—as well as the other Russians who frequented that area—Weber gained a better understanding of such ideas and observe their practical application.

Among the young Russians who studied in Heidelberg was Fedor Stepun, who became one of Weber's important interlocuters on the subject of Russian history and culture, especially writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.[285] Stepun grew up in a small Russian village and served in the Russian army, studying in Heidelberg from 1902–1910, primarily working with the neo-Kantian Wilhelm Windelband and later going on to become a well-known teacher and writer in his own right.[286] He wrote his dissertation on the Russian mystical Sophiologist Vladimir Solovyov and introduced Weber to Solovyov's "mystical rationalist" philosophy.[287] Sophiology is a doctrine of esoteric Christianity holding that divine wisdom, referred to as Sophia (in the sense of the Greek goddess of wisdom), can be expressed in the world through human wisdom.[288] At the time, another student from Russia, S. J. Giwago (Sergei Schiwago), was working on a translation with Stepun of Solovyov's "The National Question in Russia." Weber, who took a deep interest in Solovyov, encouraged the two students and suggested the publication

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[284] „Zur Lage der bürgerlichen Demokratie in Rußland" and „Rußlands Übergang zum Scheinkonstitutionalismus." See Max Weber, *Zur Russischen Revolution von 1905. Schriften und Reden 1905–1912,* eds. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Dittmar Dahlmann (Tübingen: J.G.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989).

[285] Hubert Treiber, „Die Geburt der Weberschen Rationalismus-These: Webers Bekanntschaften mit der russischen Geschichtsphilosophie in Heidelberg," *Leviathan* 19, no. 3 (1991): 435–451; Weber mentions Stepun and Solovyov together in "Zur Lage der bürgerlichen Demokratie in Rußland."

[286] Stepun reports in his autobiography that he immersed himself in the romantic German mystics such as Novalis, Schelling, Baader, Eckhart and Rilke to deal with his stresses as a Heidelberg foreign exchange student. Fedor Stepun, *Das Antlitz Russlands Und Das Gesicht Der Revolution: Aus Meinem Leben, 1884–1922* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1961), 113. For a useful biography of Stupen in English, see https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/11/resources/617/collection_organization.

[287] Roth, "Max Weber's Generational Rebellion," 455. Symbolist philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, who was also connected to the publication of Logos in Russia, once referred to Solovyov as a "mystical rationalist." Linde, "The Spirit of Revolt," 59.

[288] See Sergiĭ Bulgakov, *Sophia, the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology* (Hudson: Lindisfarne Press, 1993); Oliver Smith, *Vladimir Soloviev and the Spiritualization of Matter* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011).

of this work to Siebeck in Tübingen, even offering to make corrections.[289] Treiber suggests

Marianne Weber's comment in her biography that Weber could "recognize the peculiarities of

Occidental rationalism and the role it has played for occidental culture," which she refers to as

one of Weber's "most important discoveries" and dates between 1909 and 1913, was a response

to his exposure to these Russian students and their ideas about Russian philosophy.[290] This

"peculiarity," of course, is the historical process of rationalization culminating in the

disenchantment of modern Western Europe for which Weber is famous.[291]

      Steiner's Anthroposophy, it should be mentioned, expresses precisely the same idea as

Solovyov's sophiological historiosophy—namely, *anthropos* (human) and *Sophia* (wisdom)—

and Steiner championed Solovyov's ideas and his followers took a great interest in the Russian

philosopher's work.[292] Steiner and Stepun are considered among those responsible for

introducing the ideas of Solovyov into Germany.[293] As one scholar puts it:

> Steiner's thought had a great deal in common with the philosophy of Vladimir
> Solovyov. His doctrine, which proclaims that through a series of incarnations we
> can perfect ourselves as spiritual beings and ultimately attain union with Christ,

[289] Hubert Treiber, "Fedor Steppuhn in Heidelberg (1903–1955)," in *Heidelberg Im Schnittpunkt Intellektueller Kreise,* 70–118, 78–80; Honigsheim, *The Unknown Max Weber*, 108.

[290] Treiber, "Fedor Steppuhn in Heidelberg," 79–80. See also Marianne Weber, *Max Weber*, 349, and Wolfgang Schluchter, "Max Webers Religionswissenschaft. Eine werkgeschichtliche Rekonstruktion," in *Max Webers Sicht des antiken Christentums*, ed. Wolfgang Schluchter (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 525–560, 528.

[291] Weber's "Science as a Vocation" lecture was delivered on the same night as the Russian Revolution, as Stepun was there experiencing it firsthand. Stepun would return to Germany in the 1920s and position his own sociology as an alternative to Weber's, namely, that in contrast to Weber's ideal of a value-free professional scholar, Stepun presented himself as the politically committed, transnational intellectual. See Christian Hufen, "Russe als Beruf: Anmerkungen zu Fedor Stepun," *Osteuropa* 54, no. 11 (2004): 47–62, 49; Christian Hufen, *Fedor Stepun: Ein Politischer Intellektueller Aus Russland in Europa: Die Jahre 1884–1945* (Berlin: Lukas, 2001), 239–244.

[292] Steiner lectured on Solovyov in Locarno and Helsinki in 1911/1912, speaking of him favorably as a potential hope and guide for the future of the Russian people. In the early 1921–1922 an anthroposophical publisher in Stuttgart published selected works by Solovyov in German. Dmitrij Belkin, „Die Rezeption V. S. Solov'evs in Deutschland" (PhD Diss., University of Tübingen, 2000), 77–80. See also Maria Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 95, 101-102. Also Marie von Sivers translated his poems into German and likely introduced Steiner to him.

[293] Belkin, „Die Rezeption V. S. Solov'evs in Deutschland," 76.

seemed essentially in harmony with Solovyov's early prophecy that modern humans would be transformed into "God-men."[294]

The Stepun connection is thus not random but rather draws Weber closer to the world of Steiner and esotericism through the Russian symbolists and the academic publication *"Logos." Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie der Kultur*, which was published jointly in Heidelberg and Tübingen in Germany and Moscow and Petersburg in Russia.[295] The journal was established in 1910 by Stepun and several Heidelberg collogues, including Weber, and edited by Richard Kroner and Georg Mehlis in Germany and by Stepun (following his return), Sergey Hessen, and Boris Jakovenko in Russia.[296] *Logos* published some of the most important scholars and thinkers of the time, from neo-Kantians and sociologists such as Georg Simmel, Georg Lukacs, Siegfried Krakauer, Paul Natorp, and Heinrich Rickert, but also esotericists, symbolists, anthroposophists such as Andrei Bely, the above-mentioned Viacheslav Ivanov, traveling theosophist philosopher and student of Asian religions Hermann Graf Keyserling, the neo-vitalist Hans Driesch, Jewish anthroposophist Hugo Bergmann, and later the Italian esotericist magician Julius Evola.[297] Both Weber and Stepun published articles in *Logos*, and Weber's included two of his most important methodological texts, one of which featured early formulations of his theory of disenchantment and published the same year he embarked on his first trip to Ascona (discussed in the chapter on Ascona).

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[294] Magnus Ljunggren, *Poetry and Psychiatry: Essays on Early Twentieth-Century Russian Symbolist Culture* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 98.

[295] See Alexander Dmitriev, "European Exile for Russian Westernizers: The Logos Circle," *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads* 3, no. 1 (2006): 75–91.

[296] Rüdiger Kramme, „Philosophische Kultur als Programm: Die Konstituierungsphase des LOGOS," in *Heidelberg Im Schnittpunkt Intellektueller Kreise*, 119–149.

[297] See The Open Commons of Phenomenology website for list of *Logos* authors at https://ophen.org/CollView.php?coll=423&creator=1.

Many of these Russian students, such as Stupen, would apply to places in Germany like Heidelberg precisely because of the neo-Kantian activity there, after which they would return to Russia to establish and import this "Western rationalism," sometimes to counteract orthodox church thinkers and the neo-Slavophiles, but equally to help Russia attain maturity since it was often seen in terms of being an "infant" culture that would attain greatness in the future.[298] The Russian edition of *Logos* was published by Musaget Publishing House, which was founded by musical and literary critic Emil Medtner, the anthroposophist and symbolist writer Andrei Bely, and the anarchist, anthroposophist, and visionary Ellis (Lev Kobylinskiy). Medtner also believed that Russia was in its culture infancy and required the German intellectual tradition to fulfill its cultural mission, and Bely and the others agreed.[299] Bely was friends with Medtner and played a significant role in the Musaget activities. In one member's recollections, Bely was referred to as the "soul" and "authority" of the Musaget work.[300] *Logos* was therefore a kind of international peace operation between Russia and Germany dedicated to importing the German spirit, publishing translations of Goethe, Rilke, and Novalis, as well as the neo-Kantians like Windelband and Rickert (who had originally selected the name *Logos* in Heidelberg), but also theosophists and anthroposophists.[301] Members of the Russian intelligentsia, even members of the official Solovyov society, denounced *Logos* as alien to Russian culture.[302] However, Stepun

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[298] S. A. Nizhnikov, "On the Specific Traits of Russian Kantianism," *Filozofia* 67, no. 3 (2012): 254–261; Nina A. Dmitrieva, "Back to Kant, or Forward to Enlightenment: The Particularities and Issues of Russian Neo-Kantianism," *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 54, no. 5 (2016): 378–394; Alexander Vucinich, *Social Thought in Tsarist Russia: The Quest for a General Science of Society, 1861–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 106–152. For a general treatment of Russian exiles in Germany during this time see Robert C. Williams, *Culture in Exile: Russian Emigrés in Germany, 1881–1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972). On Neo-Slavophilism see Mikhail D. Suslov, "Neo-Slavophilism and the Revolution of 1905–07: A Study in the Ideology of S. F. Sharapov," *Revolutionary Russia* 24, no. 1 (2011): 33–58.

[299] V. K. Kantor, "F. A. Stepun, 'Musagetes,' E. K. Metner," *Kantian Journal*, no. 1 (2010): 70–79, 71. English translation available online at https://journals.kantiana.ru/upload/iblock/8df/Kantor%20V.%20K._70-79.pdf.

[300] This was writer and poet Boris Pasternak. See Ljunggren, *Poetry and Psychiatry*, 134.

[301] Kantor, "Fyodor Stepun," 72.

[302] Dmitriev, "European Exile for Russian Westernizers," 83.

and the others involved seemed much more engaged in establishing a kind of synthesis of culture, spirit and science.

The Musaget group was imbricated in the entire Russian symbolist movement and the beginnings of the first anthroposophical and theosophical groups in Russia centered around the occultist seer Anna Mintslova. Mintslova was a friend of Steiner's second wife Marie and was regarded by some as Steiner's "secret emissary" to Russia.[303] A scholar of this under-researched group even speaks of "Musaget Steinerians," revealing that there was even a certain branch of the Musaget publishing house devoted exclusively to theosophy and anthroposophy, which was referred to as "Dukhovnoe Znanie" (Spiritual Knowledge).[304] Steiner's anthroposophy was such a core feature of this group that it became a source of conflict and led to its eventual break up.[305] Because of the unusual way in which anthroposophy was imported to Russia via groups like the Musaget, it took on a unique character because it reflected such strong German influences:

> Russian Anthroposophy was a remarkably homogeneous movement, attracting specifically a small core of intellectual seekers who came to the problem of Russia's crisis of culture and consciousness through the focus of German idealism, cultural philosophy, and European cosmopolitanism. University trained, saturated with neo-Kantianism, steeped in Troitskii, Hartmann, Windelband, Wundt, and Hoffding, but still responsive to a religious urge and the creative impulse, they demanded a coherent methodology, scientific discipline, and aesthetic style in their occultism.[306]

Such a description (sans the word occultism) could similarly apply to Weber. What's so intriguing about the connection to Russian neo-Kantianism is that one would assume that such a

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[303] Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth*," 93–95.
[304] Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth,"* 93–95.
[305] Michail Bezrodnyi, "Die russiche Ausgabe der internationalen Zeitschrift fur Kulturphilosophie 'Logos' (1910–1914)," in *Heidelberg Im Schnittpunkt Intellektueller Kreise*, 150–169; Kantor, "Fyodor Stepun," 75; Ljunggren, *Poetry and Psychiatry*, 98–106. Viacheslav Ivanov and Andrei Belyi also managed to introduce Steiner's version of the Zoroastriean demon Ahriman, the demon representing materialism, into Russian Symbolist literature. See Linde, "The Spirit of Revolt," 131.
[306] Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth,"* 102–103.

movement, whose influence on Weber has been extensively documented, represents a rational, empirical, positivistic school of thought, having little to do with symbolism, neo-romanticism, and alternative forms of spirituality, thus drawing a thinker like Weber away from one such as Steiner. However, the Russian neo-Kantians with whom Weber busied himself represented, as has been shown, precisely these same concepts that Steiner did. It is therefore not surprising to find the Russian neo-Kantians, who we can associate with Weber, being also associated with theosophy and Steiner.[307] What is surprising is that Weber's close connection to *Logos* and its publishing activities in Russia sheds new light on the *type* of neo-Kantianism that Weber was attracted to, namely, a type resembling a variety of features common to esotericism, such as symbolism, neo-romanticism, and novel forms of Occidental rationality merged with an Oriental mysticism. As Ninzikov argues, initial interest in the epistemological and culturological issues of neo-Kantianism in Russia over time were replaced by interest in the mystical revelation of consciousness.[308] Although we expect Weber's neo-Kantianism to act as the differentiating factor between himself and Steiner, in this case it binds the two together.

Also active in Heidelberg at this time was the esoteric and symbolist poet Stefan George, who was gaining a reputation as the mystical leader of an elitist literary movement.[309] George's circle of admirers and followers was vast, spanning Europe, a devoted group of artists and writers who gathered around the poet to learn and worship at the "Master's" feet, as they referred to him. He and his followers considered themselves the "embodiment and defenders of the 'true' but 'secret' Germany, as opposed to the 'false' and all too manifest reality of contemporary

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[307] A recent dissertation has also successfully approached Steiner as a neo-Kantian. See Hal Jon Ginges, "The Act of Knowing: Rudolf Steiner and the Neo-Kantian Tradition" (PhD Diss., University of Western Sydney, 2012).
[308] Nizhnikov, "On the Specific Traits of Russian Kantianism," 260.
[309] For an overview of George's life and activities, see Robert Edward Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and His Circle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

bourgeois society."[310] This secret Germany could only be grasped visually and only the initiated could recognize it and make it visible, manifesting a mystical transformation of Germany.[311]

George's earliest and most devoted follower (and lover) was Friedrich Gundolf, a German-Jewish literary scholar and poet who came to Heidelberg to habilitate in 1910, making quite an impression on his arrival as an opponent of the rationalism prevailing in the small university town. In his autobiography, Stepun refers to Gundolf as "an original speaker" who was a "fanatical defender of universal personality" and "waged an energetic and conscious struggle against the abstract rationalism of the Heidelberg school philosophy."[312] Gundolf and Weber became close friends and shared many conversations, with Gundolf becoming a regular participant of the Sunday "Jour" salons that met at the Webers' "Haus Fallenstein." As Marianne relates in her biography of her husband, "Gundolf and Lukacs were two of the few guests in Weber's salon who were bright and forceful enough to serve as independent centers of discussion when Weber was around."[313]

Gundolf introduced Weber to George not long after his arrival in Heidelberg when his "Master" came to visit. Upon first meeting Weber, Gundolf wrote back to his Master that: "Of all the professors the two Webers [Max and Alfred] seem to me to have most felt a shudder of the more profound life, not just like Simmel as knowledge, but rather as will."[314] The Master and the Myth would meet, though initially the two imposing intellects would remain ambivalent toward one another. Yet their two circles co-existed at the same time with members associated with each. Henrich Rickert had introduced Weber to George's poetry in the 1890s, but Weber had not

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[310] Norton, *Secret Germany*, x.
[311] Bernd Johannsen, *Reich des Geistes, Stefan George und das Geheime Deutschland* (München: Verlag Dr. Hut, 2008), 201.
[312] Stepun quoted in Hufen, *Fedor Stepun*, 125.
[313] Weber, *Max Weber. Ein Lebensbild*, 511.
[314] Quoted in Norton, *Secret Germany*, 476.

taken much interest; however, following his mental breakdown and re-emergence, he found himself drawn to the mystical poet.[315]

George became a regular visitor in Heidelberg, visiting Weber at his home on several occasions and having lively conversations with both Webers (Max and Marianne). While they disagreed on many issues, they also found enough common ground to have meaningful talks, and it may have been Marianne who was ultimately more opposed to some of George's ideas than Weber.[316] At any rate, the poet gained a local reputation, which Weber observed and commented on in his discussions of "charisma" and the "charismatic leader." The two continued to come in contact and in 1915 Weber shared an apartment with Gundolf and George for some weeks.[317] Gundolf acted as the intermediary between the two influential thinkers, as they referenced each other in their respective writings, typically characterizing the other as the opposite to criticize their position. Yet Weber was sympathetic and interested in George's artistic abilities and both he and Marianne admired his poetry.[318] In the end, however, Weber felt that: "Stefan George and his students probably in the end serve other gods than I do in decisive points, no matter how high their art and their willingness suits me."[319]

Although historically it has been assumed that George was the "prophetic leader" of his circle, and Weber's circle was more democratic, both men were similarly outsiders in the city (that is, outside the university proper). Yet Weber himself possessed a charismatic aura that was

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[315] Norton, *Secret Germany*, 477.
[316] Norton, *Secret Germany*, 478–481.
[317] See the entry "Max Weber," in *Stefan George Und Sein Kreis: Ein Handbuch, Bd. III*, eds. Achim Aurnhammer, et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 1753–1757.
[318] Marianne even uses George's poem "Der Teppich des Lebes" as an epitaph for one of the chapters in her biography.
[319] "Stefan George und seine Schüler dienen in entscheidenden Punkten vermutlich oder wahrscheinlich letztlich anderen Göttern als ich, so hoch ihre Kunst und ihr Wollen mir steht." Weber in a letter to Paul August in 1910. Max Weber, *Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe. Band II/6: Briefe 1909–1910*, eds. M. Rainer Lepsius, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Birgit Rudhard, and Manfred Schön (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994), 697.

handed down by first his followers and then academically legitimized by Marianne, all of which inspired Donald MacRae to refer to Weber as the "magus" of sociology for the Fontana Modern Masters series, suggesting that Weber's sociology had a magical and re-enchanting quality.[320] As with the Musaget circle, members of the George circle were deeply imbricated in theosophical and anthroposophical milieus, with certain members such as Melchior Lechter joining Steiner's Anthroposohical Society, while others attacked occultism as pseudo-scientific and denounced Steiner in published writings.[321] Thus, even while some of the George circle disagreed with Steiner, others remained followers and they all considered him important enough to engage with and/or refute in a serious way. Gundolf himself was later compared to Steiner based on certain writings during the world war—much to Gundolf's dismay—yet as Jan Stottmeister has argued, their ideas about the spiritual causes and consequences of the war were rather to a considerable extent in harmony.[322] The same is similarly true of Steiner and Gundolf's friend, Max Weber, as this dissertation seeks to demonstrate.

Another follower of Steiner in Heidelberg was the occultist and alchemist Alexander von Bernus, whose family had acquired the medieval Benedictine monastery in the 19th century. Bernus assumed responsibility for the Stift Neuburg Abbey in 1908 and transformed it into a kind on intellectual and occult villa where he practiced operative alchemy and entertained guests, including both Gundolf and George, as well as Steiner, on multiple occasions.[323] Prior to taking over the abbey, Bernus lived in Munich and operated a famous "shadow-play" theater. He was a

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[320] Donald G. MacRae, *Weber* (London: Fontana, 1974), 14–17.

[321] Jan Stottmeister, *Der George-Kreis und die Theosophie Mit einem Exkurs zum Swastika-Zeichen bei Helena Blavatsky, Alfred Schuler und Stefan George* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag 2014).

[322] Stottmeister, *Der George-Kreis*, 291–292.

[323] For the background of von Bernus's interest in esotericism and his activities at the Stift Neuburg see Franz Anselm Schmitt, *Alexander von Bernus. Dichter U. Alchymist: Leben U. Werk in Dokumenten* (Nürnberg: Hans Carl, 1971); Mirko Sladek and Maria Schütze*, Alexander Von Bernus* (Nürnberg: Hans Carl, 1981); *Worte der Freundschaft für Alexander von Bernus* (Nürnberg: Hans Carl, 1949).

member of the Schwabing occultists and Bohemians, forming friendships with artists and writers such as Ricarda Huch, Karl Thylmann, Karl Wolfskehl, Fanny zu Reventlow, and Rainer Maria Rilke (most of whom were acquainted with Weber during his life, as well).[324]

Bernus joined the German section of the Theosophical Society around 1910/11, which was headed by Steiner, and later he followed Steiner's anthroposophical movement without officially joining, even offering to grant Steiner a piece of the Stift Neuburg land on which to build his spiritual headquarters, the Goetheanum.[325] Bernus was introduced to Stefan George in Heidelberg when the poet stayed at Stift Neuburg on several occasions in 1909 and 1910. Other attendees at Stift Neuburg who accompanied George include Friedrich Gundolf, Karl Wolfskehl, and the anthroposophist and soon-to-be acquaintance of Steiner Karl Thylmann, about whom Steiner remarked, Thylmann is "a friend of the anthroposophical movement" who had "gained some insights into the spiritual world."[326] This group was joined by the theosophist and anthroposophist artist Melchior Lechter, as well as several others. They spent their evenings engaged in esoteric activities, including interaction with spirits, performing seances, and putting on mystery plays—even searching for lost supernatural treasure on the grounds—all of which culminated in the grand occult "comet festival" celebrated on the occasion of Halley's Comet in May 1910.[327]

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[324] See „Bernus, Alexander von," in *Stefan George Und Sein Kreis: Ein Handbuch. Band III*, 1274–1278; Karlhans Kluncker, "Die Schwabinger Schattenspiele," in *Literatur Und Theater Im Wilhelminischen Zeitalter*, eds. Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer, Karl Otto Conrady, and Helmut Schanze (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1978), 326–345.

[325] Steiner politely declined, citing spiritual reasons for deciding to build the Goetheanum in Switzerland. Stottmeister, *Der George-Kreis*, 269–270; Zander, *Rudolf Steiner*, 314.

[326] Rudolf Steiner, *The Influences of Lucifer and Ahriman: Human Responsibility for the Earth* (GA 191; Hudson: Anthroposophic Press, 1993), Lecture IV, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA191/English/AP1993/19191115p01.html. There is also a Karl Thylmann-named anthroposophical branch (or lodge) in Kiel, which Steiner personally gave his blessing to have it named after Thylmann. See the Anthroposophischen Gesellschaft Karl-Thylmann-Zweig Kiel website at https://www.anthroposophie-nord.de/zweige/kiel-karl-thylmann-zweig.

[327] Jürgen Egyptien, *Stefan George: Dichter Und Prophet* (Darmstadt: Theiss, 2018), 329–332.

Such activities took place just as Gundolf was introducing George to Weber. While Weber was never a direct part of these supernatural events, he befriended Gundolf and George and, as mentioned above, they spent time with him at his home and Weber lodged with them briefly. Weber himself went to the alchemical abbey Stift Neuburg at least as early as 1916 to visit two friends: the philosopher of religion and writer Friedrich Alfred Schmid Noerr and his wife, the actress Clara Rosenberger.[328] Noerr was a lecturer at Heidelberg and he and his wife Clara corresponded and met with Weber regularly. Noerr was friends with Steiner, whom he likely met when Steiner visited Stift Neuburg.[329] Noerr was also friends with famed Austrian esotericist and theosophist writer Gustav Meyrink, and it is now known that Noerr collaborated with Meyrink and helped him write substantial parts of several works, including Meyrink's final novel originally entitled *Baphomet*.[330]

Steiner, Noerr, Bernus, and the anthroposophist Carl Unger were among the original writers for the premier issue of *Das Reich*, Bernus's philosophical and anthroposophical journal that was published between 1916 and 1920. Zander argues that the title *Das Reich* signified a nationalistic sentiment, yet Stottmeister has convincingly shown that it is a reference to a rather defiant turn on the part of Bernus away from George's "kingdom" toward Steiner as his new Master.[331] Another young scholar of Weber's inner circle, Ernst Bloch, remarked that *Das Reich* was finally "George + Steiner."[332] Meanwhile, Gundolf remained skeptical of these theosophical endeavors, primarily because of his unwavering and fanatical devotion to George. Gundolf

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[328] Max Weber, *Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe. Band II/9: Briefe 1915–1917*, eds. Gerd Krumeich, Rainer Lepsius, Birgit Rudhard, and Manfred Schön (Tübingen: Mohr, 2008), 108, 111. In these two letters, Weber first says he will visit Clara at the Stift Neuburg, then a few days later he mentions that he made the visit in another letter.
[329] Theodore Ziolkowski, *The Alchemist in Literature: From Dante to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 165.
[330] Ziolkowski, *The Alchemist in Literature*, 165.
[331] Stottmeister, *Der George-Kreis*, 270.
[332] Stottmeister, *Der George-Kreis*, 271.

followed Thomas Carlyle's idea that "history of the world is but the biography of great men,"

and that the modern world required such a great man or prophet to be re-enchanted. In Gundolf's

estimation, Blavatsky and Steiner were not it, George was. Napoleon and Shakespeare were

therefore "more initiates" than the gurus of India, Gundolf wrote to George. Gundolf believed

that George's visionary mysticism was more natural, as opposed to contrived through spiritual

exercises, which he considered theosophy to be.[333]

What's important to realize here is that what we generally assume about Weber—that he

was the ever-respectable sober scholar who interacted only with staid academics and other

atheistic scientists—turns out to be false. As the above examples illustrate, following Weber's

mental breakdown he was surrounded by esotericists of one stripe or another and engaged in

constructive dialogue with them. This suggests that Weber is to be understood within the context

of early 20th century esotericism in Europe; furthermore, that his formulation of the discipline of

social science is partially informed by this marginalized history, which gives additional

importance to the academic study of esotericism.

Steiner and the Re-Enchantment of the World

Steiner and von Sivers dedicated themselves to their new theosophical calling, and

Steiner worked enthusiastically as the General Sectary of the German Branch before splitting

with the Theosophical Headquarters in India to found his own Anthroposophical Society in 1913.

He became a personal instructor to the advanced students of the TS's Esoteric Section and

organized freemasonic meetings in which he deliberately brought women into normally all-male

ritual practices.[334] This post-transformation period is best characterized as one of tremendous

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[333] Stottmeister, *Der George-Kreis*, 300–301.
[334] For this Background see Franklin, "Prolegomena to the Study of Rudolf Steiner's Christian Teachings."

productivity and drive, a response to the years of doubt and darkness in Berlin. He published numerous books, delivered thousands of lectures across Europe, and corresponded with people from all walks of life and from wildly different professions, from dancers and doctors to farmers and theologians. He developed several practical applications of his esoteric philosophy, dealing with education, medicine, agriculture, dance, architecture, and politics.

Among the most significant application of his anthroposophical philosophy was in the field of education in the Waldorf or Steiner schools, the first of which was opened in Stuttgart in 1919. These schools have gone on to become the most successfully aspect of Steiner's intellectual legacy, with current schools spanning the entire globe. Steiner created the curricula for these schools to promote the free and autonomous spiritual life (*Geistesleben*) of the students and to reduce an over-reliance on top-down authority, especially from the state.[335] There is a direct connection to Weber's important "vocation" lectures delivered in Munich that same year (discussed more in the next section) by way of the German communist and publicist Alexander Schwab, who organized the lectures for the *Freistudentische Bund. Landesverband Bayern.* Earlier in 1919, Schwab published his article *Schulprobleme in der Revolution* in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, the academic journal edited by Weber, Edgar Jaffé and Werner Sombart.[336] This article, of which Steiner possessed a copy and marked it up extensively, lays out conditions for a free and autonomous school system within the context of the German revolution and socialist state. Schwab was a member of the *Freistudentenschaft* (Free Students Group) as well as the *deutsche Jugendbewegung* (German youth movement), and he taught at the

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[335] On the history of Waldorf education see Ida Oberman, Th*e Waldorf Movement in Education from European Cradle to American Crucible, 1919–2008* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008); Joaquin Munoz, "The Circle of Mind and Heart: Integrating Waldorf Education, Indigenous Epistemologies, and Critical Pedagogy" (PhD Diss., University of Arizona, 2016).

[336] Alexander Schwab, "Schulprobleme in der Revolution," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik,* Bd. 45, Heft 3 (1919): 629–659.

Freie Schulgemeinde in Wickersdorf, a rural educational reform school founded in 1906 focused

on movement, physical culture, and gender equality.[337] Schwab's ideas, whether political or

pedagogical, were radical and landed him in trouble with authorities throughout his life (he

would later die in a Nazi concentration camp).[338] His pedagogical reforms constituted a

resistance to the increasing adaptation to capitalism of the German economy through forms of

technical specialization, professionalization, and economization, what he referred to as the

Berufsproblem (professional problem) in the school system, and which he viewed as facilitating

the capitalist takeover of Germany.[339] He argued in favor of intellectual freedom and the

unification of knowledge in the humanities and sciences, and he eventually identified the

brothers Max and Alfred Weber as the only living scholars who had adequately assessed this

situation.

Wenzel Götte has argued that Steiner's annotated copy of Schwab's article, still kept in

Steiner's archive, is the only remaining source that shows how much Steiner took an interest in

the educational school reform ideas of his time, especially regarding organization and autonomy

in the education system, replacing the director's role with a democratic school management and

the freedom to create own's own curriculum.[340] Götte reads Steiner's annotations of this text as

evidence of those aspects of Schwab's thought Steiner agreed with. This included a "systematic

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[337] Diethart Kerbs, "Schwab, Alexander," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie Bd. 23*, 2007, https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd129586633.html#ndbcontent. See also the introduction in Alexander Schwab, *Das Buch Vom Bauen: Wohnungsnot, Neue Technik, Neue Baukunst, Städtebau Aus Sozialist. Sicht: Erschienen 1930 Unter D. Pseud. Albert Sigrist* (1930; Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann Fachverlag, 1973).

[338] He was also a member of the *Spartakusbund* with famous communist fighters Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, both of whom he knew.

[339] "This problem of balancing work and life, of specialist training and general education is part of the professional problem." Schwab, "Schulprobleme in der Revolution," 631. See also Edoardo Massimilla, *Ansichten Zu Weber: Wissenschaft, Leben Und Werte in Der Auseinandersetzung Um Wissenschaft Als Beruf* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universität Verlag, 2008), 10–11.

[340] Wenzel M. Götte, „Erfahrungen mit Schulautonomie: das Beispiel der Freien Waldorfschulen" (PhD Diss., Bielefeld University, 2000), 156–157.

early training of all abilities of the entire spiritual and physical organism" founded on a principle of "learning by doing and for doing."[341] Steiner further annotates approvingly Schwab's mention of Gustav Wyneken's "school community" in the *Freie Schulgemeinde* in Wickersdorf, in which children were granted educational opportunities regardless of class prejudice, and state oversight was restricted in favor of internal organization based on the workers in the school.[342]

Götte is quick to point out that Steiner's educational ideas had been outlined already in 1918; however, the Schwab connection represents the only known reference and connection between Steiner and the goals of other educational reformist movements at the time.[343] This connection happens to be Alexander Schwab, the same person who organized Weber's famous "Science as a Vocation" in Munich under the heading of educational reform regarding the work of the scholar and the role of the state and the university—a connection demonstrating that Weber and Steiner shared similar progressive ideas about education and how it might be renewed.[344] The influential "Science as a Vocation" lecture turns out to be just as much about educational reform as about scientific practice, and it is this lecture that most agrees with Steiner's concerns and objectives. That this lecture was given the same year as the opening of the first Waldorf school should offer further evidence for a parallel direction in the thought of these two men. Behind Steiner's intellectual project, even in the case of school reform, stands Goethe, with his emphasis on the spiritual dimension of the physical world, as well as Nietzsche, with his emphasis on the autonomy of the individual and the necessity of the transvaluation of values in modern times. As we shall see, this background informs much of Weber's scholarly work, especially the Nietzschean interpretation of society that emphases the role of the individual.

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[341] Schwab, "Schulprobleme in der Revolution," 645.
[342] Schwab, "Schulprobleme in der Revolution," 648.
[343] Götte, „Erfahrungen mit Schulautonomie," 156–157.
[344] Perry Myers makes a similar argument in *The Double-Edged Sword: The Cult of Bildung*.

Weber and the World of Re-Enchantment

Weber's Heidelberg years were his most productive, during which he developed some of his most influential ideas. He continued to consistently interact with esoteric and radical outsiders, traveling to the esoteric hotspot of Ascona, Switzerland, and engaging in extramarital affairs with a fixation on eroticism and mysticism. All of this will be explored in chapter 3. Weber continued gaining a reputation throughout Germany, as well, mostly through his academic articles and popular lectures. As with other German intellectuals, including Steiner, when the First World War broke out, Weber became increasingly involved in politics and took an intense interest in Germany's political future.

During the war, Weber argued that Americans were leading in the development of a certain form of mechanical and bureaucratic life, which would inevitably, according to Weber, spread across the world as a result of the war.[345] Initially, he had taken a favorable view of the difference between the "sect" in America and the "church" in Europe, as the former retained a sense of individual humanness.[346] Upon returning from his journey to America, he had underlined the importance of fraternal and voluntary organizations, including freemasons, for the democratic, economic, and social processes of American life. The war changed his view, and Weber then spoke pessimistically of the "Europeanization" of America.[347] Weber speculated that "everywhere in the large states modern democracy is becoming bureaucratized democracy " and that "[a]s a consequence of this war America will emerge as a state with a large army, an officer

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[345] Weber, *Political Writings*, 155. For a detailed account of what Weber likely meant by this "form of life," see Steven T. Katz, "Technology and Genocide: Technology as a 'Form of Life,'" in *Historicism, the Holocaust, and Zionism: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought and History* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 193–224.

[346] Lawrence Scaff, *Max Weber in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 29–36.

[347] Scaff, *Max Weber*, 33; Joshua Derman, "Max Weber and the Idea of the Occident," in *The Oxford Handbook of Max Weber*, eds. Edith Hanke, Lawrence Scaff, and Sam Whimster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 523.

corps, and a bureaucracy."[348] This would contribute to the creation of sectarian specialists and

associative members—which, Weber claimed, everyone in the United States must be in order to

legitimately participate in society—and this ultimately would further the process of

disenchantment engendered by European Protestantism.[349] "Democracy in America is not a heap

of sand," wrote Weber, "but a maze of exclusive sects, associations and clubs. These all support

the selection of those who conform to the American way of life in general, by smoothing their

path to influential positions of all kinds in business, politics and social life."[350] Voluntary

associations, alongside political parties, were undergoing increasing bureaucratization and had

become enrolled, along with everything else, into the capitalist structure of modern society. In

the words of one scholar, this development signified for Weber "the tendencies which invariably

lead to the reemergence of exclusivist status groups and hierarchical social arrangements."[351]

In Germany, however, things were no better, and Weber experimented with a variety of

approaches to identify the best path forward. He participated in the Lauensteiner Conference of

1917, which was organized by Eugen Diederichs, the publisher of the "social-religious" journal

Die Tat, as a renaissance movement of socialist and pacifist students.[352] Diederichs had coined

the term "New Romanticism" and his publishing endeavors contributed to the spread of

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[348] Quoted in Schaff, *Max Weber*, 36.

[349] See Max Weber, "Transactions of the First German Conference of Sociologists," in *Max Weber's Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations*, ed. John, Dreijmanis, trans. Gordon C Wells (New York: Algora Publishing, 2007) 90–93.

[350] Weber, "Transactions," 92.

[351] Regina F. Titunik, "The Continuation of History: Max Weber on the Advent of a New Aristocracy," *The Journal of Politics* 59, no. 3 (1997): 680–700, 690. See also Guenther Roth, "Marx and Weber on the United States-Today," in *A Weber-Marx Dialogue*, eds. Robert J. Antonio and Ronald M. Glassman (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985).

[352] Derman, *Max Weber in Politics and Social Thought*, 22–23; David M. Choberka, "Calling, Charisma, and the War of Material: The First World War in the Politics of Ernst Toller, Ernst Junger, and Max Weber" (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2007), 130–139; Gangolf Hübinger, "Eugen Diederichs' Bemühungen um die Grundlegung einer neuen Geisteskultur (Anhang: Protokoll der Lauensteiner Kulturtagung Pfingsten 1917)," in *Kultur und Krieg: Die Rolle der Intellektuellen, Künstler und Schriftsteller im Ersten Weltkrieg*, eds. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Elisabeth Müller Luckner (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996), 259–274.

theosophical as well as anthroposophical ideas in Germany, and several anthroposophists published articles in *Die Tat*.[353] Diederichs's home in Jena was, similar to von Bernus's Stift Neuburg, a melting pot of students, intellectuals, and artists interested in forms occultism, spiritualism, vitalism, as well as national politics.[354] Diederichs personally invited Weber to the conference, writing of him: "[w]hat is certainly needed is the new man, who finds his orientation in the laws of the soul, and who therefore is not impressed by the economic laws of life, but rather, looking at things more platonically, senses the spirit as something that shapes the life of the economy and state…"[355] At the conference, Weber engaged a diversity of political positions, progressive and conservative—getting into conflicts with both pacifists and reactionaries—even discussing issues with radical revolutionaries such as Erich Mühsam and Ernst Toller, whose life he later saved through testifying in his defense in court following the November Revolution and the short-lived Munich Soviet Republic.[356]

At this same time, Steiner was making similar arguments about the threat of scientific materialism from the Anglo-American cultural element and lecturing on the tragic geopolitical situation. By 1917, he was developing a project for replacing the broken governmental system,

[353] For example, Ernst Boldt, "Philosophie und Theosophie," *Die Tat* (November 1918): 595–610; Friedrich Rittelmeyer, "Zur Steinerschen Theosophie," *Die Tat* (January 1919): 794–795; Richard Seebohm, "Dreigliederung des sozialen Lebens," *Die Tat* (February 1921): 832–839.

[354] On Diederichs see Justus H. Ulbricht and Meike G. Werner, eds., *Romantik, Revolution Und Reform: Der Eugen Diederichs Verlag Im Epochenkontext 1900–1949* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1999); Meike G. Werner, *Moderne in der Provinz: Kulturelle Experimente im Fin de Siecle Jena* (Gottingen: Wallstein, 2003); Justus H. Ulbricht, "'Deutsche Religion' Und 'Deutsche Kunst': Intellektuelle Sinnsuche Und Kulturelle Identitätskonstruktionen in Der 'Klassischen Moderne'" (PhD Diss., Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, 2009); Irmgard Heidler, *Der Verleger Eugen Diederichs und seine Welt (1896–1930)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998); Justus Ulbricht, "Durch 'deutsche Religion' zu 'neuer Renaissance': Die Rückkehr der Mystiker im Verlagsprogramm von Eugen Diederichs," in *Mystik, Mystizismus und Moderne in Deutschland um 1900*, eds. Moritz Baßler and Hildegard Chatellier (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 1998), 165–186.

[355] Quoted in Choberka, "Calling, Charisma, and the War of Material," 131. See Eugen Diederichs, *Selbstzeugnisse und Briefe von Zeitgenossen,* ed. Ulf Diederichs (Düsseldorf: Diederichs Verlag, 1967), 244–245.

[356] Friedrich Wilhelm Graf and Edith Hanke, eds., *Bürgerwelt und Sinnenwelt: Max Webers München* (München: Volk Verlag, 2020), 195–204. Incidentally, Toller was also published in the anthroposophical journal *Individualität Vierteljahresschrift für Philosophie und Kunst* (1926–1930).

which he called the "Threefold Social Order." Through this "three-fold" approach to governance social reform would take place by dividing the economic, social, and cultural spheres into three separate parliaments that operated independently of each other, with responsibility placed on the individual to change his or her attitude toward these areas and play a key role in each of these fields.[357] Together, these three fields would function as a harmonious whole, mirroring the organic workings of the human body. In 1919, he wrote an appeal titled "To the German People and the Cultural World" that was to be published alongside a supporting list of prominent signatories.[358] He tasked several of his closest collaborators to obtain these signatures, one of whom was a Swiss lawyer and sociologist named Roman Boos, who at the time was working as Steiner's personal secretary to help establish a legitimate basis for "social three-folding."[359] Hundreds of high-ranking officials, military personnel, scientists, artists, and writers from throughout Germany and Austria had signed the appeal, including Hermann Hesse, the neo-vitalist Hans Driesch, and the neo-Kantian Paul Natorp. According to Boos, who was a lifelong anthroposophist, he had become acquainted with Weber's ideas through the historian Otto von Gierke, who had published a review of his work in Weber's *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und*

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[357] Marcum, "Rudolf Steiner," 510–517. See also Rudolf Steiner, *Die Kernpunkte der sozialen Frage in den Lebensnotwendigkeiten der Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Stuttgart: Greiner und Pfeiffer, 1919). Staudenmaier argues that "social-three-folding" is a defense of hierarchical class structures patterned after the synarchy of occultist Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, aimed at countering anarchism, while Preparata, on the other hand, has identified distinctly anarchistic elements in Steiner's three-folding. See Peter Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 72–73; Guido Giacomo Preparata, "Perishable Money in a Threefold Commonwealth: Rudolf Steiner and the Social Economics of an Anarchist Utopia," Review of Radical Political Economics 38, no. 4 (2006): 619–648; also Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland*, 1286–1356.

[358] Steiner had participated in something similar back in 1902, this time in conjunction with the above-mentioned Diederichs, when he and the latter were among the signatories in support of publishing Tolstoy's *Antwort an den Synod*, an appeal published in the magazine *Der Freidenker*, the organ of the German Freethinkers Association, and initiated by the Berlin Giordano Bruno Association. There was a criminal charge when they wouldn't retract it, something similar to the anti-pornography law. See Ilja Karenovics, "Rudolf Steiner," in *Tolstoj als theologischer Denker und Kirchenkritiker*, eds. Martin George, Jens Herlth, Christian Münch, and Ulrich Schmid (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck et Ruprecht), 692–706.

[359] On Boos, see Anna-Maria Balastèr-von Wartburg and Robert Friedenthal, *Das Literarische Werk Von Roman Boos: 9. Jan. 1889—10. Dez. 1952: Bibliographie* (Basel: Verlag Die Pforte, 1973).

Sozialpolitik.[360] Apparently after discussing the idea with Steiner, Boos was given permission to

go calling at the Weber household to obtain a signature from the famous myth of Heidelberg.

Boos recalls what took place in his book *Michael gegen Michel* published a year after

Steiner died. To my knowledge, this is the only known instance of Weber directly commenting

on Steiner's ideas. It thus behooves us to pay Boos's account special attention.[361] Boos begins by

citing Weber's thesis in the *Protestant Ethic* and the tremendous role such research played in

understanding the genesis of modern capitalism and "the democracy of the West" as connected

to Calvin's "will-diverting" doctrine of predestination. As a former student of art historian

Heinrich Wölfflin, Boos's reading of Weber's thesis is that with Protestantism the curved yet

vertical longing for salvation in Gothic mysticism is replaced by a horizontal longing for

successful external activity, especially observable in America. In the early spring of 1919, Boos

traveled to Heidelberg hoping that the great scholar who had produced such profound insights

would surely understand the benefits of Steiner's social three-folding system. "Should not he,"

Boos wrote, "who had so brilliantly portrayed the historical effects of the Calvinist impact,

understand that by 'switching on' an impulse from the spirit alone a policy of reconstruction

could be established in the long run?" He continued that it was "modern individualism" that "had

to be freed from Western rationalism and German mysticism"—in other words, a spiritual-

scientific or *Geisteswissenschaft* approach. It was on these grounds that he sought out Weber.

The meeting, however, proved to be unsuccessful. According to Boos, Weber's immense

power of intellect seemed too wrapped up in the minutia of his own ideas, and "except for many

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[360] Roman Boos, *Michael gegen Michel. Katharsis des Deutschtums 1914–1925. Antwort aus der deutschen Schweiz auf eine französische Frage* (Basel: Verlag für Freies Geistesleben, 1926), 112. This was a review of Boos's *Der Gesamtarbeitsvertrag, nach Schweizerischem Recht (Obl. R. Art. 322 und 323). Deutsche Geistesformen deutschen Arbeitslebens* (München und Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1916).

[361] All quotes from Boos, *Michael gegen Michel*, 111–119. For a shortened account of this meeting in English, see Albert Schmelzer, *The Threefolding Movement, 1919: A History: Rudolf Steiner's Campaign for a Self-Governing, Self-Managing, Self-Educating Society* (Forest Row: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2017), 100.

extremely valuable individual remarks," Weber seemed too pressed for time to contribute much of substance, though overall he appears to have responded positively. Still, Boos recounts that Weber was unable to offer a better answer to the principle of the threefold social order than the following: "I understand that you are trying to establish purely economic trust companies (such as those planned at that time in Stuttgart by the three-folding industrialists). But I don't understand why generally speaking you are demanding, for example, separation of the economy from politics!"[362]

Boos's response was to lament that the "great scholar," who seemed to Boos to truly embody the German spirit—even to the extent that he "was not nominated in the Reichstag elections"—had failed to rise to the occasion of saying "yes to an evolutionist spiritual impulse, to an impulse that wants to accomplish the healing of the organic social body through the completion of the individual principle of freedom and to give meaning to the entire Calvinist involution, which it does not have within itself—which is why it has led to the degeneration of the spirit." This "involution" of Calvinism is, for Boos, identical to Weber's thesis in the *Protestant Ethic*, and when this development is understood as a "necessary, but tragic, transition from the Gothic social body of the Middle Ages through the antisocial mechanisms of the last centuries to the Goethean social body of the future," only then will meaning, or re-enchantment, be restored to a Western world utterly de-spiritualized in Weber's scholarly vision. Even though ultimately Weber did not sign Steiner's appeal, the Boos account sheds light on the way in which Weber was perceived by some of his contemporaries, before the later re-constructive

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[362] "Das verstehe ich, dass man versucht, rein wirtschaftliche Treuhandgesellschaften (wie sie damals in Stuttgart von den Dreigliederungs-Industriellen geplant waren) zu begründen. Aber das verstehe ich nicht, warum man ganz allgemein z. B. fordert: Trennung der Wirtschaft von der Politik!" Parenthetical statement presumably added by Boos.

biographical accounts, and that some leading members of the anthroposophical movement felt his thesis in the *Protestant Ethic* was generally compatible with their cause.

Weber would eventually accept a new teaching position in Munich as the successor to Lujo Brentano's chair for social science, economic history and national economy. He moved in 1919 just after the November Revolution and short-lived Munich Soviet Republic and stayed in Munich for the last few years of his life. The move to Munich was in some ways the culmination of many experiences Weber had had with Schwabing Bohemian circles in Ascona and elsewhere, as well his extramarital love affairs, which will be discussed in the chapter 3. Munich was also the site of two of Weber's most important lectures, the so-called "vocation" lectures, in which he articulated most clearly his thesis of disenchantment and the "polytheism of values," a state of perpetual conflict over meaning and confinement owing to the mental constraints imposed by bureaucratic rationalization, which characterized the modern world. Meanwhile, it was the job of the politician to weather this state of struggle and restriction though an ethics of responsibly and an unwavering sense of one's own conviction.

How these lectures came about is relevant to our discussion of Weber's connection to esoteric circles, in which Steiner was active. As mentioned earlier, German communist and publicist Alexander Schwab originally organized these lectures for the *Freistudentische Bund. Landesverband Bayern* under the name *"Geistige Arbeit als Beruf"* (Spiritual or Intellectual Work as a Profession), and Weber was invited based on his performance at Diederichs's Lauensteiner Conference.[363] Schwab, a member of the *Freistudentenschaft* (Free Students

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[363] Wolfgang Schluchter, "'Einleitung' to Max Weber 'Wissenschaft als Beruf 1917/1919. Politik als Beruf 1919,'" in *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe Bd. I/17*, eds. Wolfgang Mommsen, Wolfgang Schluchter, and Birgitt Morgenbrod (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1992), 13. For more background on the lecture itself see also Graf and Hanke, *Bürgerwelt und Sinnenwelt*, 44–130, and Keith Tribe, "Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation': Context, Genesis, Structure," *Sociologica* 12, no. 1 (2018): 125–136.

Group) and the *deutsche Jugendbewegung* (German youth movement), had published his article *Schulprobleme in der Revolution* in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, an annotated copy of which was in Steiner's possession. Another article written by Schwab on the subject "Beruf und Jugend" (Calling and Youth), which was published anonymously in the monthly *Die weißen Blätter* in 1917, gave the initial impetus for the lecture series. Here Schwab attacked the notion of a "calling" as being complicit with the bourgeoisie and Western capitalist project, and thus in need of being dispensed with. However, the significance of the article lies in its focus on the problem of *Beruf* and it named the Weber brothers—although Max would be the only Weber to make an appearance—as the only thinkers capable of solving this problem.[364]

The members of the Free Student Movement who organized the lectures were among those concerned about the German universities graduating neither fully educated nor mature individuals, but rather technical specialists, *Fachmenschen*.[365] They wanted to free themselves from the *Corps*, or so-called *Corpsbrüder*, who made up the older, more conservative student unions and regularly engaged in heavy drinking, brawling, various sexist and exclusionary practices, and tended to be nationalistic in focus.[366] As Tribe points out, based on Schwab's article, the lecture series would therefore address the "restoration of a natural relationship between life and *Geist* that had been destroyed by the modern bourgeois world," in which "the acquisition of money and intellectual activity were linked, as in a *Beruf*."[367] That Schwab felt Weber was the one who could solve this problem is similar to Boos's interpretation of Weber, in that although he was a secular scholar, Weber somehow possessed, in the eyes of some, the

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[364] See Weber, *Gesamtausgabe Bd. I/17,* 37; Tribe, "Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation,'" 127.
[365] Tribe, "Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation,'" 127; on Schwab's views, see Weber, *Gesamtausgabe Bd. I/17*, 53.
[366] Graf and Hanke, *Bürgerwelt und Sinnenwelt*, 44.
[367] Tribe, "Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation,'" 128.

ability to address matters of a spiritual nature. Weber, on his side, seemed equally willing to

address such a challenge, and he accepted the *"Geistige Arbeit als Beruf"* invitation

immediately, remarking that the topic was "close to his heart."[368] The contents of the lecture

triggered a serious debate both within the Weber circle as well as the Stefan George circle over

the effectiveness and usefulness of the old form of science and what a new form of science—

especially one that retained the human spirit or *Geist*—would look like.[369]

Final Years

Steiner died in 1925 and left behind a tremendous amount of material that was later

systematized and edited by his widow, who was the sole proprietor of his estate. Marie Steiner

oversaw the publication efforts and, as was the case with Weber's widow and Nietzsche's sister,

attempted to produce a systematic and coherent philosophy from the widely divergent materials.

This endeavor ran into problems during the Nazi period, as Marie Steiner attempted to appeal to

the authority of the National Socialists in order to preserve the Anthroposophical Society—an

endeavor that ultimately failed and managed to alienate several leading members, notably

Steiner's personal doctor and anthroposophical medicine co-founder Ita Wegman, who retreated

to Ascona to found her second clinic (the first had been founded in Dornach at the

Goetheanum).[370] The attempt to assimilate the Anthroposophical Society into the Nazi

worldview has been documented by Peter Staudenmaier.[371] This makes it extremely difficult to

arrive at a clear understanding of exactly what Steiner thought at various periods of his life and

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[368] *Weber, Gesamtausgabe Bd. I/17,* 58.
[369] On these developments, see Richard Pohle, *Max Weber Und Die Krise Der Wissenschaft: Eine Debatte in Weimar* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).
[370] Peter Selg, *The Last Three Years: Ita Wegman in Ascona, 1940-1943* (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2014).
[371] Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism*.

to judge whether or not he did abandon his early political radicalism and become more conservative.

As the popular writer Kaj Skagen has argued, social progressives often did (and still do) transition from youthful radicalism to a more spiritual outlook as they aged. It is only because of Steiner's subsequent popularity and the faithful adherence of his followers that questions of Steiner's intellectual consistency have been aroused. Gebhardt consequently calls Steiner a "deeply modern person."[372] Another of his biographers describes him as a "futurist" because his ideas were "post-conventional, innovative and futures oriented."[373] During and after his lifetime, he was labeled a Jew, an atheist, an anarchist, a communist, a fascist, a Jesuit, a guru, and a government spy. However, he is rarely considered a thinker or philosopher of any real and lasting stature. This is because until relatively recently scholars have failed to recognize the important role that esoteric thinkers like Steiner have played in shaping modernity. The purpose of these biography chapters, and the thesis as a whole, is to highlight the similarities between Steiner and mainstream thinkers like Weber with the express goal of providing one more example to show that ignoring esoteric thinkers distorts our historical understanding of what modernity actually is and how it came to be.

Weber died in Munich in June of 1920—after having only taught several semesters for the university—and he left behind, not only his wife Marianne Weber, but many students and colleagues who together would successfully establish his international reputation as one of the founders of the discipline of social science. However, his legacy of ideas and theories, as well as

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[372] Als zutiefst moderne Person nahm er sich wiederholt das Recht auf eine neuerliche Selbstfindung heraus." Gebhardt, *Rudolf Steiner*, 14.

[373] Gidley, "Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925)"; see also Gidley, "Educational Imperatives of the Evolution of Consciousness: The Integral Visions of Rudolf Steiner and Ken Wilber," *The International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 12, no. 2 (2007): 117–135.

the kind of person Weber was, have been the focus of a seemingly endless amount of literature in the same way that Steiner's intellectual legacy and character have been. Weber's "Science as a Vocation" lecture, with its description of the disenchantment of the modern Western world, is arguably Weber's most important contribution to his conception and analysis of disenchantment, the theme in which his life and work culminated. But this too has been selectively understood. Donald MacRae argued that by the final years of his life Weber was, in fact, occupying "the margins of the zone of torrid friendship at the center of which was the poet Stefan George," and citing a line from one of George's late poems—"it is only through magic that life stays awake"— MacRae concluded that Weber "might not have liked such teaching, but it is the lesson of Max Weber all the same."[374]

Indeed, the importance of magic and enchantment—or alternatively spirit (*Geist*) or even meaning—is central in both Weber's and Steiner's work, but so is a concept of individual freedom. Isaac Finkle argues that Weber reinterpreted Nietzsche's individualism for use by scholars in the social and cultural sciences.[375] According to Finkle, Weber's conceptions of science and vocation in the "Science as a Vocation" lecture represent the direct descendants of Nietzsche's individualism: "The Weberian 'vocation' is not just the commitment to one's work which expresses an 'inward calling'; it is more importantly a commitment to the kind of intellectual integrity that characterized Nietzsche's philosophers."[376] Weber himself seems to acknowledge the influence of Nietzsche in his work. In an exchange with students in February 1920, following a discussion with Oswald Spengler, he remarked that

> One can judge the honesty of a contemporary scholar and above all a contemporary philosopher according to how he takes a stand in relation to Nietzsche and Marx.

[374] MacRae, *Weber*, 90.
[375] Isaac Finkle, "Nietzsche and Weber" (PhD. Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1998), 10–11.
[376] Although with less inherent elitism, Finkle argues. See Finkle, "Nietzsche and Weber," 13.

Whoever denies that he could not have accomplished the most important parts of his own work without the work done by both of them deceives himself and others. The world in which we live as intellectual beings is largely a world bearing the imprint of Marx and Nietzsche.[377]

Part of the problem is that Weber rarely references and often obscures his reliance on Nietzsche or else criticizes the philosopher's abilities as a specialist, as scholars have now recognized.[378] However, this does not change the fact that Weber's thought strongly reflects and responds to Nietzsche's contribution. A second factor is Weber's earliest interpreters, including Marianne, distanced Weber's thought from Nietzsche's after it became increasingly appropriated for rightwing purposes.[379] However, Bryan Turner maintains that "Nietzsche's idea that modern nihilism is a key example of resentment found its counterpart in Weber's analysis of rationalization and disenchantment."[380] This suggests Weber considered modern culture to be ultimately valueless, that the world "is in principle subject to an infinity of different interpretations, all of which are unavoidably subjective."[381] Weber and Steiner thus agreed on the centrality of enchantment to organic and social life, as well as the modern requirement of the individual to freely create new moral values out of oneself.

One of Steiner's goals with anthroposophy was to establish communication with the dead and help human beings have a more co-operative relationship with those who had passed on to

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[377] Eduard Baumgarten, *Max Weber: Werk und Person* (Tubingen: J.C. Mohr, 1964), 554-5 as cited in Schaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage*, 6. Schaff notes the similarity between Weber's thesis of disenchantment and Nietzsche's pronouncement that god is dead. See also Stephen A. Kent, "Weber, Goethe, and the Nietzschean Allusion: Capturing the Source of the 'Iron Cage' Metaphor," *Sociological Analysis* 44, no. 4 (1983):297–319. Radkau rejects that Weber was influenced by Nietzsche, yet he does suggest Weber may have seen a connection between his own dark night of the soul and Nietzsche's total decent into madness at the end of his life. See Radkau, *Max Weber*, 167.

[378] See Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber: Collected Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 26; Reinhard Bendix and Guenther Roth, *Scholarship and Partisanship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 22–23; Finkle, "Nietzsche and Weber," 32.

[379] Finkle, "Nietzsche and Weber," 33.

[380] Bryan S. Turner, "Max Weber and the Spirit of Resentment: The Nietzsche Legacy," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 11, no. 1 (2011): 75–92, 78–79.

[381] Finkle, "Nietzsche and Weber," 11.

the spiritual world.[382] Even today, modern anthroposophists place a great deal of importance on the spirits of the dead, and, based on indications given by Steiner, they have made a practice of reading anthroposophical literature to the dead *out loud* in order to help them move through the spiritual world toward their next incarnation—a practice that has similarities to other religious traditions, for example, Tibetan Buddhism.[383]

Following Weber's death, Marianne received a letter of condolence from Weber's niece, Ilse Castendyk, who had become an anthroposophist in Munich and would later move to Dornach and work as an art teacher there in the Goetheanum.[384] According to her grand-mother, Hertha Möller—who was part of the Bielefelder/Oerlinghauser Weber family—Ilse had "enthusiastically grasped the teaching" of anthroposophy "with her temperament and imagination."[385] In her condolence letter, Ilse speaks to her in a typical anthroposophical or spiritualist manner, telling her not to despair because of "the visible closeness of our dead, yes!"[386] As a young girl, Ilse recalls hearing a lecture Weber gave at a gathering about musical notes and their correspondence to numbers, after which she got the impression of "his famous personality, his knowledge, his point of view and his ability to develop it so vividly that I will never forget." She therefore knows what Marianne has lost. However, Ilse counsels her that in

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[382] See, for example, Rudolf Steiner, *The Influence of the Dead on Destiny: Eight Lectures Held in Dornach, December 2–22, 1917* (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2007); Rudolf Steiner, *Staying Connected: How to Continue Your Relationships with Those Who Have Died: Selected Talks and Meditations* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1999); Rudolf Steiner, *Life between Death and Rebirth: Sixteen Lectures* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1968).

[383] See Peter Selg, *The Path of the Soul After Death: The Community of the Living and the Dead As Witnessed by Rudolf Steiner in His Eulogies and Funeral Addresses* (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2011); Rudolf Steiner, *Living with the Dead: Meditations for Maintaining a Connection to Those Who Have Died* (Forest Row: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2013).

[384] Hertha Möller, *Lebenserinnerung* (Bielefeld: Gundlach, 1927), 199.

[385] Möller, *Lebenserinnerung*, 199.

[386] This letter is marked "Ilse Castendyk Nr. 25" and is held in Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Ana 446.C. „Kondolenzbriefe zum Tide Max Webers."

such times it is best to "generate one's own strength from the soul … like a quiet and ardent

prayer," and always to remember that in reality Marianne has lost nothing:

> [Weber] can no longer speak to us in our language, still support us with his arms, care for us with his worries and share his life in such a way that it is connected with ours. But what has been, his wealth, in which he spent himself, that remains, that transfigures itself before us, and that transfigures itself more and more the further he moves away from us, and our faith sees him moving into that other, purer, higher world of God."

In death, then, Weber and Steiner would have a final chance encounter in the spiritual

world.

Conclusion

As I have tried to show in this chapter, Weber's and Steiner's early years culminated in a

period of mental confusion as a result of the tremendous tension they experienced in their private

and public lives. The dichotomy of inner and outer was a gendered dichotomy in that certain

behaviors, feelings, and actions were assigned to different sexes and different spheres of social

and cultural life. European culture during the 19th century was breaking down and experiencing

massive change, including the roles that men and women played in society. Steiner and Weber

were overwhelmed by these demands and experienced similar moments of desperation and

collapse, culminating in new perspectives and approaches to the modern world. This produced a

moment of rebirth and drastic change of life-course, as well a radical break with certain positions

and ideals from their past. While tension over male and female normative roles and

characteristics followed them throughout their lives, Weber and Steiner now sought new

pathways out of the predicament of modern Europe's perceived decline. This included an interest

in esotericism and mysticism, but also a radical rethinking of Kantian philosophy and an

embrace of romantic positions inspired by the philosophy of, among others, Goethe, Nietzsche, but also Russian romantic mystics like Vladimir Solovyov and Leo Tolstoy. This interest in esotericism and romantic philosophy ultimately led them to a reconsideration of the function of education, not as a conservative move to preserve the traditon of *Bildung*, but rather as a response to the radicalism of students who demanded a less capitalistic framework for their modern education. As I will show in later chapters, Weber's and Steiner's fear of increasing bureaucratic rationalization and the spread of scientific materialism—but also their interest in esotericism and educational reform—would ultimately lead them to the East in search of answers to their Western problems.

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Chapter Three

Max Weber in Ascona:

Among the Esotericists and Anarchists

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Introduction

Weber scholars have tended to neglect Weber's interest in mysticism, in part because he

is thought to have held an "ambiguous attitude" toward the subject, dismissed it as the "passive

acquiescence to social conditions," and thought of it "as little more than a superstition from the

Neolithic Age."[387] Instead, his work on asceticism, charisma, and economics is foregrounded.[388]

This is evidenced by the success of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, especially

in the English-speaking world, a text for which Weber has arguably become most well-known.

Beginning with Marianne Weber's biography of her husband in 1926, scholars have emphasized

aspects of Weber's life and work to fit a pre-existing model that, until recently, confirmed

science and rationalism as the *sine qua non* of Western thought. This was done for reasons of

academic legitimation and as a response to the Second World War, which was interpreted as the

dangerous eruption of spiritualism, mysticism, irrationalism, pseudo-science, and myth.

The following chapter offers a different perspective of Weber, one that challenges the

preferred image that presents him as the ever-sober rationalist, conscientious liberal, and neo-

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[387] Roland Robertson, "On the Analysis of Mysticism: Pre-Weberian, Weberian and Post-Weberian Perspectives," *Sociological Analysis* 36, no. 3 (1975): 241–266, 241; Erika Summers-Effler and Hyunjin Deborah Kwak, "Weber's Missing Mystics: Inner-Worldly Mystical Practices and the Micro-Potential for Social Change," *Theory and Society* 44 (2015): 251–282, 251; Gert H. Mueller, "Asceticism and Mysticism," *International Yearbook for the Sociology of Religion* 8 (1973): 68–132, 72.

[388] Some other exceptions include Volkhard Krech, "Mystik," in *Max Webers »Religionssystematik«*, edited by Hans G. Kippenberg and Martin Riesebrodt (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 241–262; Michael Symonds and Jason Pudsey, "The Forms of Brotherly Love in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion," *Sociological Theory* 24, no. 2 (2006): 133–149; Christopher Adair-Toteff, "Max Weber's Mysticism," *European Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 3 (2002): 339–353.

Kantian objectivist. He was, of course, these things, but he was much more as well. This new perspective brings into focus aspects of Weber's thought and character that are too-often overlooked down-played, or ignored altogether, that he was an impulsive romantic, venerator of nature, charismatic savior in the minds of some of his acquaintances, and someone who took mysticism seriously enough to consider such experiences a potential solution to the problem of disenchantment. Just as Weber's wife and most of his biographers have ignored the mystical aspects of his thought, they have also and for similar reasons failed to acknowledge that he was influenced by esoteric currents, owing in part to the constructed image of Weber as a rationalist critic of religious beliefs. But this is also due to the historical blindness to esotericism, which was until recently the modus operandi of working scholars. On the other hand, when esotericism *was* incorporated into an intellectual or cultural history, its aspects were evoked to criticize and dismiss them, rarely to understand. This, as it turns out, was a product of the scholarship following the Second World War. The academic study of esotericism emerging from the 1960s on has drawn on Weber's theory of disenchantment as a frame for understanding the activity of esotericists in the emergence of the modern world. Such historical actors are thought to be busily resisting and fighting the disenchantment and disillusionment with modern life. Although Weber was attracted to esoteric thought and envisioned the possibility that certain strands of esotericism might provide a remedy for disenchantment, his diagnosis of modernity as disenchanted stuck, and his wife and others downplayed any association between Weber and esotericism in order to present him as modern, rational, and scientific. Yet now that esotericism can be seen as multi-dimensional and in many respects as a positive and creative force, it is possible to expose this other side of Weber.

The question rarely asked is why Weber's work (opposed to some other scholar's) has been so generative for the study of esotericism, and furthermore why Weber comes across as so accurate and observant in his diagnosis of the time in which he lived. As scholars such as Randall Styers, Wouter Hanegraaff, Jason Josephson-Storm, and others have made clear, this diagnosis of disenchantment was accepted because the West had defined itself as rational and objective, and Westerners differentiated themselves from a mystical, irrational, oriental "other." This narrative, which charts the triumphal rise of science and reason out of the ancient mists of magic, superstition, and religion was reproduced so often in the academy that Western scholars took it as gospel. This story is what Josephson-Storm has called the "myth" of disenchantment, and many of the early versions of this myth were formulated in Germany during the 18th and 19th centuries. This was the period in which nihilism and alienation were theorized in relation to the death of god and the loss of mystery, ideas that were later aggregated into the concept of "secularization."[389]

It is precisely this narrative that the relatively new field of esotericism has worked to decenter. Earlier scholars such as Frances Yates argued that esotericism is an ignored feature of pre-Christian and non-rational intellectual currents, which were influential in European history and were therefore worthy of academic study. Antoine Faivre later held that Western esotericism is a specific style of thought that possessed shared features and had been marginalized in the grand narrative of the progress of the European Enlightenment.[390] Wouter Hanegraaff has argued that modernity came to be identified with disenchantment and secularization in European history through a centuries-long process of obscuring and excluding an alternative intellectual tradition

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[389] Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 65–66.
[390] Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*.

in European thought he referred to as "Platonic Orientalism."[391] This alternative tradition encompasses areas such as Hellenism, Hermeticism, astrology, magic, late Platonism, alchemy, and Kabbalah. During the past half century, scholars reassessed the diverse elements that make up Platonic Orientalism under the rubric of Western esotericism or simply "esotericism" (sometimes called "rejected knowledge"). Owing to the marginalization of this body of knowledge and the lack of an academic discipline dedicated to esotericism as its "object of knowledge"—at least until the late 20th century—intellectuals such as Karl Marx, Auguste Comte, Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, James Frazer and Peter Berger were successful in formulating grand narratives of disenchantment. However, these grand narratives failed to consider or otherwise dismissed the persistence influence of esoteric thought on modern European society. The point of emphasizing Weber's presence around Ascona and Monte Verità is important because this site was one of the most influential places in the history of modern esotericism, and its influence is felt today in the arts and occult communities. Weber was truly hanging out in one of the hotbeds of esotericism and mystical living in early 20th century Europe, and he was not immune from the influence of his experiences there.

This chapter situates Weber where he belongs, in the middle of this vibrant atmosphere of the esotericists of his time—instead of considering him as the somehow detached and "value-free" social scientist making objective observations from an ivory tower about culture and the social changes he experienced. By taking a holistic approach to Weber, we discover a multi-dimensional human being: a scientist and theorist, to be sure, but one who was well-versed in German literature, particularly the Romantics, and who was open to—and actually sought out—the esoteric currents of thought prevalent among his contemporaries. This is of crucial

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[391] Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy.*

importance in the larger context of my comparison of Weber and Steiner because, in a similar way, aspects of Steiner (also beginning with his wife, Marie Steiner) were cherry-picked to refute the prevailing view of him as an irrational guru and present his thinking as compatible with modern science. Weber's theory of a charismatic leader has been utilized by some scholars to cast Steiner as the irrational guru, which is a sociological lens that is equally applicable to Weber himself, as will be shown. In order to illustrate this side of Weber, it is important to describe the time he spent in Ascona and the friendships and acquaintances he made with the Bohemians and radicals he met there.

Weber and Mysticism

Scholars often downplay Weber's interest in mysticism, predominantly because they see him as more interested in asceticism and rationalism. According to these scholars, Weber viewed mysticism as frequently self-indulgent and irrational and therefore gave it minimal attention and was not much involved.[392] Yet the attention Weber did devote to the topic is illuminating. Robert Bellah, Michael Symonds, and Jason Pudsey have illustrated how Weber devoted considerable energy to developing a complex typology of mystical action not only confined to a highly individualistic form of mystical experience, but based on love, community, and an ethics of brotherliness.[393] Bellah describes Weber's struggle to conceptualize a "world-denying" or "acosmistic" love (*Liebesakosmismus*), a struggle that left generations of Weber scholars equally perplexed as to Weber's ultimate meaning.[394] Weber identified this form of love with, for

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[392] Exceptions include Krech, "Mystik," in *Max Webers »Religionssystematik«*; Christopher Adair-Toteff, *Fundamental Concepts in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), Ch. 4.

[393] Bellah, "Max Weber and World-Denying Love"; Symonds and Pudsey, "The Forms of Brotherly Love in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion."

[394] In Weber's typology, "world-denying" is opposed to "world-fleeing" (*weltfluchtig*): the latter leaves the world behind altogether (Weber usually associates this with Asian and Indo-Tibetan forms of mysticism), while the former remains in the world and seeks to change it or reform it, typically in order to relieve its perceived suffering.

example, mystics such as Tolstoy, and he fleshed out these ideas in his *Zwischenbetrachtung*, a text that was partly composed the year of his first visit to Ascona. The *Zwischenbetrachtung* is also concerned with the idea of modernity as a polytheism of value-spheres, in which the old gods metaphorically rise again from their graves and inhabit the earth in a disenchanted form as competing values. Bellah highlights the fact that in the section on the erotic value sphere, Weber transforms eroticism into a form of mystical release, "a *sacrament*," and "gives it the quality of a full-scale alternative form of salvation," which appears most appealing in the context of modern disenchantment.[395] "The lover realizes himself to be rooted in the kernel of the truly living," Weber writes, "which is eternally inaccessible to any rational endeavor. He knows himself to be freed from the cold skeleton hands of rational orders, just as completely as from the banality of everyday routine."[396] Most importantly, Weber makes it clear here that he is speaking of "specifically extramarital sexual life," an expression of love that has been "removed from everyday affairs."[397]

Building on such suggestions, Christopher Adair-Toteff argues that Weber indeed took more than a passing academic interest in mysticism and "seemed to have a personal interest in it as well."[398] Weber was among many contemporary scholars writing about mysticism, notably Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) and Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923). Several major studies on German mystics such as Johannes Tauler and Meister Eckhart appeared during this time. Adair-Toteff suggests it may have been Troeltsch who encouraged Weber to take an interest in mysticism.[399]

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[395] Bellah, "Max Weber and World-Denying Love," 294.

[396] H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 347.

[397] Gerth and Mills, *From Max Weber*, 346.

[398] Adair-Toteff, *Fundamental Concepts in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion*, 60.

[399] Adair-Toteff, "Max Weber's Mysticism." Bellah also points out that, according to Wolfgang Schluchter, Weber used the concept of a world-denying love in connection with mysticism while responding to a paper Troeltsch gave during the convention of the German Sociological Association in 1910. See Bellah, "Max Weber and World-Denying Love," 277.

In Heidelberg, he and Troeltsch were members of a private (though strictly confidential) informal Sunday study group called the Eranos Kreis (1904–1908), founded by German Protestant theologian Adolf Deißmann, who was known for his groundbreaking work in New Testament *koine* philology and archaeological excavations at Ephesus.[400] The Kries was co-founded with the German classical philologist and scholar of religion Albrecht Dieterich, who along with Troeltsch influenced Weber's ideas about the Protestant ethic and the *Geist* of capitalism.[401] However, Dieterich's most influential book was his study of telluric cults entitled *Mutter Erde. Ein Versuch über Volksreligion* (*Mother Earth*, 1905), which, alongside the work of Johann Jakob Bachofen, was influential in popularizing the idea of a matriarchal dominance in the early history of Asia Minor, an idea that was widely accepted among erotic anarchists in Munich and Ascona.[402] The Kreis consisted of Weber, Deißmann, Dieterich, Troeltsch, jurist Georg Jellinek, historian Alfred von Domaszewski, archaeologist Friedrich von Duhn, historian Erich Marcks, economist Karl Rathgen, philosopher Wilhelm Windelband, and often invited guests.[403] Several of these scholars also had a direct effect on the development of esotericism, as well as Steiner's anthroposophy, especially by mentoring some of Steiner's key followers as graduate students.[404]

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[400] Albrecht Gerber, "Protestantism and Social Liberalism in Imperial Germany: Gustav Adolf Deissmann (1866–1937) and Friedrich Naumann (1860–1919)," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 57, no.2 (2011): 174–187.
[401] Hubert Treiber, „Der ‚Eranos'—Das Glanzstückim Heidelberger Mythenkranz?" in *Asketischer Protestantismus und der "Geist" des modernen Kapitalismus: Max Weber und Ernst Troeltsch*, eds. Wolfgang Schluchter and Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 75–153.
[402] See Olof Pettersson, *Mother Earth: An Analysis of the Mother Earth Concepts According to Albrecht Dieterich* (Lund: Gleerup, 1967); Edith Weigert-Vowinkel, "The Cult and Mythology of the Magna Mater from the Standpoint of Psychoanalysis," *Psychiatry. Journal of the Biology and Pathology of Interpersonal Relations* 1 (1938): 347–378.
[403] See *Jahrbuch der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaft für das Jahr 1983* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1984), 46–49. See the Eranos 'minutes book', a facsimile of which is held by the Max Weber-Collection at the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Munich.
[404] Dieterich, who was Deißmann's Doktorvater, published a work on the magical papyri in 1891 entitled *Abraxas: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des spätern Altertums*, a 1893 study of the underworld entitled *Nekyia: Beiträge zur Erklärung der neuentdeckten Petrusapokalypse* (in which he connected the gnostic Apocalypse of Peter to the pagan tradition of katabasis), and in 1903 he published *Mithrasliturgie* (in which he popularized a Mithraic text by seeing it as part of a religion, labeled it a liturgy, and transliterated the IAO vowels)—all of which served as major sources

One of the first lectures given to the Eranos group by Dieterich on February 28, 1904, was entitled "Mutter Erde," which Weber attended. Weber's name is recorded as "present" for most of the lectures in a private guestbook of the Kreis. Dieterich's lecture outlined his initial research (later to become a book) on the ancient belief that the earth was a mother goddess that had given birth out of herself to human beings. Such beliefs were transmitted and developed, according to Dieterich, in mystery cults such as Eleusis, in which the initiate, via a death ritual, was granted a new birth and second life that was in direct connection with the "great mother." According to the meeting's minutes, the lecture goes into considerable depth regarding esoteric aspects of such initiation rituals, including the mysterious "wedding" ceremonies, before concluding that such rituals, centered around the mother goddess, constituted a belief system that is the root of religious thought prior to a belief in "our father."[405]

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of inspiration for esotericists, including MacGregor Mathers, who co-founded the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Aleister Crowley, Julius Evola, Carl Jung and G. R. S. Mead, Ludwig Klages, as well as other 'esoterically influential' scholars such as Richard August Reitzenstein and Walter Otto. See Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 177–179; Korshi Dosoo, "Rituals of Apparition in the Theban Magical Library" (PhD Diss., Macquarie University, 2014), 46–63; On Evola, see Hans Thomas Hakl, "Deification as a Core Theme in Julius Evola's Esoteric Works," *Correspondences* 6, no. 2 (2018): 145–171; Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 507, note 429; Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology As Ideology and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 200–205; Suzanne Marchand, "From Liberalism to Neoromanticism: Albrecht Dieterich, Richard Reitzenstein, and the Religious Turn in Fin-de-Siècle German Classical Studies," in *Out of Arcadia: Classics and Politics in Germany in the Age of Burckhardt, Nietsche and Wilamowitz*, eds. Ingo Ruehl Gildenhard and Martin Ruehl (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2003), 129–160, 150. Emil Bock and Friedrich Rittelmeyer, two of Steiner's closest students and followers, who were priests in Steiner's *Christengemeinschaft* or Christian Community (which was a movement of esoteric Christian renewal), were connected to Deißmann. See Claudia Becker, „Versuche religiöser Erneuerung in der Moderne am Beispiel des evangelischen Theologen Friedrich Rittelmeyer (1872-1938)" (PhD Diss., Frei Universität Berlin, 2001), 29; Lothar Gassmann, *Anthroposophie: Lehre Über Die Bibel, Gott, Christus Und Erlösung* (Holzgerlingen: Hänssler, 2001), 39–41.

[405] Excerpt from the minutes book: „...können wir die Reste solcher Anschauung in der antiken Welt verfolgen, in ihren Hauptphasen von altem "Mutter" kult in verschiedenen griechischen Staaten und Stämmen für Mutterreligion von Eleusis, von vielfachem Brauch alter Mysterien, in denen der Eingeweihte durch Neugeburt aus der Mutter sich sakramental ein zweites Leben aus der Mutter Erde garantiert, zu den weitverbreiteten großen Kulten der ‚großen Mutter' und der Isis … die immer wieder so räiselhafte Identität von Hochzeitsritual, Einweihungsritual der Mysterien und Totenritual unmittelbar verständlich. Der Kult der Mutter Erde tritt immer mehr in geheimnisvolles Dunkel zurück und die religiös so tiefgreifende Vorstellung von ‚unser aller Mutter', die eine der Wurzeln religiösen Denkens überhaupt ist, weicht mehr und mehr in die Schatten geheimster Kultbegehungen vor dem immer stärker ins Licht rückenden religiösen Bilde von ‚unserm Vater'."

It is interesting to imagine Weber taking part in such a lecture and the discussion that

followed. That Weber was aware of such ideas suggests their possible influence, especially in

relation to Weber's later connection of "rebirth" and "salvation" to the sacred value sphere and

to the erotic intensity directed toward an "other" in mystical experiences.[406] In the *Sociology of*

Religion, Weber acknowledges that this experience of rebirth could happen *in this world* and

function as a prerequisite of purification for the ultimate acquisition of "magical charisma… as

the magical pre-condition for insuring the charisma of the wizard or warrior."[407] Weber was, in

other words, intimately aware of the process of initiation so common to the esoteric and mystical

traditions of antiquity, a premature death ritual—whether transcendental or psychological—that

is "mediated by removal or detachment" and culminates in "the acquisition of a new soul,

generally followed by a change of name."[408] Many of these traditions had been adapted and

integrated into the rituals of contemporary esoteric group, for example among freemasons,

theosophists, and Rosicrucians.

Weber himself gave several lectures in the Eranos circle, including one on February 5th,

1905, which focused on asceticism and its connection to Protestantism, Pietism, and the spirit of

modern capitalism. This lecture even included an early iteration of a theory of disenchantment of

the world.[409] Influenced by his interactions in this circle, Weber went on to conceptualize

asceticism as "active," as a form of inner self-control, and mysticism as passive (*Weltflucht*,

"fleeing the world"), as the retreat from the world into the divine by entering into a monastic

order, for example. It is through a mysticism/asceticism binary that Weber developed his full

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[406] See Bologh, *Love or Greatness*, 114–115.
[407] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 150.
[408] Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 150.
[409] Excerpt from the minutes book: „Mit dem Absterben der religiösen Wurzel erfolgt der Übergang in den ‚reinen' Utilitarismus des 18ten Jahrhunderts."

thesis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–5), in which Protestantism is

thought to be active in the social world but ascetic in practice.[410] For Weber, this approach

constituted an inner-worldly and rational mysticism in Protestantism, in contradistinction to the

otherworldly mysticism in Catholicism. Catholics are seen as more passive and mystical, and

Protestants as more diligent and ascetic. In the *Protestant Ethic*, Weber utilized a recent book by

Karl Eger *Die Anschauung Luthers vom Beruf* (Luther's Views on the Calling, 1900), which

described Luther's role in transitioning the professional religious monastery into the professional

economic society through the idea of *Beruf* (calling).[411] Weber cites Eger extensively throughout

the text.

Although Weber accepted Eger's reading of Luther's concept of *Beruf*, he emphasized

the importance of German mysticism, especially Johannes Tauler. Tauler as a mystic stressed the

importance of ordinary life over excessive contemplation, which Weber highlighted in Luther's

concept of *Beruf*.[412] Adair-Toteff and Josephson-Storm have revealed the crucial influence that

Tauler had on both Luther and Weber. For Adair-Toteff, "there are a least three major ways in

which Tauler likely influenced Luther: (1) the preference of action over contemplation, (2) the

preference of the group over the individual, and (3) the special mystical union."[413] As Josephson-

Storm points out, the abundance of footnotes and references to Tauler in the *Protestant Ethic*

suggest Weber drew on Tauler more than Luther when formulating his thesis. In one footnote,

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[410] As Adair-Toteff explains, "When Luther said 'ich kann nicht anders, hier stehe ich,' Weber believed that Luther was doing something that was 'humanly real' ('menschlich echt') and that he was fully embracing the responsibilities of his actions." See Adair-Toteff, *Fundamental Concepts in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion*, 64.

[411] Karl Eger*, Die Anschauungen Luthers vom Beruf: Ein Beitrag zur Ethik Luthers* (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1900), 46-88. See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Fools for Christ: Essays on the True, the Good, and the Beautiful* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), 91; Ghosh, *Max Weber and the Protestant Ethic*, 136; Adair-Toteff, *Fundamental Concepts in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion*, 65–6.

[412] Weber notes, "The highest religious experience which the Lutheran faith strives to attain, especially as it developed in the course of the seventeenth century, is the *unio mystica* with the deity." Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 67.

[413] Adair-Toteff, *Fundamental Concepts in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion*, 69.

Weber writes: "The idea [of the calling] is found before Luther in Tauler, who holds the spiritual and the worldly *Ruf* (call) to be in principle of equal value."[414]

In several key texts, Weber hints at the tendency in Protestantism, especially its more extreme forms such as the emotional piety of Zinzendorf, to become an erotic relationship with the God similar to the devotional mysticism of the Bhakti tradition.[415] These ideas provided the foundation for Weber's own thinking about mysticism, in which the professional calling in society and the *unio mystica* were not mutually contradictory, rather it represented the rationalization of mysticism, similar to the rationalization of magic that was taking place.[416] That is to say, Protestants needn't flee into the otherworldliness of mysticism, but could remain both connected with God in a personal, intimate way, while at the same time performing all of the rational tasks required of them in modern society—as opposed to, for example, retreating into the desert like some Church Fathers or entering into a monastery and becoming a monk. However, this assumed binary asceticism/mysticism as characteristic of Weber himself—as well as many of his Protestant contemporaries—in that Weber was, in fact, more like the ascetic Puritan he describes in *Protestant Ethic* than he imagined. This ascetic Puritanism created the iron cage he so desperately wanted to and, for fleeting moments, did escape in a momentary frenzy of erotic mysticism.

Monte Verità (The Hill of Truth)

Nestled in the Alps and overlooking the town of Ascona, Switzerland, and the shores of beautiful Lake Maggiore, Monte Verità became home to an intentional community of

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[414] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 165n8; quoted in Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 295.

[415] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 233–235 and Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 200–201. See also Martin E. Spencer, "The Social Psychology of Max Weber," *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 3 (1979): 240–253, 243.

[416] Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 295.

nonconforming artists and writers at the turn of the 20th century.[417] The site went through several

stages of development, but always functioned as a crucial node in a network of late 19th and

early 20th century artists and intellectuals eager to discover new sources of inspiration in radical

political ideologies, Eastern philosophies, and the various forms of esotericism flourishing at the

time. Franz Hartmann, a prominent occultist and theosophist, was among the first to identify the

importance of the location, and he describes the utopic vision the area inspired:

> In the midst of the mountains, among the most sublime and picturesque scenery,
> upon a secluded hill near the shore of the most beautiful Italian lake, extensive
> grounds were purchased, and it was proposed to build a house whose object it was
> to serve as a refuge for those who wanted to cultivate spirituality pure and simple,
> without any admixture of priestcraft and superstition."[418]

As early as 1889, Hartmann, together with the Locarno philosopher Alfredo Pioda, the

well-known esotericist Countess Constance Wachtmeister (a friend of Helena Blavastky), and

the spiritualist and "lucid dream" researcher Frederik van Eeden, met together to plan a type of

international theosophical monastery for lay people called *Fraternitas* to be built on a hill-top

promontory above Ascona. An announcement describing the founding of this monastery as a

joint-stock company appeared in 1889 in the Italian-based magazine *Lux*, which was the main

organ of the International Academy of Studies of Spiritism and Magnetism at the time.[419] The

announcement welcomed students of occultism and theosophy to join in this endeavor and work

for universal brotherhood and spiritual renewal. Although the monastery was never built and its

potential founders eventually abandoned the idea, the announcement marked the beginning of

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[417] An intentional community is one that is designed to be socially cohesive, in which the members tend to hold the same vision of an alternative lifestyle. See Diana Leafe Christian, *Creating a life together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities* (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 2003).

[418] Franz Hartmann, *With the Adepts: An Adventure Among the Rosicrucians* (London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1910), Appendix.

[419] "Fraternitas," *Lux: bollettino dell'Accademia internazionale per gli studi spiritici e magnetici*, Fasc. V, Anno II (1889), 311.

what eventually transformed the area into a thriving intellectual community, a haven for those seeking to revitalize the arts and sciences through experimental workshops in music, dance, and theater and new approaches to science and philosophy.

Around 1900, the hill was purchased by a new set of visionaries, Henry Oedenkoven and Ida Hofmann, who, together with Lotte Hattemer, Karl and Gustav "Gusto" Gräser, and several others, established a vegetarian co-operative inspired by Tolstoy's writings on ethics and politics.[420] The colony was intended to be a new type of community, what the anthropologist of religions Yme Kuiper has referred to as a "modern ascetic" community.[421] As opposed to ascetic practices of the pre-modern world, which were intended to purify the practitioner through a renunciation of pleasure, modern asceticism is practiced more "for the sake of personal authenticity" and as a way to critique "the dominant bourgeois culture."[422] In other words, modern asceticism is not only "practised for the sake of communal ideals but perhaps even more for the sake of personal identity."[423] However, this perspective could mislead one into thinking that the people visiting Monte Verità and the area around Ascona did not possess a sincere desire to achieve spiritual purification or heal themselves, which they did. As with Hermann Hesse, who visited Monte Verità to find a natural cure for his alcoholism,[424] Weber sought out the area

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[420] On this history of the colony, see Stefan Bollmann, *Monte Verità 1900: Der Traum Vom Alternativen Leben Beginnt* (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2017); Robert Landmann, *Ascona – Monte Verità* (Berlin: Adalbert Schultz Verlag, 1930); Green, *Mountain of Truth*; Andreas Schwab, *Monte Verità - Sanatorium Der Sehnsucht* (Zurich: Füssli Verlag, 2003); Kaj Noschis, *Monte Verità. Ascona et le Génie du Lieu* (Lausanne: Presses Polytechniques et Universitaires Romandes, 2011); "Das Ende einer Vegetarierkolonie," *Berner Intelligenzblatt*, March 3, 1910, https://monteVerità.net/monte-Verità/dokumente-1910/das-ende-einer-vegetarierkolonie.

[421] Kuiper is following the work of Evert Peeters, Leen van Molle and Kaat Wils. See: "Introduction," in *Beyond Pleasure: Cultures of Modern Asceticism*, eds. Evert Peeters, Leen van Molle and Kaat Wils (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 1–18.

[422] Yme B. Kuiper, "Tolstoyans on a Mountain: From New Practices of Asceticism to the Deconstruction of the Myths of Monte Verità," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 6 (2013): 1–18, 4.

[423] Kuiper, "Tolstoyans on a Mountain," 4.

[424] Dominic Hibberd, *Harold Monro: Poet of the New Age* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 74–75.

in the years following his severe psychological breakdown, which nearly cost him his sanity and

life.

A sanatorium to combat the toxicity of modern life was established on the grounds not

long after the Monte Verità land was purchased. Open wood cabins and other facilities were

constructed to offer the experience of an immersion in nature to counter the debilitating effects

of urban industrial life. In 1904 an Art Nouveau "Community House" was opened, providing a

social meeting space, complete with electricity, running water, a vegetarian restaurant, a library,

a game room, and a terrace for nude sunbathing. The conviction that nature had restorative

properties had become popular as a result of the unhealthy conditions found in industrial cities

with their teeming tenements, factories belching smoke, toxic air quality, and polluted water

systems. "Back-to-nature" groups such as the *Naturmenschen* (people of nature) and the

Wandervogel (wandering bird) had come to Switzerland from Germany for years to hike the

impressive surroundings and visit the Catholic pilgrimage sites surrounding Lago Maggiore.[425]

Jon Savage describes how rebellious teenagers who wanted to escape the rigid, traditional, and

materialistic ideology of the bourgeoisie class began joining such movements around 1900 as a

means of escaping their oppressive families.[426] At the heart of these movements was a rejection

of what many people saw as the materialism and self-serving morality of the bourgeoisie, with its

lack of respect for the creative arts and slavish concern with propriety. Marx had criticized these

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[425] On the history of the *Naturmenschen* and *Wandervogel* movements, see John A. Williams, *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation, 1900–1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Reuven Kahane and Tamar Rapoport, *The Origins of Postmodern Youth: Informal Youth Movements in a Comparative Perspective* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 47–54; Elizabeth Heineman, "Gender Identity in the Wandervogel Movement," *German Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (1989): 249–270; Wolfgang Saur, "100 Jahre Wandervogel: Geschichte – Deutung – Wirkung," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 54, no. 2 (2002): 171–178; Avi Sharma, "Wilhelmine Nature: Natural Lifestyle and Practical Politics in the German Life-Reform Movement (1890–1914)," *Social History* 37, no. 1 (2012): 36–54; Dan McKanan, *Eco-Alchemy: Anthroposophy and the History and Future of Environmentalism* (University of California Press, 2018); Corinna Treitel, *Eating Nature in Modern Germany: Food, Agriculture, and Environment, C.1870 to 2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
[426] Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York: Viking, 2007), 101–108.

very same qualities of the bourgeoisie in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), citing "the icy waters of calculation," which reduce everything—law, poetry, science—to the conditions of wage labor.

Monte Verità was therefore one of the innumerable reformist communities founded in the 19th century both in Europe and the United States to combat the growing fragmentation of society under the destructive impact of industrialization and urbanization.[427] The community was a response to what Weber himself saw as "the disenchantment of the world" in the face of the relentless drive for profit characteristic of a capitalist economic system that dehumanized and alienated individuals from their work, themselves, and each other.[428] Weber's idea of "disenchantment" expressed the sense of the futility and meaninglessness of life that had afflicted many upper-class males from the late eighteenth century onwards, reaching a climax among Weber and Steiner's contemporaries. It was this epidemic of what came to be called "ennui" that the artists and progressives at Monte Verità wanted to challenge by marshalling their energies to re-enchant the world with new styles of music, dance, art, and spirituality, all of which aimed at reforming and revitalizing traditional and outmoded models of social, political, and economic organization.[429] The residents of Monte Verità returned to nature to escape the cities and put these new ideas into practice. Rather than interpreting such developments as only part of a dialectical process of enlightenment reason and reactionary irrationalism—as

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[427] On utopian communities see, for example, Raymond Lee Muncy, *Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities: 19th Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973); Carl Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-De-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Visions and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Doris Beik and Paul Beik, eds., *Utopian Feminist, Her Travel Diaries and Personal Crusade* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

[428] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *The Blackwell City Reader*, eds. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Oxford and Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 11–19.

[429] Allison Coudert, "Space, Time, and Identity: Giovanni Battista Piranesi and the Epidemic of Ennui in the Pre-Modern West," in *Travel, Time, and Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Time: Explorations of World Perceptions and Processes of Identity Formation*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), 647–696.

Horkheimer and Adorno would have us do—Corinna Treitel, Michael Saler, and other historians have suggested the existence of multiple modernities or "alternative modernities," some of which were inherently enchanted yet distinctly modern.[430] Monte Verità and the surrounding area of Ascona illustrate this type of "alternative modernity."

Kuiper posits "at least" four different groups of "seekers" that made up the community of Monte Verità: the Tolstoyan pacifist communitarians, the Eastern-oriented theosophists, the vegetarian and healthy lifestyle advocates (which, in his scheme, also includes nature mysticism, nudism, and new artistic forms of self-expression), and finally the utopic anarchists.[431] Many members of this group were writers or Bohemians from Munich's Schwabing district, where Weber moved toward the end of his life, who were involved in open sexual relationships and, following Bachofen's *Mutterrecht* (1861), advocated a return to matriarchy and worshipped the mother goddess. It was with this latter group that Weber was most closely connected, although he clearly shared interests with others who visited Ascona, especially those who advocated an alternative erotic lifestyle and an interest in Eastern religions. Weber's closest contacts in this group were Ludwig Klages, Otto Gross, Frieda Gross, Ernst Frick, Else and Edgar Jaffé, Fanny zu Reventlow, and Stefan Georg, which I will discuss later in this chapter. It is important to remember that all these groups shared a deep interest in eroticism and feminism.

Furthermore, freemasonic, esoteric, and magical theories, philosophies, and practices (especially sex magic) must be included in the mosaic of ideologies available to residents and visitors in the Monte Verità/Ascona community, and these were woven into Weber's experience

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[430] Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*; Saler, "Modernity and Enchantment"; Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Pre-History of Virtual Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[431] Yme B. Kuiper, "On Monte Verità: Myth and Modernity in the Lebensreform Movement", in *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer*, eds. Jitse Dijkstra, Justin Kroesen and Yme Kuiper (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2010), 629–650, 646–647.

during his visits and reveal an influence on Weber that is often downplayed or simply unknown.

For example, as Weber left Ascona for the last time, one of the most significant events in the

history of modern occultism was about to take place on Monte Verità: the O.T.O. "A national

Congress for Organizing the Reconstruction of Society on Practical Cooperative Lines,"

organized by the freemason and occultist Theodor Reuss and held on August 15–25, 1917.[432]

The rituals performed during this conference included sex magic as a central aspect of the rites.

Although Weber did not attend this conference, the rituals performed during it represent exactly

the kinds of influences Weber encountered during his stays in Ascona. Weber himself failed to

anticipate or fully recognize how these counter-cultural ideologies would affect him. He referred

to Monte Verità as a "*Warenhaus der Weltanschauung*," or a "department store of worldviews,"

many of which, as I shall argue, challenged and offered alternatives to his more pessimistic

inclinations. Although he initially reacted to such elements with sarcasm, he was influenced by

them. As Joachim Radkau has recently argued, for all his criticisms Weber was changed by his

interactions with friends and lovers who were part of the Monte Verità and Ascona

community.[433]

In this dynamic environment, non-European religions (including hybridizations such as

theosophy and anthroposophy), radical new expressions of political ideology, and alternative

understandings of the human mind and how it worked (e.g., psychoanalysis) came together in the

same cultural space. Traditional dogmatic religious beliefs were wholly rejected, replaced with

occult and Asian religious teachings, or radically re-interpreted. As Hans Thomas Hakl has

shown, these novel religious forms provided alternatives for Germans seeking to navigate the

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[432] For the background of this conference, see Evelyn Dörr, *Rudolf Laban: The Dancer of the Crystal* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 67–70.
[433] Radkau, *Max Weber*, 382.

transition to modernity.[434] Taoism and Eastern philosophies were particularly important for the

Monte Verità community, which explains why Herman Hesse came to Monte Verità in 1907.

Hesse spent time with Gusto Graser, who was then staying in a nearby cave, and it was there in

the cave with Graser that he learned about Taoism and was inspired to travel to Asia.[435] Drawing

on the work of German Protestant theologians and Indologists Richard Wilhelm and Julius Grill,

who had published translations and commentaries on Taoism ideas, Graser wrote his own

idiosyncratic version of the Tao te Ching (*Tao. Das heilende Geheimnis*).[436] It was these varied

and diverse forms of esoteric thought, as well as the appeal of a more natural and simplified way

of living, that led to an upsurge of creativity among the many hundreds of important thinkers and

artists who were attracted to Monte Verità and Ascona. These included Mary Wigman, Isadora

Duncan, Else Lasker-Schüler, Wassily Kandinsky, Hans Arp, Stefan George, Hugo Ball, among

many others.

 Some historians have claimed that by the time Weber arrived in Ascona, the edge had

worn off the esotericism that had been its defining feature. It is therefore important to ask, how

"esoteric" was Ascona during the period of Weber's visit in 1913 and 1914. It is one thing to

consider Weber as the typical member of the bourgeoisie taking a holiday at a beautiful resort; it

is quite another to find him embedded within a cultural milieu that contains elements not usually

associated with his life and work. One of the individuals who was active at Monte Verità during

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[434] As Hakl has shown, these seekers continued to come to Ascona long after Weber had left with the same intention of finding new forms of spirituality appropriate for modern life. It was at Ascona, for example, that the first Eranos conferences were hosted by Olga Froebe-Kapteyn and Carl Jung. See Hakl, *Eranos*.

[435] Joseph Mileck, *Hermann Hesse: Life and Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 45.

[436] Gustav Gräser, *Tao. Das heilende Geheimnis* (Wetzlar: Büchse der Pandora, 1979). It is interesting to note that Martin Buber had also translated the writings of Chuang Tse into German in 1910. See Irene Eber, "Martin Buber and Taoism," *Monumenta Serica* 42 (1994): 445–464.

the time that Weber stayed there was the artist and famed dance choreographer Rudolf Laban.[437]

Laban's stay at Monte Verità and the activities he pursued while there provide a clear indication

that the interest in esotericism had not waned.

In 1913, with the encouragement of Oedenkoven and Hofmann, Laban opened a "School

for Art" on Monte Verità. The school was not merely intended to teach specialized dance,

theater, or painting; rather, Laban's goals for the school were in line with the colony's larger

vision of a creating a total work of art that integrated all aspects of life in a spiritually fulfilling,

holistic unity (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). Laban intended his school curriculum to instruct students in

"all expressive forms of human genius."[438] He taught classes relating to verbal art and

movement, linking dance, sounds, and words together into an integral whole. He had his students

improvise sounds and movements, growl and shake their limbs, often without music or simply to

the beat of drums. In the bourgeois world of traditional dance, such practices were scandalous.

One has only to think of the extraordinary ruckus that broke out during the first performance of

Stravinsky's and Diaghilev's performance of "Rites of Spring" to imagine the radical nature of

Laban's teaching. Inspired by Steiner's eurythmy and Emile Jaques-Dalcroze's rhythmic

gymnastics, Laban reveled in such experimentation. Evelyn Dörr notes the Eastern influences on

Laban's ideas: "Laban knew that sound combinations with many vowels were particularly

amenable to spoken and dance improvisation. It is not surprising that he turned to Asiatic sound

combinations, as these are particularly rich in vowels."[439] Laban thus had his students recite and

perform Chinese war poetry, such as the "Li T'ai-po." His dance philosophy incorporated

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[437] As the Weber correspondence reveals, he was there at a time when Laban was also there for the summer course of his School for Art, but it seems they may have just missed each other, since Laban arrived at the end of May, and Weber left at the end of April. However, Weber is likely to have observed some of Laban's followers.
[438] Dörr, *Rudolf Laban*, 33.
[439] Dörr, *Rudolf Laban*, 36. See also Edward Ross Dickinson, *Dancing in the Blood: Modern Dance and European Culture on the Eve of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

esoteric and ritualistic elements, drawing on everything from Nordic runes to the hexagrams of the I-Ching. He believed that the purpose of dance and body movements was to put humankind in touch with the deeper symbolic world of will and feeling. In both Zurich and Ascona, he staged performances based on his interpretation of Egyptian, African, Indian, Chinese, and Mexican songs and magical ceremonies. Laban was a follower of Ernst Haeckel and incorporated his form of mystical biology into his holistic view of nature, humans, and art. When his students staged such performances in Zurich, audiences were shocked by the de-gendered presentations of the women and the sound of "Negro poetry" accompanied by fierce-looking abstract masks.[440]

This was the atmosphere that greeted Weber during his visits to Ascona. Esotericism was flourishing and many groups of people congregating there were in search of new religious and spiritual forms to replace the dying dogmas of Europe's declining state Churches. As Landmann recounts, it was not uncommon for groups of barefoot Buddhists wearing Indian robes to stay on the Hill of Truth.[441] Owing to the variety of seekers who frequented the area, often from different backgrounds and with unique interests, Monte Verità became known as a place where those seeking truth went, rather than a place claiming to possess absolute truth. Spiritualists and theosophists conducted séances and magical rituals to make spirits appear. They practiced novel forms of therapeutic hypnosis, attended healing classes on reincarnation, and worked to develop their psychic abilities. These were the kinds of individuals and activities that greeted Weber when he arrived in Ascona in the years following what can only be described as a nervous breakdown.

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[440] Katherine Weinstein, "Subversive Women: Female Performing Artists in Zurich Dada" (PhD Diss., Tufts University, 2001), 2.

[441] See Robert Landmann, *Monte Verità: Die Geschichte Eines Berges* (Ascona: Pancaldi Verlag, 1934).

Naturism, Eroticism, and Max Weber

Ascona would seem to be the last place to find Max Weber, who, as I mentioned earlier, is generally viewed as a rational thinker and not as someone with romantic leanings and quasi-spiritual aspirations. It would seem even less likely that he would travel long distances and stay in the mountains to experience this unique and "enchanted" environment at a time in his life when he was going through emotional turmoil; furthermore, it is important to note that he traveled there without his wife and spent many hours interacting with other women. Yet this is precisely the case. Weber's visits to Ascona suggest that toward the end of his life and after his nervous breakdown he was willing to reassess elements of his previous thought and scholarship in the light of new ideas. However radical these ideas may have appeared to his academic contemporaries, they must have been, at least to some extent, congenial to him.

Weber stayed in Ascona during the springs of 1913 and 1914 for one month each time, right as the Great War was taking shape. While claiming initially to be unimpressed, the place eventually cast its spell on him. Around this time, he started thinking and writing about disenchantment and re-enchantment, as well as eroticism, aestheticism, mysticism, and "the East"—all subjects he had approached before, yet the period between 1913–1916 marked a crucial new period of work for Weber, in which these issues became central to his thought. During this phase, he wrote his important "Zwischenbetrachtung: Stufen und Richtungen der religiösen Weltablehnung" (Intermediate Considerations: Levels and Directions in the Religious Rejection of the World), in which he wrestled with the debilitating effects that science had on spiritual life by relegating religion to the sphere of the irrational. This, of course, became the central thesis in his theory of disenchantment:

Wherever rational, empirical knowledge has effected *the disenchantment of the world* and consequently transformed it into a causal mechanism, it comes into tension with the demands of the ethical postulate—that the world is divinely ordered, and so somehow an ethically and meaningfully oriented cosmos. For the empirical and completely mathematically oriented worldview rejects in principle any approach which asks for "meaning" from inner-worldly events. With every increase of empirical scientific rationalism, religion is increasingly pushed from the rational into the irrational realm.[442]

He later formulated this thesis more precisely in his "Science as a Vocation" lecture in 1919.

Weber claimed that the ongoing process of rationalization and the precedence awarded to a

narrow form of rationality—namely, instrumental rationality, which is solely concerned with

mean-ends efficiency and not to be confused with "reason" in the Enlightenment sense—had

brought about a situation in which any agreed-upon sense of universal meaning was no longer

possible. Therefore, society would fragment into a "polytheism of values," in which "the old

Gods, deprived of magical powers, rise from their tombs and strive to gain influence over our

lives and renew their eternal struggle."[443] These "old gods" were, in fact, a metaphor for personal

values that individuals accepted based on their own proclivities, owing to the fact that science

could not—and should not—determine moral values, in Weber's view, and yet the religious

metaphysics of the churches had lost their power because of science. Therefore, it was left to the

individual to determine his or her own set of moral values.

Weber was refining these ideas in 1913–1914, partly during his stays in Ascona, which is

suggestive of the importance of his decision to travel there. The body of texts that Weber wrote

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[442] Max Weber, *Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe. Band I/19: Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen: Konfuzianismus und Taoismus; Schriften 1915–1920*, eds. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer and Petra Kolonko (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989), 512 (emphasis added). Quoted in Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 283.

[443] Weber quoted in Hartmut Lehmann, "Max Weber and the Dialectics of Disenchantment and Re-enchantment in Modern History," in *Max Weber in the 21st Century: Transdisciplinarity within the Social Sciences*, eds. Frank Adloff and Manuel Borutta (Florence: European University Institute, 2008), 73–80; 75.

at this time reveal his deepening focus on disenchantment and his potential motives for traveling

to Ascona. The idea of *die Entzauberung der Welt* had formed in his mind as early as 1912 as he

prepared an essay titled "Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology" for publication in 1913, yet

the idea crystalized in Ascona and during the years following, becoming fully integrated into his

overall intellectual outlook and theory of sociology.[444] The "Categories" essay represents

Weber's early systematic treatment of his interpretive sociology. It is a treatise on methodology.

In it, he attempted a form of "boundary work," delineating his sociology from other disciplines,

such as law and psychology. However, what is significant for the present argument is that in the

section on psychology we find the exact phrase *Entzauberung der Welt*:

> Action oriented toward conceptions of magic, for example, is often subjectively of
> a far more instrumentally rational character than any non-magical "religious"
> behavior, for precisely in a world increasingly divested of magic [mit zunehmender
> Entzauberung der Welt), religiosity must take on increasingly (subjective) irrational
> meaning relationships (ethical or mystical, for instance).[445]

The "Categories" essay was published in November 1913, but chapters IV–VII of the

second half belong to the first working period of *Economy and Society* in 1910/11. The first

chapters of the "Categories" essay, from which the above quote is taken, were therefore written

in 1912/13, which we know because these parts contain quotations of psychological literature

from 1912. Hans Kippenberg has demonstrated that these years—especially 1913–1914—reflect

Weber's "growing interest in the history of world religions," which directly influenced his ideas

about disenchantment.[446] In this period, then, religion came more and more to the forefront of

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[444] Max Weber, „Uber einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie," *Logos: Internationale Zeitschrift fur Philosophie der Kultur* IV (1913): 253–294, published in English as "Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology," trans. Edith Graber, *The Sociological Quarterly* 22, No. 2 (1981): 151–180.
[445] Weber, 'Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology', 155.
[446] Hans G. Kippenberg, "Dialectics of Disenchantment: Devaluation of the Objective World—Revaluation of Subjective Religiosity," *Max Weber Studies* 17, no. 2(2017): 254–281, 282.

Weber's thinking, with *The Economic Ethic of the World Religions* (*Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen*) appearing not long after, and it was this current line of thinking that drew him to Ascona and increased his interactions with the type of people who stayed there, namely, the religious/seeker types.

The segment on religion in *Economy and Society*, "Religiöse Gemeinschaften" (Religious Communities), also written in 1913, presents an in-depth comparison of the world's major religions constructed entirely around the process of disenchantment.[447]As Kippenberg points out, Weber introduced disenchantment as an open-ended process and not as a foregone conclusion in response to which religiosity was forced to become more subjective and based on either ethical conviction (Gesinnungsethik) or mystical experience.[448] The introduction to the first essays on "The Economic Ethic of the World Religions," written in 1913 (published in 1915) further reveals Weber's focus on disenchantment and the idea that the growth of science effectively reduced the objective role religion played in understanding the physical laws determining how the universe functions, consequently forcing religion into the subjective and irrational:

> The unity of the primitive image of the world, in which everything was concrete magic, has tended to split into rational cognition and mastery of nature, on the one hand, and into 'mystic' experiences on the other. The inexpressible contents of such experiences remain the only possible 'beyond', added to the mechanism of a world robbed of gods.[449]

These passages, all written or published around 1913–1914, demonstrate that Weber believed intellectuals and scientists performed a crucial role in suppressing magic and stimulating the

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[447] Kippenberg, "Dialectics of Disenchantment," 259.
[448] Kippenberg, "Dialectics of Disenchantment," 262.
[449] Max Weber, "The Social Psychology of World Religions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 282; Weber, *Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe. Band I/19*, 103.

condition of disenchantment, hence the motivation for his trips to Ascona and the relationships

he developed there and elsewhere with non-academics and radicals, particularly women with

whom he became emotionally and sexually involved.[450] Weber's extra-marital love obsessions

and fascination with eroticism represented a type of mystical experience for him, which in turn

functioned as a potential escape from the disenchanted, meaningless modern world. Furthermore,

his previous close associations with esotericists among the Stefan Georg circle and the anarchists

in Ascona reveal Weber as someone in search of personal care as well as spiritual liberation, as

someone seeing in such liberated individuals a mirror that reflected the limits of his own

confining rationalism. Although he never explicitly confesses this, for he always sought to

personify the cautious and "serious" scholar (*Gelehrte*), his actions make it painfully clear that a

part of him was in revolt. His interest in certain esoteric thinkers, his irrational and romantic

behavior with regard to women, and the inspired reactions he had to these experiences as well as

to the natural environment in Ascona illustrate the profound role his visits there and the people

he met had in the development of his sociological theories.

Weber arrived in Ascona with the goal to fast and/or maintain a vegetarian diet, yet his

correspondence reveals the struggle he had staying committed to this regime. Another

motivation, if not overtly stated, was his intention to wean himself off certain "aids," i.e. the

bromine he had been using in order to sleep.[451] A year earlier in Avignon, he wrote that he had

still required "a lot of bromide … otherwise sleep did not come."[452] The environment in and

around Ascona apparently enabled him to kick this habit. This was not only due to the shift to a

natural lifestyle but also because of his intense feelings of love and longing, which for Weber

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[450] Kippenberg, "Dialectics of Disenchantment," 264.
[451] Max Weber, *Gesamtausgabe. Band II/8: Briefe 1913–1914*, eds. M. Rainer Lepsius, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Birgit Rudhard, and Manfred Schön (Tübingen: Mohr, 2003), 155, quoted in Radkau, *Max Weber*, 380.
[452] Weber quoted in Radkau, *Max Weber*, 380.

ascended to the level of spiritual or religious experience. Weber could finally feel himself to be free within the extramarital context of such relationships, and he often interpreted his two extra-marital affairs and longings in quasi-mystical terms. These encounters were an important part of his life, and while he had had romantic experiences before his visits to Ascona, his exposure to the unorthodox views about marriage and sexuality there reinforced his belief that love and physical intimacy might provide a way out of the iron cage of rationality.

His own extra-marital (and thus potentially liberating) experiences concerned his affair with Mina Tobler (1880–1967) and his obsessive love and longing for former student Else von Richthofen (also known as Else Jaffé 1874–1973). By the time of his first Ascona trip, Else was having an affair with Max's brother, Alfred, after declining an invitation to have "adventures" with Max in Venice in 1910, during which he recited a poem to her by Rainer Maria Rilke in an unstated confession of love. This event marks one of Weber's initial attempts to escape the cage and the unsatisfactory results left him feeling ferociously jealous. Else and Max would have their affair at least as early as 1918, but it was kept a secret for decades even after Weber's death.[453]

Weber's disposition toward eroticism was also shaped by his interactions with the ex-countess and epitome of Schwabing bohemianism Fanny zu Reventlow, as well as by Frieda Schloffer-Gross, wife of renegade psychotherapist and anarchist Otto Gross. These women were known for having affairs and embracing a philosophy of Bohemianism, which held that open sexuality was liberating while social conventions and the religious insistence on monogamy were stultifying, causing frustration and unhappiness and acting as a barrier to creativity. Reventlow's

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[453] See Max Weber's letters to Else Jaffé in Max Weber, *Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe. Band II/10: Briefe 1918–1920,* eds. Gerd Krumeich, M. Rainer Lepsius, Uta Hinz, Sybille Oßwald-Bargende, and Manfred Schön (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). Else and Marianne remained close friends and the former did not wish to upset the latter. For a more detailed account of these events, see Eberhard Demm, *Else Jaffé-von Richthofen. Erfülltes Leben zwischen Max und Alfred Weber* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2014).

eroticism and rejection of traditional marriage was influenced by Ibsen, as she was a member of the *Ibsenklub* in Lübeck before finding her way to Schwabing.[454] Richard Faber referred to Reventlow as the "embodiment" (*Verkörperung*) of Schwabing Bohemianism and as the "incarnation of the 'erotic Movement' [and] 'erotic rebellion.'"[455] Weber claimed adherence to a different type of eroticism, which contradicted the sexual liberation ethos of Reventlow and Gross and focused on sublimation, as we can see from the following quote:

> the sublimation of sexual expression into an eroticism … becomes the basis of idiosyncratic sensations … [and] generates its own unique values and transcends everyday life. The impediments to sexual intercourse that are increasingly produced by the economic interests of clans and by status conventions are the most important factors favoring this sublimation.[456]

Weber also developed his theory of sublimation and eroticism into a type of refinement in his *Zwischenbetrachtung* ("Intermediate Reflections"), where he argued that the "civilised form of sexuality is the refinement and the intensification of the erotic in contradistinction to the mere physicality of sexual intercourse."[457] However, despite such intellectual theorizing, Weber often acted quite differently, and his outbreaks of passionate emotion—for example, in his letters to Else Jaffé described below—were closer to the Romantics and Bohemians he supposedly kept at arms-length. In other words, when it came to love interests and eroticism, Weber often says one thing when he is doing something else, itself a sublimation of what he really wanted, which was

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[454] On Ibsen and marriage see Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[455] Richard Faber, *Franziska zu Reventlow und die Schwabinger Gegenkultur* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1993), 2: „Reventlow war, wie generell die Verkörperung Schwabings und seiner Boheme, die ‚Inkarnation der ‚erotischen Bewegung,' der ‚erotischen Rebellion.'"
2 „...die Königin der Boheme..." Faber, *Franziska zu Reventlow*, 1.

[456] Max Weber, *Economy and Society, Vols. I-II*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 606–607.

[457] Sam Whimster, "No Place for a Sexual Revolutionary," in *Sexual Revolutions: Psychoanalysis, History and the Father*, ed. Gottfried Heuer (New York: Routledge, 2011), 181–200, 196. See also Whimster, "Max Weber on the Erotic and Some Comparisons with the Work of Foucault," *International Sociology* 10, no. 4 (1995): 447–462.

passionate erotic physical relationships. His marital love for with Marianne, on the other hand,

seems to have been more concerned with career interests and comradeship. He thus took an

intense interest in women such as Reventlow and Frieda Gross, even while he critiqued their

erotic activities as ultimately doomed. He spent many hours in Frieda Gross's house on the hill

while he was in Ascona. Although there is no evidence that these two were ever romantically

involved, his close connection to her is telling.[458] Weber wrote to Marianne from Ascona in

April 1913:

> I sat with Frieda yesterday by her fireplace for a few hours. She has a great need
> to talk things out. Her life is completely wrecked. How so can be quickly told.
> Dementia praecox was already diagnosed before her marriage to Otto Gross. The
> parents had concealed this from her. Then it went as Jaspers predicted of Bloch:
> she became dreadfully overtaxed, completely and wretchedly eaten up and on top
> of this—which she confesses—the terrible drain of emotions owing to her
> polygamy. It's of no consequence who started this: mentally she couldn't meet the
> demands of her husband, she has become a complete nervous wreck, and must
> have "the other" (for opposite reasons as Else!).[459]

A few days later, Weber describes Gross in another letter to Marianne as a "complete

coquette."[460] Such descriptions of Frieda Gross as both coquettish and an emotional wreck,

hungering after "the other," are revealing and suggestive of the possible romantic link between

her and Weber—or at least of the sexual tension that would build up during a situation that

framed him as the rational knight in shining armor and her as the emotional damsel in distress.

Frieda Gross was clearly attracted to Weber, as a letter fragment from her to Else reveals. Here

she refers to "Max Weber," and then goes on to make some suggestive remarks about loving him

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[458] For example, Weber's lover Mina Tobler feared that Freida Gross would seduce him and was intensely jealous of his interactions with Freida while he was in Ascona. See M. Rainer Lepsius and Sam Whimster, "Mina Tobler and Max Weber: Passion Confined," *Max Weber Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004): 9–21, 16.

[459] Max Weber, "Letters from Ascona," in *Max Weber and the Culture of Anarchy*, 47.

[460] Weber, "Letters from Ascona," 49.

but not loving him at the same time, ending up with the tantalizing suggestion that her interaction with him caused him to fear something. At just this, the letter breaks off:

> …but rather the tiles on the roof would consider my soul and personality than this Max Weber, whom naturally one must love. Love in this case of course means not love. But to have him near without seeking his actual nearness and without wanting his understanding and recognition—if one has a real soul in one's body—that would be a paradoxical situation to live with. At least, so it seems to me. And since he was just as solicitous and kindhearted as uncomprehending of me and my 'ambitions'—there were definitely moments where he feared…[461]

What Weber "feared" has not been preserved in the letter, but such statements represent more suggestive evidence that Weber was attracted to Frieda. Furthermore, Weber later reported in another letter in 1920 that he had always wanted to return to Frieda Gross in Ascona or for her to come to Munich where he was living.[462]

During Weber's initial visit to Ascona, Frieda was in an open relationship with Ernst Frick (1881–1956), a Swiss anarchist associated with anarchistic activities and robberies in Munich, as well as a bombing in Zurich in 1907. When Weber first met him in 1913, Frick was in prison for participating in an anarchist attack in Switzerland. He had been accused of using explosives to free a Russian citizen from a barracks and causing a tram to derail.[463] The two men had several conversations, about which Weber reported favorably to his wife, admiring Frick's

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[461] The letter is unfortunately incomplete. From Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, Digital Collections and Archives, Else von Richthofen Collection. Quoted in Demm, "Max and Alfred Weber and their Female Entourage," 79. Demm sees in this fragment evidence that Weber did indeed rebuff Frieda Gross's romantic advancements, as Weber reported to his wife, because apparently Gross told Else everything. However, given the level of complicated emotions involved in these open relationships and the individual participants—many of whom had to lead double lives of private and public, or try and mask their jealousy because it contradicted an open relationship ethic—it is certainly not as easily dismissed as Demm suggests.

[462] Prussian Secret State Archive, Rep. 92 *Nachlass Max Weber*, Nr. 30, Bd. 8, B1. 72–73, quoted in Sam Whimster, "No Place for a Sexual Revolutionary," 196.

[463] See Esther Bertschinger-Joos and Richard Butz, *Ernst Frick. Zürich—Ascona, Monte Verità. Anarchist, Künstler, Forscher* (Zürich: Limmat Verlag, 2014).

"ethics of conviction" (*Gesinnungsethik*), which he also discussed with Frieda.[464] He and Frick met again during Weber's trip to Ascona in 1914. Frick later spent his time as an amateur geological researcher in Ascona, obsessed with researching the Celtic fortress Balla Drum to the west of Monte Verità. He became a student of Arthur Segal, the painter and sculptor, and began to paint around 1917. He married Margarita Marianne Fellerer in 1919, an anthroposophist and follower of Rudolf Steiner, who was also the official photographer of the Eranos Conferences from the early 1930s until the mid-1950s. Frick endeavored to uncover the so-called "original language" and worked on breaking words down to their original root structures. Based on his amateur archeological activities, he believed that the earth itself was throwing up ancient stones to the surface from the center of the earth in the area around Monte Verità. Such ideas served as inspiration for his artistic creativity.[465] Weber developed a strong interest in Frick, and they had many conversations about anarchy, eroticism, and other topics (although he remained ultimately unconvinced of the effectiveness of Frick's anarchism).[466] Weber's relationship with Frick is interesting in itself for what it tells us about Weber in his later years, but it is also interesting because of Frick's later connection through his wife to Steiner. These kinds of relationships indicate that individuals who seem so different on the surface may actually have had more in common than scholars imagine.

In his letters, Weber reported to his wife that he spent time alone in Frieda's home with her and her three daughters, who were fathered by Frick. He wrote that "he [Frick] has a religious belief in a future society free of jealousy, of really 'free' love, that is free from within.

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[464] See Edith Hanke, "Max Weber, Leo Tolstoy and the Mountain of Truth," in *Max Weber and the Culture of Anarchy*, 153; Esther Bertschinger-Joos, *Frieda Gross Und Ihre Briefe an Else Jaffé: Ein Bewegtes Leben Im Umfeld Von Anarchismus, Psychoanalyse Und Bohème* (Marburg: Verlag LiteraturWissenschaft.de, 2014).
[465] See Bertschinger-Joos and Butz, *Ernst Frick*.
[466] Hanke, "Max Weber, Leo Tolstoy and the Mountain of Truth," 145, 153–155.

She herself [Frieda] also theorised about this…"[467] Weber responds by defending feelings of jealousy. This is interesting since Freida had been involved with two other men, both of whom were erotic anarchists, Erich Mühsam and Otto Gross.[468] Weber was especially jealous of Gross, who'd had an affair with Else, resulting in her giving birth to one of Otto's sons, Peter. When Otto Gross's father (Frieda Schloffer-Gross's father-in-law), the renowned Austrian criminologist Hans Gross, had his son imprisoned in Berlin in 1913, he filed two lawsuits against Frieda over the custody of the son. This was another of Weber's motivations for going to Ascona. As soon as he arrived he became Frieda's dedicated legal adviser, and he, along with the anarchist and doctor Raphael Friedeberg (with whom Weber developed a friendship) delivered an official legal opinion in court, while Friedeberg issued a medical one.[469] During the proceedings, it was precisely Weber's associations with Frick that were attacked in order to undermine both Weber's and Frieda's credibility. However, it seems that without Weber's assistance, Frieda would have lost custody of the child.[470]

Weber's introduction to free love through the lifestyle reform movement combined with his own sudden and overwhelming experience of passionate, erotic love were reflected in his sociology of religion.[471] His conviction that some kind of physical passion or eroticism lay at the heart of religion would seem to reflect the awakening of his own erotic feelings—which clearly verged on the mystical—for example, when he declared his love for Else. In Green's recounting, although Else initially rejected Weber, the experience of 1910, in which he, for once, expressed

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[467] Weber, "Letters from Ascona," 47: „die eifersuchtfreie Zukunftgesellschaft der wirklich ‚freien' – innerlich befreiten – Liebe."
[468] See Ulrich Linse, "Sexual Revolution and Anarchism: Erich Miihsam," in *Max Weber and the Culture of Anarchy*, 129–143.
[469] Dittmar Dahlmann, "Max Weber's Relation to Anarchism and Anarchists: The Case of Ernst Toller," in *Max Weber and his Contemporaries*, eds. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Jurgen Osterhammel (1987; London: Routledge, 2006), 367–381, 367.
[470] For a more detailed account of these events see Bertschinger-Joos, *Frieda Gross und ihre Briefe an Else Jaffé*.
[471] Radkau, *Max Weber*, 380.

his feelings of passion and love openly to her, was "a date of the greatest significance for Max, and gave a vision of erotic happiness."[472]

In response to his experience with Else in Venice and his moment of vulnerability, the doors of Weber's iron cage of reason were blown open. In poured a flood of new feelings and passions that were not easily bottled up and were thus released and expressed in his subsequent affair with Mina Tobler from 1911–1914. Weber therefore found himself at home in Ascona, notwithstanding the warehouse of worldviews and the "irrational" behaviors (which he was not above criticizing). He recognized that many of the people congregating around Monte Verità contended with illnesses and afflictions and wrestled with the passions, as he did.[473] The community was rife with experimental relationships, from the abstinent to the bohemian. Precisely this "unmarried" element of Weber's love interests and affairs was responsible for the quasi-spiritual intimations we find bubbling up inside him.

Recent Weberians working with newly available materials left out of Marianne's *Ein Lebensbild* have suggested that Weber knew exactly the type of place Monte Verità was, what went on there, and that he visited Ascona for these reasons.[474] He was already in the habit of traveling alone, following his mental breakdown, and Ascona was a point of interest for many of his friends, love interests, and acquaintances. He wrote to Marianne from Ascona, calling the place a "world full of enchantresses, grace, treachery and desire for happiness."[475] As Eberhard Demm has shown, this statement was made in a slightly self-protective sense, since Weber claimed that he preferred the previous day's trip to Ufenau with "the 'noble' child [Mina

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[472] Green, *The von Richthofen Sisters*, 130.
[473] "The irrational reputation of Monte Verità was well known. Fritz Brupbacher referred to it as the 'psychopathological International' in 1907." Quoted Radkau, *Max Weber*, 381.
[474] See especially Radkau, *Max Weber* and Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*.
[475] Weber, "Letters from Ascona," 60.

Tobler]," who, "in her far less lavish but reserved and gentle effusive way, was a sort of oasis of purity." Despite this sidestepping on Weber's part, it is possible to see him as up to similar behavior as those at Monte Verità, namely, the pursuit of love in its pure, natural, and spontaneous form, consummated in the free and extramarital space. Weber was not so different from the kind of people he met in this "world full of enchantresses,"[476] nor was he somehow odd or out of place, despite what he may have claimed. He was, in fact, at home and for all his protestations it seems clear that Weber enjoyed the sexual and erotic frisson he experienced in Ascona.

Joachim Radkau's recent comprehensive biography of Weber suggests Weberians have failed to recognize the role "nature" plays in connecting Weber's personal life and his academic work. The natural environment—in others words the *pure* (as Weber referred to his experience with Mina Tobler)—is crucial to understanding Weber's life, offering an important lens for analyzing his more subtle, perhaps quasi-mystical, beliefs about religion, eroticism, and the natural world. Purity here was something of a mask or shield that Weber used to disguise his strong sexual feelings, feelings that both overwhelmed and troubled him. As Bologh points out, Weber's mother disliked sex and thought it should occur only for the purpose of procreation.[477] After all, sex is neither rational nor dignified. It is wild, like nature itself, and it opens one up to another person in a way that is dangerous. At the same time, it is seductive in a way that a good, rational, calculating bourgeois like Weber would find both repugnant and alluring. As scholars have noticed, Weber's behavior and intellectual output throughout his life were complex and contradictory, placing him more realistically among the moderns and seekers of his time, rather than among the technocrats or sober Liberal bourgeoisie (though he must be placed among these

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[476] Weber, *Gesamtausgabe. Band II/8*, 605, quoted in Radkau, *Max Weber*, 382.
[477] Bologh, *Love or Greatness*, 27–30.

groups, as well).[478] After his mental breakdown of 1897/98, Weber began visiting natural-

healing clinics and took up vegetarianism to repair his health. His wife Marianne did the same. In

Ascona, he participated in this sacred diet not within cold monastic walls but among nature

nudists and anarchist vegetarians engaging in open relationships. He himself adopted nude

sunbathing and started writing more about eroticism, mystical experience, and disenchantment.

As Radkau puts it, Weber "was one of those who responded to the new impulse with the support

of his own experience," and "the mark that such movements [e.g. lifestyle reform movements]

left on Max Weber is clearly visible, even if he also retained certain reservations"—for example,

Weber continued smoking his pipe, even while sunbathing, whereas reformers were anti-

tobacco.[479]

Thus, far from being the overly cautious rationalist that many have imagined him to be—

a tradition beginning with Marianne Weber's biography of her husband—Weber, in some ways,

saw himself and behaved as a romantic, and some of those he was closest to agreed. Letters

between German economist and historian Eberhard Gothein and his wife from 1915 reveal

Weber as a prophet, with three women—Marie Bernays, Elisabeth Braus, and Weber's lover

Mina Tobler—listening with rapt attention at his feet.[480] Gothein wrote to his wife Marie Luise:

"Like Maria and Martha both ladies and Mrs. Bernays sat right at Weber's feet, listening and

looking up devoutly. At the end full of admiration Frau Braus said: 'Ah, if only we had

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[478] On Weber's contradictions, see Bryan S. Turner, *Max Weber: From History to Modernity* (Routledge, 1993), 11; Dirk Kaesler, "Still Waiting for an Intellectual Biography of Max Weber," *Max Weber Studies* 7, no. 1 (2007): 97–118; Friedrich H. Tenbruck, "The Problem of Thematic Unity in the Works of Max Weber," *The British Journal of Sociology* 31, no. 3 (1980): 316–351; Andrew Zimmerman, "Decolonizing Weber," *Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 1 (2006): 53–79. Zimmerman's opening sentence, stating that Weber is a racist, is clearly unsupportable in light Weber's English correspondence with W. E. B. Du Bois. See Christopher A. McAuley, *The Spirit Vs. the Souls: Max Weber, W. E. B. Du Bois, and the Politics of Scholarship* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).
[479] Radkau, *Max Weber*, 377.
[480] Demm, "Max and Alfred Weber," 76-78.

economists and historians [meaning Weber] as political leaders…'"[481] Marie Luise then replied

with: "You are quite right, these women disciples appear to me either merely comic or

repugnant, but certainly all prophets needed such women who followed them with devout

confidence. Even with Christ the women of the community have also played an important

role..."[482] This is one of the reasons Weber needed to have a person such as Mina Tobler in his

life. In the words of one scholar: "as a guru like Otto Gross and Stefan Georg, although not as

dangerous as these two men, [Weber] could expect from his disciples a pious veneration—a

veneration which he needed himself as well, because what is a guru without followers."[483] Weber

showed effusive sensitivity toward nature and the environment in his travel letters to his wife and

young lover, which was the motivation for his many journeys, connecting him to the legacy of

the *Naturmenschen* and *Wandervogel*, not to mention the romantic poets whose works he read. In

the words of the Weber scholar Andreas Anter, "The travel letters let a sensitive and nature-

loving Max Weber emerge who, full of enthusiasm, raves about the beauty of the countryside; a

nature bliss which is in a clear contrast to his usual pointed sobriety."[484]

In terms of how such experiences square with Weber's concept of the disenchantment of

the world, Radkau remarks, "The great disenchanter yearns, if somewhat shamefaced, for a re-

enchantment of the world," which for Weber was often "the enchantment of love."[485] Weber's

concept of disenchantment must thus be read differently if we are to grasp what he meant. Along

with Kippenberg, Jason Josephson-Storm and Egil Asprem argue that Weber conceived of the

world as being *actively* disenchanted, rather than as a completed historical process. Weber was

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[481] Demm, "Max and Alfred Weber," 77.
[482] Demm, "Max and Alfred Weber," 77.
[483] Demm, "Max and Alfred Weber," 78.
[484] Andreas Anter, "Max Weber's Concept of Nature and the Ambivalence of Modernity," *Max Weber Studies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 217–229, 222.
[485] Radkau, *Max Weber*, 382.

disturbed by the idea that the world had lost its magic and wonder and as a result he joined the ranks of those who sought to reenchant the world—and, characteristic of the moderns, he was nonetheless able to cast a critical eye on the absurdity of his times.

How did Weber reconcile a persistence of magic and mystery in modernity with his concept of disenchantment? Josephson-Storm argues that Weber conceived of magic and rationality as compatible, that magic had been suppressed as the world had become actively *disenchanted*. In other words, Weber recognized the persistence of magic in modernity but felt it had been confined within its own "cultural sphere," where it had undergone its own process of rationalization. "For Weber, magic is subjectively, instrumentally rational."[486] Storm refers to an "in-process" disenchanting of the world, opposed to a completed-process, and points out that Weber's initial use of disenchantment came in a discussion about the rationalization of magic in 1913.[487] How does this work? Storm explains,

> an increasingly disenchanted world with religiously motivated actors, having foreclosed meaning in nature, often perform actions that are instrumentally *irrational*: in other words, actions that are directed against their seemingly rational interests, but instead invested with subjective meaning rooted in their specific conviction or mystical experiences.[488]

This is important because Weber may in fact be suggesting that to be religious in the modern world, one must resort to a type of irrational mysticism. This will become important later. Many of Weber's key sociological concepts were formulated in response to engaging with and being in

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[486] Johannes Winckelmann, "Die Herkunft von Max Webers Entzauberungs-Konzeption," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 32, no. 1 (1980): 12–53. See also Jason A. Josephson-Storm, "Max Weber and the Rationalization of Magic," in *Narratives of Disenchantment and Secularization: Critiquing Max Weber's Idea of Modernity*, ed. Robert A. Yelle and Lorenz Trein (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 31–50.

[487] Here Josephson-Storm refers to Max Weber, *Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe. Band I/22-2: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Religiöse Gemeinschaften*, eds. Hans G. Kippenberg, Petra Schilm, and Jutta Niemeier (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 2001), 122–123.

[488] Josephson-Storm, "Max Weber and the Rationalization of Magic," 40.

close proximity to mystics, occultists, and esotericists. He was not so far removed from what he thought of as the *irrational* in modern society as we often think. As Storm has helped reveal, we must recognize that Weber was impacted by the turn-of-the-century esotericism that influenced many other Europeans of his generation. Such figures include symbolist mystical poet Stefan George, who gathered a circle of devotees around him in Heidelberg. George's circle referred to him as "Meister" and his poetry was steeped in symbolist and esoteric themes. George was, for a time, also a member of the Munich Kosmikers, a group centered around the spiritualist, dilettante archaeologist, and mystic Alfred Schuler. The Munich circle included Jewish poet and translator Karl Wolfskehl (1869-1948), esoteric philosopher Ludwig Klages (1872-1956), and freemason, occultist, and writer Ludwig Derleth (1870-1948), who would play a key role in the development of the Eranos meetings on Monte Verità beginning in the 1930s.

The George-Kreis and Kosmikers were at one point connected but separated over time through a series of disagreements and disputes. While the George-Kreis centered around George and his poetry, the Kosmikers centered around the spiritualism of Alfred Schuler, whose fragmentary philosophy was later edited and published by Klages and can been characterized as "cosmic." In reality the Kosmikers consisted of people with divergent views that included a return to a sacred social hierarchy along the lines of traditional Catholicism and the Hindu caste system (Derleth), establishing a Zionistic community (Wolfskehl), developing a magical, existential, and biocentric philosophy (Klages), reactivating a mystical paganism (Schuler), the symbolism of George, and an overall interest in primal matriarchy founded on the work of Bachofen's *Mutterrecht*.[489] In spite of this complexity and the contradictions involved in such a constellation of ideas, a central organizing concept of the "cosmic" has been identified, which

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[489] Gerhard Plumpe, "Alfred Schuler und die Kosmische Runde," in Manfred Frank, *Götter im Exil: Vorlesungen über die neue Mythologie, II. Teil* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), 213–256.

Paul Bishop locates in Schuler's "Kosmogoniae Fragmenta" (Fragments for a Cosmogony) (1895) and describes as follows:

> First, it was indebted to vitalist thought for the belief in an irrational, organic life energy. Second, it was influenced by Bachofen's conception of "matriarchy," the notion that our current, "patriarchal" society was preceded by an ancient civilization based on gynaecocracy.… Third, it laid emphasis on the Dionysian aspect of life, as described by Nietzsche in terms of *Rausch* (ecstasy) and the celebration of bodily drives…. Fourth, it tended toward a blatantly, and sometimes brutally, anti-intellectual stance … Fifth, it embraced a pagan view of life, appreciating in Christianity (particularly Catholicism) the persistence of earlier rites and beliefs, and some of the *Kosmiker* became increasingly committed to an anti-Semitic outlook. Finally, this … "cosmic" thought … makes startling, occasionally alarming, use of imagery of heat, light, and blood.[490]

George and Schuler were homosexuals, and the group as a whole decried the sexual norms of the day, often envisioning the divine as androgynous, a belief found in many esoteric systems such as alchemy and theosophy. Weber was fully aware of such ideas through his relationships with Fanny zu Reventlow, who had a long relationship with Klages and was an unofficial member of the group, as well as through his main love interest Else, who was also an unofficial member. Reventlow wrote a provocative passage about them, which Weber is known to have read in 1913 during his stay in Ascona. In this passage, Reventlow describes the Kosmiker's conviction that it was possible to tap into the cosmic principle at the center of the universe, an idea that resonated with Weber's attempt to find a way to counter a disenchanted world:

> They claim to have discovered secrets of immeasurable importance and thereby have gone so far as to achieve mastery of certain inner powers. Hence sooner or later they will be in a position to work magic (*zaubern*)…. They explained it to me like this: one succeeds by means of a mystical procedure— I believe by absolute self-absorption in the primordial cosmic principle (*kosmische Urprinzip*)…. When this is successful, one's essence is completely permeated by the primordial cosmic

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[490] Paul Bishop, "Stefan George and the Munich Cosmologists," in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*, ed. Jens Rieckmann (Rochester: Camden House, 2010), 161–187, 163.

substance, which is in itself all-powerful. Then one is made just as powerful, and those who are all-powerful can work magic (*zaubern*).[491]

It is not known if Weber met Schuler, though he'd undoubtedly heard of him. However, there is no question that he knew George, Wolfskehl, Klages, and Reventlow, and he developed some of his most important sociological theories in response to these relationships. His ideas about mysticism and a charismatic leader came from first meeting Otto Gross and later by observing how George's supporters reacted to him. Reventlow was steeped in the ideas of the Kosmikers, and she acted as Weber's temporary secretary, perhaps as an intermediary between him and Klages, and the two may have been closer than is generally assumed (as with Frieda Gross).

Klages had an impact on the notion of disenchantment, as he articulated a version of the rationalization process in his 1913 *Mensch und Erde* (Human and Earth). While it is not known if Weber was familiar with this particular work, he was reading Klages around this time, and they were soon corresponding. Klages, who was the leader of the graphology movement and believed that handwriting could reveal a person's true inner self concealed behind a "mask of courtesy," even analyzed Weber's handwriting.[492] In a letter to Else Jaffé from 1919, Weber remarks that Klages is really a "smart" graphologist and records the final "verdict" of Klages's analysis, which, Weber jokes, declared that "it's just that something in the instincts has gotten into disorder."[493] Incidentally, Klages also analyzed Steiner's handwriting, in whose script he identified the so-called "religious curve," a trait that was related to the rise of romanticism and

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[491] Franziska zu Reventlow, *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen* (Munich: Langen, 1913),142–143, quoted in Josephson-Storm, 212.

[492] Green, *The Von Richthofen Sisters*, 352; Mitchell G. Ash, *Gestalt Psychology in German Culture, 1890–1967: Holism and the Quest for Objectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 290.

[493] "…nur ist irgend etwas in den Instinkten in Unordnung geokommen." The joke is that Weber is totally "fine" and "normal" other than the fact that something in his instincts is out of order. See Weber, *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe. Band II/10-1*, 419–422.

the decline of classicism in the German tradition.[494] Weber further cited Klages, for example, in

the *Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and Klages cited Weber in return. This

influential relationship has not been fully acknowledged, especially in the Anglophone literature.

In the letter, Weber concedes to the accuracy of Klages's analysis, a confession that is

followed by an outpouring of mystical emotion and devotion, in which he refers to Else as the

daughter of the goddess Aphrodite whose "individual great stations and altars" along the "Rose

Path of the great Goddess" he has visited throughout his encounters with her. He refers to "solid

barriers" and "huge masses of rubble, of countless shattered images of gods (and idols), of streets

of life left in ruins and abandoned and dilapidated dwellings, in which I [Weber] sought refuge

and did not find it…" These personal statements are succeeded by references to "a special iron

bolt before the buried gate," barring any admittance from "the desire beyond" and consisting of

an "ever-deepening shyness and fear," which Weber experienced in her presence. The key to this

lock was only furnished by her "knowing and noble freedom like a delicate and yet completely

self-confident fairy-tale wonder," as well as her "enchanting humor," which helped produce a

"mighty power of magic" to face his fears and embrace his passionate feelings for her. The letter

is concluded by Weber thanking Else "from the depth of my soul."[495]

Such symbolic descriptions clearly suggest Weber, at least in relation to his love affair

with Else, thought of himself as trapped inside a cage of reason, and he even refers to himself as

"the cramped one." In Radkou's reading, Weber's sojourns to Ascona and his interactions with

the people associated with the site resulted in his spiritual awakening, triggered by the obsession

with Else Jaffé, his former doctoral student, with whom he was not speaking at the time because

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[494] Ludwig Klages, *Ludwig Klages: Sämtliche Werke. Band 8. Graphologie II*, eds. Ernst Frauchiger, Gerhard Funke, Karl J. Groffmann, Robert Heiss, and Hans Eggert Schröder (Bonn: Bouvier, 1986), 302.
[495] All quotations from Weber, *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe. Band II/10-1*, 419–422.

of jealousy over her affair with Alfred and her rejection of him in Venice. However, whatever "spiritual experience" resulted from his declaration of love and Else's rejection stimulated the awakening of strong erotic emotions. According to Weber's letters to his wife, when Else did show up in Ascona in 1914, Weber pretended as though he wasn't there and hid out in his room where he was staying with Freida Gross:

> I am blockaded in my room today, because yesterday Frieda installed Else in the room directly opposite. On my instructions she has explained that I am away and there is no way she can see me. So I am not allowed to be here. Also I do not wish to see her. Also from what Alfred [Weber] said to Frieda [Gross] in Bellinzona [nearby] the nasty and cowardly absence of chivalrous behaviour of both of these people to me has become only too apparent ± there can be nothing more for me than a "chance meeting."[496]

For all his self-pity in this letter, Weber's time in Ascona had an overall positive and stimulating effect on him, offering new kinds of stimulating experiences, erotic and otherwise, that helped him recover from his strong tendency to depression. The serene and beautiful natural environment of Ascona and the liberated eroticism of its inhabitants put Weber in a state of intellectual illumination, recognizable in his "Intermediate Reflections" (*Zwishenbetractung*, 1915), which he worked on at the time. Weber may have even equated such experiences with those of a "mystic" having a "mystical experience," one of communion with the Other and an integration into the ineffable All. At the very least, Weber seems to have been seeking such experiences through excursions to places such as Ascona.[497] Weber indeed linked mysticism and eroticism, as we can see from the following passage:

> the erotic relation seems to offer the unsurpassable peak of the fulfilment of the request for love in the direct fusion of the souls of one to the other. This boundless

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[496] Weber, "Letters from Ascona," 56–57.
[497] "Who would doubt that such phrases contain a kernel of what was going on in Weber, and that they sprang not from logical argument but from a gladdening experience?" Radkau, *Max Weber*, 389.

giving of oneself is as radical as possible in its opposition to all functionality, rationality, and generality. It is displayed here as the unique meaning which one creature in his irrationality has for another, and only for this specific other. However, from the point of view of eroticism, this meaning, and with it the value-content of the relation itself, rests upon the possibility of a communion which is felt as a complete unification, as a fading of the 'thou.' It is so overpowering that it is interpreted 'symbolically': as a sacrament. The lover realizes himself to be rooted in the kernel of the truly living, which is eternally inaccessible to any rational endeavor. He knows himself to be freed from the cold skeleton hands of rational orders, just as completely as from the banality of everyday routine. This consciousness of the lover rests upon the ineflaceability and inexhaustibleness of his own experience. The experience is by no means communicable and in this respect it is equivalent to the 'having' of the mystic. This is not only due to the intensity of the lover's experience, but to the immediacy of the possessed reality.[498]

Can this-worldly eroticism and absorption in the flesh be at all connected to the otherworldliness of religious life? Radkau certainly believes they can, arguing that in Weber's eyes "mysticism, which gives free rein to man's inner life, makes it easy for the one to fuse with the other," and in short, "Weber discovered that eroticism and spirituality intensify each other."[499] And yet, Otto Gross, the infamous bohemian anarchist and rebel psychanalyst, asserted that giving up a sensual life for the sake of higher intellectuality was a form of "social asceticism," which is how he viewed Weber.[500] Indeed, the two men are often thought of as polar opposites.[501] They had a well-known ongoing debate concerning that rational/secular and an irrational/spiritual approach to interpretation of the social and psychological, as Weber always intended to appear as the hard rationalist and professional scholar on the surface.[502] In the words of Gottfried Heuer, "For Gross, psychoanalysis was a weapon in a countercultural revolution to overthrow the existing

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[498] Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, 347.
[499] Radkau, *Max Weber*, 388–389.
[500] Otto Gross and Frieda Weekley, "The Otto Gross–Frieda Weekley Correspondence," translated by John Turner with Cornelia Rumpf-Worthen and Ruth Jenkins, *The D.H. Lawrence Review* 22, no. 2 (1990): 137–225, quoted in Sam Whimster and Gottfried Heuer, "Otto Gross and Else Jaffé and Max Weber," in *Love & Eroticism*, edited by Mike Featherstone (London: SAGE, 1999), 129–160, 131.
[501] See the work of Martin Green.
[502] See Gottfried Heuer, *Freud's "Outstanding" Colleague/Jung's "Twin Brother": The Suppressed Psychoanalytic and Political Significance of Otto Gross* (London: Routledge, 2017).

Order—not, as he saw it becoming, a means to force people to adapt better to it."[503] Nicolaus

Sombart summarizes Gross's philosophy in two succinct theses: first, that the patriarchal order

had to be destroyed before a better alternative could emerge; and second, this destruction must

start with individuals:

> [Gross's] first thesis was: The realization of the anarchist alternative to the patriarchal order of society has to begin with the destruction of the latter. Without hesitation, Otto Gross owned up to practicing this—in accordance with anarchist principles—by the propaganda of the 'Tat' [deed, action], first by an exemplary way of life aimed at destroying the limitations of society within himself; second as a psychotherapist by trying to realize new forms of social life experimentally in founding unconventional relationships and communes (for example in Ascona from where he was expelled as an instigator of 'orgies') … His second thesis: Whoever wants to change the structures of power (and production) in a repressive society, has to start by changing these structures in himself and to eradicate the 'authority that has infiltrated one's own inner being.' In his opinion it is the achievement of psychoanalysis as a science to have created the preconditions and to have provided the instruments for this.[504]

Else Jaffé had desired to bring Weber and Otto Gross into closer intellectual dialogue

with each other, perhaps because she realized they had more in common than Weber cared to

admit. She encouraged Otto to submit an article to the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft* and

encouraged Weber to consider it seriously. These were two very important men in her life, both

of whom she was romantically involved with at some point. It is generally assumed that Gross

was the one who transmitted the doctrine of free love through Else Jaffé to Weber and the city of

Heidelberg.[505] However, the effort was a failure, as the two men disagreed over, among other

[503] Gottfried Heuer, "Jung's Twin Brother. Otto Gross and Carl Gustav Jung*," Journal of Analytical Psychology* 46 (2001): 655–688, 660.

[504] Nicolaus Sombart, *Die deutschen Männer und ihre Feinde. Carl Schmitt—ein deutsches Schicksal zwischen Männerbund und Matriarchatsmythos* (München & Wien: Carl Hanser, 1991), 110–111, quoted in Heuer, "Jung's Twin Brother, " 661.

[505] Whimster, "No Place for a Sexual Revolutionary," 189. See also Bozena Choluj, "Max Weber und die Erotik," in *Heidelberg Im Schnittpunkt Intellektueller Kreise,* 242–263.

things, value-free science and the scientific validity of Freudianism.[506] At bottom lay Weber's

conviction that Gross was attempting to transport his own base sexual desires into an academic

theory. Weber's was an eroticism of aestheticism and sublimation. Martin Green has suggested

that one of Else's ulterior motives may have been a hope that Gross, who was a brilliant

psychoanalyst, could have cured Weber of his debilitating neurosis, a neurosis centered on

Weber's divided consciousness, split as it was between puritanical constraint and romantic,

erotic freedom.[507] Green ultimately reads this failed encounter as the determining factor in Else's

choosing of Weber and his way of life over Gross and the Schwabing bohemians, as Gross's life

increasingly became a steady decline into ruin and academic oblivion.[508] Whimster argues that

Weber did not reject Otto out of jealousy but because his article broke the academic value-free

code of the journal Weber was editing, which is partly true.[509] But Green is right to suggest

Weber was jealous. In the context of my argument, Otto embodied something that tortured

Weber: a person who had escaped the iron cage, however tragic Otto's liberation proved to be.[510]

But were these two men so different? The relationship between them is complex and

illuminating. It is easy to cast Weber as the Apollonian and Gross as the Dionysian, however this

does not do Weber justice. While Weber eventually espoused a philosophy of sublimation, one

could say that he did this reluctantly, torn by a conflict that pitted duty against passion. His

connection to Ascona and the people there reveals Weber's deeper feelings and inspirations,

bordering on mysticism and ecstasy. Else had her affair with Alfred, to the dismay of her

husband Edgar. Weber proclaimed his love around 1910 by reciting a piece of evocative poetry

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[506] Whimster and Heuer, "Otto Gross and Else Jaffé and Max Weber," 144.

[507] Green, *The Von Richthofen Sisters*, 56.

[508] Green, *The Von Richthofen Sisters*, 55–56.

[509] Whimster, "No Place for a Sexual Revolutionary," 191.

[510] Gross died of pneumonia related to a drug addiction after being discovered starved and freezing on the streets of Berlin in 1920.

to her and though she rejected him, which became a wound for Weber, they eventually had their affair. The poem was "Requiem" by Rilke about a nature spirit. Rilke was also a member of the George-Kreis and had close connections with Schuler, Klages, and the Munich Kosmikers.[511] That Weber was hopelessly entangled in this complex network of spiritual seekers, erotic enthusiasts, and open lovers reveals an aspect of him that counters his own self-constructed professional image.

The erotic meant, for Weber, a "cultivated form of sexuality, an intensification of what would otherwise be brute natural instinct."[512] David Chalcraft has described how Weber was an admirer and a private consumer of the erotic, allegorical, and fantastical artwork of Max Klinger (1857–1920). Weber owned many Klinger pieces, displayed them in his home and office in Heidelberg (where a young Else von Richthofen noticed one and was intrigued), and even gave them as gifts.[513] Marianne and Max apparently enjoyed some of these works of art together for their stark erotic nature, and Weber gave Marianne nearly the entire set of Klinger etchings as an anniversary present in 1894. There are numerous accounts of friends and relatives being struck by all of the various nudes gazing from the walls of the Webers' home. Although Weber surely understood the polemical side of these images, the point is that he took a deep interest in these images, which displayed copious nude bodies, prostitution, fallen women, and an impassioned release of erotic emotions. Chalcraft theorizes that, in addition to related works like Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* and the plays of Sudermann, such aesthetic themes helped the Webers

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[511] Whimster and Heuer, "Otto Gross and Else Jaffé and Max Weber,"146–147.

[512] Whimster and Heuer, "Otto Gross and Else Jaffé and Max Weber," 147; see also Whimster, "Max Weber and the Erotic and Some Comparisons with the work of Foucault."

[513] As Chalcraft reports, as late as 1918 Weber was giving to Alwine (Wina) Müller—Marianne Weber's mother's sister—for her birthday a Klinger print that had "hung here (in Heidelberg) in my room and because of that could be seen as rather 'personal.'" See Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kultur Besitz, Berlin, 10.10.1918; quoted in David Chalcraft, "Love and Death: Weber, Wagner and Max Klinger," in *Max Weber and the Culture of Anarchy*, 197.

organize their thoughts around sex and sublimation in their marriage. The themes of these pieces included the association of decay and death with sex and disorder. Eroticism was thus supposed to be enjoyed culturally but repressed (sublimated) as a physical act of enjoyment. However, while Weber suffered from impotence throughout his life, he was never chaste, not even in his relationship with Marianne.[514] This makes it difficult to grasp how exactly sublimation operated for Weber. Chalcraft concludes that Weber must have "controlled the anarchy of his passions through the culture of renunciation."[515] Whimster and Heuer, moreover, have described this aspect of Weber's life as "a tantric practice of his own making," yet they ultimately conclude that the incident between Max and Else in 1910, with the reading of the Rilke poem and unstated confession of love, "severely tried the conventions of eroticism."[516]

Conclusion

In a letter to Ferdnand Tonnies four years before his first trip to Ascona, Weber claimed that he was "unmusical" when it came to religion. As he wrote:

> For I am indeed absolutely religiously "unmusical" and have neither the desire nor the capacity to erect any such soul "construction" of a religious character in me— that is simply not possible, for I reject that. However, upon closer examination, I find that I am neither anti-religious nor irreligious.[517]

While some scholars have often been quick to cite this passage as suggesting Weber's secular position, it is important to recognize how much Weber changed in the years following this letter.

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[514] Demm, "Max and Alfred Weber," 65–68.
[515] Chalcraft, "Love and Death: Weber, Wagner and Max Klinger," 210.
[516] Whimster and Gottfried Heuer, "Otto Gross and Else Jaffé and Max Weber," 147.
[517] „Denn ich bin zwar religiös absolute "unmusikalisch" und habe weder Bedürfnis noch Fähigkeit irgendwelche seelisch "Bauwerke" religiösen Charakters in mich zu errichten—das geht einfach nicht, resp. ich lehne es ab. Aber, ich bin, nach genauer Prüfung, weder antireligiös noch irreligiös." Weber quoted in Adair-Toteff, *Fundamental Concepts in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion*, 79.

Peter Ghosh has argued that Weber's statement here is *open*, and possibly intimating an interest in a personal religion.[518] Ghosh suggests that by taking all of Weber's writing together, including his posthumously published work, Weber is best characterized as a religious thinker articulating his own *religious history*. Ghosh further suggests that Weber even leaned on the side of religion (as opposed to that of science) when it came to asking big philosophical questions such as "What should we do? How should we live?"[519] Gosh emphasizes Weber's ambivalent relationship to science, which he revered for its objectivity but at the same time regretted its inability to provide individuals with any kind of moral compass:

> its modern search for detachment and "objectivity" revealed that *Wissenschaft* too was much diminished relative to religion. Its concerns might be universal, but if it was pursued as it should be, in "value-free" form, then it could make no direct claim to influence conduct … Taken overall, its immediate appearance was that of the aetiolated modern residue of the historic religious capacity to construe the world as meaningful—and this was something Weber felt keenly. *Wissenschaft* was the one part of the modern rationalized world to which he was unconditionally loyal, and yet this relationship could never be more than one of cool, reserved, sobriety.[520]

Adair-Toteff suggests Weber's non-"anti-religious nor irreligious" inclinations, whatever those might be, were reconciled in a personal attraction to asceticism. He rests this claim on Weber's biography, that Weber was never much interested in contemplation, but seemed "drawn to sober activity and work."[521] However, this only makes sense if we hold to Weber's own dichotomy of

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[518] Gosh further suggests that Weber borrowed his religiosity and musicality analogy from William James. See Peter Ghosh, *A Historian Reads Max Weber: Essays on the Protestant Ethics* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), 246; see also Wilhelm Hennis, "The Spiritualist Foundation of Max Weber's 'Interpretative Sociology': Ernst Troeltsch, Max Weber and William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 2 (1998): 83–106.

[519] From "Science as a Vocation": "The simplest reply was given by Tolstoy with his statement, 'Science is meaningless because it has no answer to the only questions that matter to us: "What should we do? How shall we live?"' The fact that science cannot give us this answer is absolutely indisputable." Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004), 17.

[520] Peter Ghosh, *Max Weber and the Protestant Ethic*, 222.

[521] Adair-Toteff, *Fundamental Concepts in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion*, 79.

asceticism and mysticism, from which I suggest a departure. Ascetic and mystical practices can

and do interpenetrate, even in Weber's time. Weber's experiences while at Ascona are crucial if

we are to understand how his view of religion changed, allowing him to imagine that a kind of

sublimated eroticism could provide a mystical experience that would allow him to escape from

the iron cage of rationality. Adair-Toteff never mentions Weber's time in Ascona nor his various

love interests. There is a case to be made for the linkage between eroticism and mysticism (as

Radkau suggests) and to consider whether Weber was inclined to mysticism through experiences

and relationships with women.

Adair-Toteff concludes his discussion of Weber's ascetic proclivities by suggesting that it

is possible Weber *may have* felt attracted to mysticism, despite the contrary surface appearances.

He supports this interpretation by citing a supposed remark Weber made to Marianne in 1919–

1920 (later published in 1964):

> [Max] Tell me, can you picture yourself to be a mystic?
> [Marianne] That would certainly be the last thing that I could think about myself.
> Could you imagine that for yourself?
> [Max] It could even be that I am one. How much more in my life have I "dreamt"
> than one ought to actually allow oneself, thus I never feel entirely dependably at
> home anywhere. It is as if I could (and want) just as well to withdraw myself
> entirely from everything.[522]

Adair-Toteff remarks that such a statement, if genuine, does not mean Weber thought of himself

as a mystic. However, it does reveal Weber's interest in the subject and that he was relating the

concept to himself.[523]

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[522] Adair-Toteff, *Fundamental Concepts in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion*, 80–81.
[523] Weber was already known to have been compared to the Hebrew prophets, such as Elijah and Jeremiah, not only in his actions and general demeanor, but also for his writings on ancient Judaism. See Green, *The Von Richthofen Sisters*, 145–146.

However, while scholars such as Ghosh and Adair-Toteff recognize Weber's interest in mysticism, the connection to eroticism and the effect of Weber's visits to Ascona are not always fully appreciated. One cannot help but hear echoes of Weber's time in Ascona in the sentiment of wanting to withdraw oneself "entirely from everything." Total absorption, whether in a pure erotic encounter or through a submersion in nature—joining with the Other and extinguishing the ego—has all the hallmarks of a traditional mystical experience. I would argue that Weber's wistful comments to his wife sums up his life-long conflict between following the dictates of love or duty. Weber, I would suggest, provided the model for the ideal puritan type he describes in the *Protestant Ethic*. This was the worldly Weber, the respected academic locked in the iron cage of instrumental rationality. But there was another Weber, as well, the one who rattled the bars of this cage and even for rare moments may have escaped it.

Chapter Four

The Threat of Technology

> "Technology reveals the active relation of man to nature…"
>
> —Marx[524]

Introduction

This chapter compares the views of Weber and Steiner on technology, situating them in a larger context of a conversation taking place in Germany during the first half of the 20th century that was concerned with the role of technology in the modern world and its implications for the future of society. Questions of freedom, efficiency, rationality, science, war, plurality, and peace frequently appeared in this debate. In contrast to what some historians of the second half of the 20th century believe, technology was not a marginalized topic subordinated to science in grappling over the meaning of a "modern Europe"; rather, machines and gadgets and the logic behind them frequently took center stage, especially after the Great War shattered the illusion of unidirectional progress. The conversation surrounding technology encompassed every aspect of social, private, and public life, and it occupied groups which, in the past, were thought to be *outside* such a conversation, namely, esoteric movements such as theosophy and anthroposophy.

Revisiting what Weber and Steiner thought about technology reveals that both expressed fears over a future world that in many ways resembles the one we find ourselves inhabiting: a world where technological advancement surpasses the humans responsible for creating it. Both thinkers provide a type of "gnostic worldview" of a fallen humanity, ensnared by an ever-encroaching materiality that somehow required elevation. That Weber and Steiner, a mainstream

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[524] Karl Marx, *Capital. Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 493.

academic and an esoteric thinker, arrived at a similar vision of a caged humanity, imprisoned and

entrapped by technology, presents an opportunity for rethinking the boundaries of "accepted" or

"prestigious" and "esoteric" or "rejected" forms of knowledge. A comparison is instructive

because it not only writes esotericism back into mainstream history but further suggests that

esoteric thinkers were not as hostile to or marginalized by the emergence of modernity as

previously thought. They were, in fact, an essential ingredient in creating it, often presenting

self-reflexive alternatives to the contemporary situation.[525] Finally, the worries and concerns

over technology expressed by Weber and Steiner are characteristic of their times. This had

become a constant theme across Europe and in Russia starting in the 18th century, especially with

romantic and esoteric critics of the Enlightenment, who were deeply worried about the effects of

technology on nature and human beings. It is also characteristic of a whole generation of later

German thinkers, such as Jaspers, Heidegger, Marcuse, and Arendt, a legacy that continues to

inform the philosophy of science and technology today, especially in terms of environmentalism

and climate change. The question this chapter investigated is the way Steiner's esoteric interests

converged with Weber's on the issue of technology, providing a further example to demonstrate

that esotericism was part of mainstream thinking and not in binary opposition to it.

Social Context

Europeans living in urban areas during the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries bore

witness to a bewildering acceleration of technological innovation, which reshaped their

experience of the world. A flood of new devices and machines poured from the laboratories and

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[525] Many scholars have made this point. On spiritual movements and occult traditions of the Victorian era playing an innovate role in the creation of modern Britain, see Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 1–16. See also Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*.

workshops at an unprecedented rate, producing a broad and complex range of emotional

reactions and intellectual responses. These varied from inspired reverence to outright terror. The

onslaught of material objects, such as cars, trains, and home appliances, as well as the ideas

behind the justification of their mass production—namely, modern science—aimed at perfecting

the efficiency of the social and economic spheres, easing the drudgery of daily life and

transforming the productivity of labor. The appearance of such machines was accompanied by

promises of miraculous medicine (for example, the introduction of x-ray machines), increased

ability to travel and communicate, and new experiences of entertainment, such as film, record

players, and better golf clubs and tennis rackets. This proliferation of commercial goods on view

in the windows of the increasing number of large department stores and shops lining city streets

generated an aura of enchantment through sheer novelty and speed, and began, perhaps

unsurprisingly, to be referred to—especially by the media—as performing "secular miracles" and

"modern wonders."[526] Couching technology and machines in metaphorical and even religious

language fueled the public's already awestruck response and intensified the feeling that

everything was changing *fast*.

     Georg Simmel, one of the founders of sociology (along with Max Weber), analyzed the

effect of more people moving to urban areas in his 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental

Life." Simmel argued that the fast-paced, discontinuous, overstimulated environment of the

metropole forced inhabitants into a more intellectual mind frame constructed to protect the

individual psyche against the constant external barrage of noise, smells, and sights that accosted

their sense in crowded urban spaces. As a result, the citizen of the metropole tends to react to and

deal with problems in a largely rational and impersonal manner, dealing with other people the

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[526] See Bernhard Rieger, "'Modern Wonders': Technological Innovation and Public Ambivalence in Britain and Germany, 1890s to 1933," *History Workshop Journal* 55 (2003): 152–176.

same way they deal with money and economic issues: as sets of units valued quantitatively. Simmel contrasts this to rural inhabitants, whose external environment is radically different (slower and rhythmically habitual), and who retain a less intellectual, more sentimental mind frame, reacting to problems on an emotional level. Part of the reason for this distinct contrast, Simmel argues, has to do with the modes of production: anonymous, large scale, fast paced in the metropole; local, personal, and small scale in the rural areas. For Simmel, the modern mind is the mind of the metropole. It is increasingly calculating and must always remain on guard and ready to exclude "those irrational, instinctive, sovereign human traits and impulses which originally seek to determine the form of life from within instead of receiving it from the out-side in a general, schematically precise form."[527] In the metropole money dominates the value of everything, it becomes the "common denominator," the "frightful leveler," which "hollows out the core of things," rendering everything colorless and identical.[528] The endless stimuli from encounters with other people produces a cascade of inner responses, and thus the city engenders an antisocial attitude, culminating in feelings of "actual antagonism."[529] Yet this aversion caused by the metropole is one of the elementary stages of socialization, the first step in individual freedom and cosmopolitanism.

Urban life in Paris, London, Amsterdam, as well as Dresden and Berlin, was undoubtedly a shocking and visceral experience, especially for intellectuals like Steiner and Weber who had grown up in small, quiet villages. New factories, warehouses, laboratories, together with the technologies that arose in urban centers alongside the new middle classes of businessmen and managers, created a new environment. Thus, the problems that came with urban life, for

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[527] Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 13. Weber knew Simmel and was influenced by his ideas.
[528] Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 14.
[529] Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 15.

example, the breakdown of family networks, alcoholism, gambling, prostitution, and illegitimacy, came to be associated with new forms of laissez-fair liberal capitalism, scientific technology, urbanization, and mass industrial production, which increasingly ignored the emotional and spiritual needs of employers and employees alike.[530] Weber would later designate this phenomenon in a totalizing way as "rational capitalism."

Halfway through the 19th century, it was twenty-four-year-old Friedrich Engels who vividly described the realities of the new urban landscapes after spending twenty-one months in the various slums of Manchester.[531] During this time, he was able to witness what few middle- or upper-class people could see, as they tended to avoid the slums because they were too dangerous.[532] As Engels argued,

> The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels…. And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common … the social war, the war of each against all, is here openly declared. Just as in [Max] Stirner's recent book, people regard each other only as useful objects … Everywhere barbarous indifference, hard egotism on one hand, and nameless misery on the other, everywhere social warfare…[533]

Engels's writings represent an early attempt to develop sociological concepts and theories to understand the rapid process of urbanization and industrialization and the horror that came with both. His intense language criticizing the inhumane living conditions of the working class described what he had seen in horrifying detail. He painted a vivid picture of the slums he

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[530] On European industrialization and urbanization in the 19th century see Andreas Killen, *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Lenard R. Berlanstein, *The Working People of Paris, 1871–1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964).

[531] On the life of Engels see Tristram Hunt, *The Frock-Coated Communist: The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels* (London: Allen Lane, 2009); Edmund Frow and Ruth Frow, *Frederick Engels in Manchester and "The Condition of the Working Class in England" in 1844* (Salford: Working Class Movement Library, 1995).

[532] Engels likely only gained access to the Manchester slums because of his lover Mary Burns (1821–1863), a working-class Irish woman.

[533] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Electric Book, 2001), 80–81.

visited, where everywhere "a multitude of covered passages" were covered in "filth and disgusting grime the equal of which is not to be found," where "in dry weather, a long string of the most disgusting, blackish-green, slime pools are left standing … from the depths of which bubbles of miasmatic gas constantly arise and give forth a stench unendurable."[534] From these descriptions, one can see why Engels and Marx felt driven to write the Communist Manifesto only a few years later.[535]

The public was inevitably on the receiving end of new technologies and their impact on urban life. Their reactions could be as intense as Engels's, with some embracing the liberatory potential of technology and others agreeing with Engels's grim picture of urbanization. Pervasive technologies were something *done to them* and regular people felt uninvolved in the process of their production or the decision of whether such machines ought to be constructed. Yet many people were enthralled by the way technology transformed their physical and mental environments, while still others remained ambivalent, and many more became intensely critical and appalled and terrified by the social and moral problems for which the new technologies seemed responsible. Events such as the "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations," held in London in 1851 and later in Paris in 1865, bolstered competition between nations and fueled the desire for more technology even in the face of growing anxiety. Massive ships like the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*, whose launching in 1897 was attended by the Imperial family and 30,000 admiring spectators, contributed to the impression that size was a mark of strength and invincibility, that these new colossal creations had somehow become gods moving

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[534] Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class*, 109–110.
[535] Several novels appeared at this time also describing the horrors of the industrial city. For example, *Hard Times: For These Times* (1854) by Charles Dickens, *North and South* (1854) by Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Outpost* (1185–1886) by Bolesław Prus, and *Germinal* (1885) by Émile Zola. See also Jane Desmarais and David Weir, eds., *Decadence and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Charlotte Woodford and Benedict Schofield, *The German Bestseller in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Rochester: Camden House, 2012).

on earth.[536] That the ship was later sunk off the coast of Africa by the British cruiser *HMS Highflyer* during the First World War only underscored the ambivalent reaction that such machines inspired, that they could inspire wonder but also terror at the thought that humans were overstepping their limits and would be punished for usurping the role of God. As the Austrian author Karl Kraus (1874–1936) remarked following the sinking of the *Titanic*, "*sie haben Gott an die Maschine verraten*," and this was God's payback for worshiping machines.[537]

At the same time, futurists, anarchists, socialists, communists, and proto-fascists harnessed the tremendous power of industrial technology in order to imagine more perfect future worlds. Avant-garde thinkers, artists, inventors, engineers, scientists, and architects like Walter Gropius and Henry van de Velde joined in, envisioning a more humane and equitable future with people living in new and improved urban environments with modern forms of transportation, lighting, and sewage, and with access to better housing, more comfortable furniture and clothing, and new technologies and appliances like toasters, vacuum cleaners, and better cooking stoves to make daily life easier. In Vienna, Michael Thonet and Gebrüder Thonet Co. revolutionized furniture manufacturing and caused a sensation with their "Chair No. 14," which became a global success. The Deutsche Werkstätten in Dresden become among the first to implement standardized forms of mass-produced, machine-made furniture, streamlining the process and

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[536] Nils Schwerdtner, *German Luxury Ocean Liners: from Kaiser Wilhelm Der Grosse to Aidastella* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2013). The event was also documented on film and highly touted in the media. See Robert C. Reimer and Carol J. Reimer, *Historical Dictionary of German Cinema* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 5. The launch was even mentioned in *Harper's Weekly*, stating that "reports of her [Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse] behavior will be read with almost as much interest as one of Mr. Kipling's mechanical stories." See "This Busy World," *Harper's Weekly* (New York), Oct. 2, 1897.

[537] William M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History, 1848–1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 391; Karl Kraus, "Großer Sieg der Technik: Silbernes Besteck für zehntausend Menschen oder Furchtbare Versäumnisse: Gott hat nicht Schiffbau studiert," January, 1912, *textlog.de – Historische Texte & Wörterbücher*, https://www.textlog.de/35997.html.

producing furniture that was not only stylish but affordable.[538] In Weimar, Anni Albers, Gunta Stölzl, and other textile artists connected to the Bauhaus utilized new materials such as cellophane to minimize wrinkles in clothing and design to create surfaces that reflected light and absorbed sound.[539] Such innovations intensified the feeling that the physical environment was being transformed by humans into something exciting and inconceivably new.

Not only were time and space being reconfigured, but Andrew Carnegie offered people the opportunity to travel to the moon, staging an astronomical performance in his Music Hall in New York in 1892 entitled *A Trip to the Moon*. According to contemporary newspaper accounts, Carnegie managed with the latest technology to transport audiences to the moon, leaving them "spellbound."[540] The use of modern forms of technology to enchant people with new forms of magic was a phenomenon that went back to the 18th century with performers such as Isaac Fawkes in England, and later P. T. Barnum in America, who incorporated magic lanterns, optical illusions, automata, sleight of hand, ventriloquism, and hydraulics to spin webs of illusion over audiences that left them breathlessly trying to figure out every mechanical device behind the tricks.[541] Such magical abilities overlapped with the special effects of early cinema and the cinematograph, a device that distorted viewers' perception of reality, as described in Rudyard Kipling's story "Mrs Bathurst." In this tale, the central character becomes obsessed with the moving image of a woman he once had an affair with transported across space and time as the fleeting image of her in a film, which disrupts the boundary between artistic representation and

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[538] John V. Maciuika, *Before the Bauhaus: Architecture, Politics and the German State, 1890–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[539] Ulrike Muller, *Bauhaus Women: Art, Handicraft, Design* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009); Elizabeth Otto and Rössler Patrick, *Bauhaus Women: A Global Perspective* (London: Herbert Press, 2019).

[540] Artemis Willis, "'What the Moon is Like': Technology, Modernity, and Experience in a Late-Nineteenth-Century Astronomical Entertainment," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 15, no. 2 (2017): 175–203, 177.

[541] During, *Modern Enchantments*; Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Landy and Saler, eds., *The Re-Enchantment of the World*; Coudert, "Rethinking Max Weber's Theory of Disenchantment."

reality.[542] Nicholas Daly has argued that the encounter between humans and machines, which stimulated feelings of terror as well as fascination, can also be seen in the recurring trope of "a crash" in literature and film. In such scenarios, an individual, often a woman, is rescued from the path of train at the last moment, a symbolic expression capturing the impact of modernity on human life and the feeling that rapidly increasing industrialization and proliferation of machines presented an imminent threat to human beings.[543]

Psychological fears of a potential accident in connection to steam locomotives, automobiles, and airplanes produced empirical change in human mental and physical health, often in ways not intended by engineers and developers. When trains were introduced in Europe in the 19th century, for example, one of the unforeseen consequences was the emergence of new mental illnesses caused by train phobia. The tremendous power and speed of the railways become a subject of fascination for Europeans, who purchased tickets merely for the thrill of transcending the normal limits of time and space as they moved about the train. H.G. Wells, commenting in 1901, wrote that "[t]he nineteenth century, when it takes its place with the other centuries in the chronological charts of the future, will, if it needs a symbol, almost inevitably have as that symbol a steam engine running upon a railway."[544] The effect of railway travel was often referred to in terms of the "annihilation of space and time," as trains hurled along at over 30 miles an hour, much faster than horse travel.[545] While the trains provided access to previously unreachable places, it did so by annihilating space itself and the identity of a location, including that place's specialness. As the writer and art critic John Ruskin (1819–1900) observed,

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[542] Erik Barnouw, *The Magician and the Cinema* (New York: Oxford, 1981); Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76–109.
[543] Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity,* 10–33.
[544] H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought* (1901; Mineota: Dover, 1999), 3.
[545] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 33–44.

passengers ceased to be travelers who interacted with the places through which they traveled, but became "parcels" to be delivered.[546] However, as the first accidents began to occur in the 1850s, they were extensively covered in the local press and, as Hannu Salmi has pointed out, this coincided with new psychological cases of people who were nervous and afraid of being on the train when it went off the rails. Not only that, those people who had been aboard during accidents developed new kinds of injury both physical and psychological. The surgeon John Eric Erichsen at the time diagnosed a phenomenon called "Railway Spine," which he argued was the neurosis that resulted from train injuries and traumas.[547]

According to Berhard Rieger, one reason for this augmented reaction and fascination with new forms of technology was the disparity between the level of technical knowledge of the scientists, technicians, and engineers and the profound lack of expert knowledge on the part of everyone else. This discrepancy, Rieger argues, was in reality a "problem of knowledge."[548] The "everyone else," who were increasingly inundated with the mind-staggering pace of innovation, lacked sufficient background to understand the scientific research behind the machines and how they functioned. Only a select few possessed the expertise to understand the changes taking place, and even they struggled to situate and legitimate this new knowledge within traditional systems of understanding.[549] That modernity is often characterized by a sense of ambiguity is, according to some scholars, precisely because of the public's lack of knowledge and experience

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[546] Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey,* 38–39.

[547] Hannu Salmi, *Nineteenth-Century Europe: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 38; John Eric Erichsen, *On Concussion of the Spine, Nervous Shock and Other Obscure Injuries of the Nervous System: In Their Clinical and Medico-Legal Aspects* (London: Longmans, Green, 1875).

[548] Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

[549] On this problem, See Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, esp. Chapter 7; Mikael Hård and Andrew Jamison, *Hubris and Hybrids: A Cultural History of Technology and Science* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Schatzberg, *Technology*, esp. Chapter 7; Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), esp. Chapter 1.

regarding rapid technological change.[550] It was therefore not only technical experts but public writers and academics who were sought out to interpret the cultural and societal role of mass technological innovation.

Weber and Steiner lived in the middle of this dynamic period, and their ideas about technology and its relationship to human beings, nature, and society are best viewed against the backdrop of such changes. When Weber delivered his famous "Science as a Vocation" lecture to a crowd of students at the University of Munich in 1918, it was these questions they hoped he would answer. Similarly, when Steiner referred to American inventor John Keely and a motor that ran on "vibrations" in a lecture in 1906, it was in response to growing fears over the effect of machines on human souls. The discourse around technology and its counterpart modern science engrossed both public and academic debates, with Steiner and Weber participating, respectively, in these contexts. Steiner, although aware of the dangers of technology, embraced the new movements in the arts, such as the Bauhaus, and engaged in the actual practical work of constructing and creating new forms of art and architecture. Weber, on the other hand, remained a connected yet detached observer, interacting with the members of these groups and consuming and admiring their works. At the same time, he could not help being influenced and inspired by their ideas, and while he did not contribute to these new movements, he was like Steiner in that he was very interested in them and connected with many involved.

The Question of Technology

Already in the 19th century, Karl Marx had argued that the industrial competition among the ruling class capitalists and the drive for profit had engendered the technological innovations

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[550] Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, 11; Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983), 37–85.

and radical changes that proliferated in capitalist societies. He referred to this doctrine as the "materialist conception of history," and it was eventually encapsulated in the concept of "historical materialism," a method of historical analysis that rests of the conviction that economic changes are at the root of historical change.[551] Crucially, this conception of history involved considering that the desire for "labor saving" machines and forms of organization, for example in the factories, contributed to changes that accompanied modernity. In other words, the technology and the machines were no longer neutral but active participants in the unfolding drama of human history and therefore implicated in the casual factors of modern capitalism. Marx spotlighted the technological mechanisms by which the dying feudal order was displaced and superseded by a new societal system predicated on profit and the production of commodities. Under this new arrangement, some, if not all, wage earners would be negatively affected by machinery because there no longer existed a reason to pay wages to workers for tasks that could be done more cheaply by machines.

In making such formulations, Marx was drawing on and refining the ideas of British economist David Ricardo, who proclaimed in 1817 that "[h]e, indeed, who made the discovery of the machine, or who first usefully applied it, would enjoy an additional advantage, by making great profits…"[552] Thus, machinery accrued a level of value to the extent that machines replaced the productivity of actual wage earners. This was a crucial insight in the formulation of Marx's labor theory of value and his description of capital as "congealed labor" (*geronnene Arbeit*), in which capital represents the value of the means of production—buildings, machines, materials,

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[551] See especially Part I of Marx and Engels's *The German Ideology*, a text originally written between 1845–1846 but not published in full until 1932.

[552] David Ricardo, *The Principles of Political Economy & Taxation* (1817; London: J. M. Dent & sons, ltd.; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1912), 263. See also Johannes Hanel, *Assessing Induced Technology. Sombart's Understanding of Technical Change in the History of Economics* (Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 2008), 119–131.

etc. The value of the means of production was determined by the amount of labor necessary to produce a marketable commodity, and behind the means, of course, was the act of labor. Marx attributed an almost mystical power to the "capacity for labor," which he claimed consisted of "the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being."[553] In another place, he described this cryptic idea more vividly:

> Human labour-power in its fluid state, or human labour, creates value, but is not itself value. It becomes value in its coagulated state, in objective form. The value of the linen as a congealed mass of human labour can be expressed only as an 'objectivity', a thing which is materially different from the linen itself and yet common to the linen and all other commodities.[554]

Ernesto Screpanti has helpfully explained that this suggests abstract labor turns out to be, for Marx, a quasi-metaphysical energy, "a *flow* emanating from a labor power that is a physical thing; a *fluid* that congeals into an objective form; a *power* that creates an objective value."[555] Marx's use of the German word *geronnene* (to congeal) in relation to industrialized labor will be important when considering Weber's ideas about machinery later.

Technology nevertheless remained a mixed bag for Marx, exhibiting positive as well as negative effects. In his view, technological change instigated human progress through the rationalization of production, a process with which the old mercantile forms of economy based on authoritative models of absolutism and archaic agrarian practices could not compete. Such a process resulted in increased social detraditionalization.[556] But this progress came with a price, namely, the emergence of technophobia, for example, in England were the Luddites, a group of

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[553] Marx, *Capital. Vol. 1*, 270.
[554] Marx, *Capital. Vol. 1*, 142.
[555] Ernesto Screpanti, "Karl Marx on Wage Labor: From Natural Abstraction to Formal Subsumption," *Rethinking Marxism* 29, no. 4 (2017): 511–537, 517.
[556] Ross Abbinnett, *Marxism After Modernity: Politics, Technology and Social Transformation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1–3.

textile workers, responded to the introduction of labor-saving machines with outrage and violence, organizing an uprising to smash these machines. Their efforts incited the passing of a new law that protected technological property and criminalized destruction of machines through capital punishment, and the army itself was sent in the quell the Luddite rebellion in the 19th century.[557] This reaction to innovative technology, as Marx had correctly observed, meant that by the beginning of the 20th century the role of technology in society and culture had become an ambiguous yet hotly debated subject. By the outbreak of the First World War and the mass devastation occasioned by new forms of weaponry, technology seemed to have become a threat to the very existence of humanity, requiring an immediate solution.

During the interwar period the conversation about technology in Germany was fueled by worry and doubt, as well as by blame over the loss of the war. A debate between the educated intellectual class, the so-called *Bildungsbürgertum,* who traditionally filled the role of intellectual and social elites, and the technical engineers erupted in the public and private spheres, as each side tried to argue its position with respect to technology.[558] The engineers wanted technology to be considered cultural, as an art or science, in order to remove the blame from themselves for what transpired during the war, employing a classical argument for the ethical neutrality of technology.[559] The developing discussion revolved around the role of the state in controlling and regulating technology, as the engineers wanted their profession to be considered on a par with professions like law and medicine, which had cultural clout.[560] Proponents of technical progress sought to integrate technology into national culture without

[557] Salmi, *Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 18.
[558] For the definitive survey of this situation, see Herf, *Reactionary Modernism* and Schatzberg, *Technology*.
[559] Mikael Hård, "German Regulation: The Integration of Modern Technology into National Culture," in *The Intellectual Appropriation of Technology: Discourses on Modernity, 1900–1939*, eds. Mikael Hård and Andrew Jamison (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 33–67; Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, Ch. 7.
[560] Hård, "German Regulation,"34.

succumbing to a mechanical or materialistic worldview. This attempt was not without resistance, as doomsday prophets such as Ostwald Spengler (1880–1936) interpreted technology and materialism as inherently threatening. To some extent this was also true of Weber, who positioned himself in the *Bildungsbürger* tradition and held that educated elites were an indispensable part of culture and society and therefore should not be replaced by bureaucratic experts in the name of purely technical knowledge and rational efficiency.

In a certain sense, the years between 1914 and 1918 signified a sea change in Germany, in which the public's ambiguous or at times enthusiastic response to technological innovation took a darker turn. Anne Harrington describes how fractured nationalism, political instability, a seemingly out-of-control industrialization process, and a fear of the "Machine" persuaded many Germans to reconnect with "the Geist" of the German people, a natural vitalistic life force, instead of putting their faith in technological and industrial progress. This meant the educated class fragmented into a multifaceted array of positions about what to do about technology, with an equally fragmented, war-weary, and confused pubic following suit. As Harrington cogently explains,

> For many in the generation of the 1890s, the conclusion here was clear: the Machine in German culture had many faces, but the machine-like rationality of the natural sciences was the engine that drove the entire monster. If this was so, then it followed that emancipation from a Machine society would require a challenge to the basic consensus both about what knowledge was and about how it was to be achieved. The new generation began to insist that the goal of individual wholeness required that human beings no longer restricted themselves to *thinking* like machines; from the highest levels of academia on down, the call went out for a willingness to explore mental possibilities beyond those of dry empiricism and passive association of ideas.[561]

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[561] Harrington, *Reenchanted Science*, 25.

Here is where we must situate Weber and Steiner, both of whom, in their respective ways, called for more innovative ways to think about the pros and cons of technology. They were not alone, and their "calls" joined a chorus of others hoping to mobilize the benefits of machines, and the scientific rationale behind them, for the best possible outcome for Germany, or in some cases, for the whole of humanity.

Public conservative intellectuals such as Spengler prophesized the dangers of machines, while simultaneously reframing technology as a legacy of Western culture. When he published the first volume of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* in 1918, the book became a sensation, garnering mass attention from the public and intellectuals alike. Translated into English as *The Decline of the West*, the German word for the "West" used by Spengler is *Abendland* or "land of the evening," recalling the tradition of the Roman conception of *occidens* (i.e. Occcident) used to signify the direction of the setting sun.[562] The Protestant reformer Caspar Hedio coined the term in 1552 in response to Martin Luther's use of the word *Morgenland* to refer to the rising sun in his bible translation.[563] The word evoked the belief, popular in esoteric and religious circles at the time, that the light of spiritual knowledge had traveled from East (*Morgenland* or "land of the rising sun") to West—*ex oriente lux*—where it dimmed and required some form of a regeneration. This idea was introduced by people such as Schopenhauer but gained more popularity through the Theosophical Society and books such as Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* published in 1879.[564] By the publication of *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes)*, this "dimming" of Western consciousness had become increasingly linked to

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[562] For a concise definition of the word *Abendland*, see Günter Barudio, *Politik als Kultur: Ein Lexikon von Abendland bis Zukunft* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Matzler 1994), 1–4.

[563] Rodolphe Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task: A Study of a Philosophical Concept* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 95.

[564] See J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 67–70; Catherine Robinson, "Interpreter of Hinduism to the West? Sir Edwin Arnold's (Re)presentation of Hindu Texts and their Reception," *Religions of South Asia* 8, no. 2 (2014): 217–236.

industrial technology and a narrowly applied scientific rationality, which, for Spengler and many others (including Weber and Steiner), was the defining feature of the West because it was the region in which this form of cognition was fully developed. Due to the destructive nature of such knowledge, the spiritual foundations of the West needed to be reaffirmed.

Spengler continued as a prophet of doom, elaborating this vision in harsher terms in 1931 when he published a short book entitled *Der Mensch und die Technik*. Here, he argued that the great technological achievements of the West would be their destruction, that their spread across the globe would result in the utter annihilation nature and people:

> In a few decades most of the great forests have disappeared, have been transformed into newspaper and consequently climatic changes have occurred, which threaten the agriculture of entire populations; countless species like the buffalo have been completely or almost completely wiped out, entire races of men like the North American Indians and the Australian aborigines have been brought virtually to a state of extinction.[565]

More militaristic thinkers such as Ernst Jünger (1895–1998), an honored war veteran, argued that technology was potential energy that needed to be harnessed to create a utopic vision of Germany composed of battle-hardened workers.[566] The conservative jurist Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), a student of Weber's, echoed Jünger, endeavoring to subordinate technology to politics and law, taming it in the name of the state and neutralizing what he conceived of as the technical rationalization of politics and the atomization of society in the name of promoting liberal democracy.[567] The theologian Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) simultaneously argued that

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[565] Oswald Spengler, *Der Mensch und die Technik: Beitrag zu einer Philosophie des Lebens* (1931; Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1971), 54–55.

[566] See Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, Chapter 7. For much-needed updated account of Junger's ideas, see also Vincent Blok, *Ernst Jünger's Philosophy of Technology: Heidegger and the Poetics of the Anthropocene* (London: Routledge, 2017); Elliot Neaman, "Ernst Jünger and Storms of Steel," in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Marl J. Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 22–35.

[567] John P. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics As Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Chantal Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 1999).

technology should not be used for militaristic or nationalistic ends, but in order to relieve

individuals and collectives from the need to struggle for survival, that technology could free

people to develop their unique talents and abilities.[568]

These examples represent a sample of the ways in which the question of technology was

grappled with in Germany. One thing had become clear by the end of the First World War: an

answer was needed to save the world from plummeting into oblivion. This feeling resulted in

many intellectuals "going back" to scrutinize the recent developments of their own tradition.

Scholars have suggested Weber was influenced by the cry of "back to Kant," whereas Steiner

might be thought of as responding to the "back to Goethe" cry of the interwar period (although

Steiner had turned to Goethe as early as the 1880s).[569] Both men were responding to the same

social and philosophical situation and drew on many of the same sources to articulate their

unique visions of modernity and beyond. They provided explanations to account for the role of

the machine in history, describing apocalyptic future scenarios in which the threat of technology

remained central.

Rudolf Steiner and "Ahrimanic" Technology

„…direkt aus der Kraft der Elektrizität selber heraus Böses über die Erde kommt." ("…directly

from the power of electricity itself, evil comes over the earth.")

—Rudolf Steiner, 1917

Steiner concerned himself with what technology represented and sought to understand its

"purpose" for "human evolution." His ideas participated in the larger conversation that sought to

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[568] On Schweitzer, see Hård, "German Regulation," 41–42.
[569] On Weber and Neo-Kantians, see, for example, Willey, *Back to Kant,* 161–165; on "back to Goethe," see Harrington, *Reenchanted Science*, 29.

explain the "essence" of technology and present it as having an autotomy or objective intention, thereby fitting into the history of European thought and culture. Neither rejecting technology—in the pastoral sense of the traditional Romantics—nor advocating a salvific enthusiasm for politics and military technology to save the German nation, Steiner's belief in a spiritual entity called Ahriman allowed him to delineate a vision of the future that cast technology as a necessary evil, a stage in the spiritual evolution of humanity. Technology offered a test, an alchemical trial by fire, which had to be passed if humans were to reach full spiritual enlightenment. They could either allow themselves to be overcome by technology or they could master it in such a way as to enhance their spirituality. This was something he frequently had to remind his anxious followers.[570]

By 1904, he was warning audiences and pupils about the danger of overextended reliance on electricity, the mechanization of the physical body, and the merger of humans and machines. Building on the cosmology of Helena Blavatsky(1831–1891), founder of the Theosophical Society, Steiner developed an esoteric system in which "the Christ impulse"—a type of universal yet evolved spiritual condition—mediated between two opposing forces, Mephistophelean entities he called Lucifer and Ahriman. The latter, Ahriman, was adopted from the Zoroastrian religion. In Steiner's system, Ahriman represents the god of materialism, abstract intellectuality, and unfeeling mechanization.[571]

As Tim Rudbøg has pointed out, Ahriman was already an important figure in the "wisdom tradition" of Western esotericism, and in 1891 Blavatsky equated Ahriman with "evil

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[570] For example, he said in 1919 that the "many people who flee from external, materialistic knowledge are misconceiving their task and preparing the best possible incarnation for Ahriman in earth existence." See Steiner, *The Influences of Lucifer and Ahriman*, Lecture II, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA191/English/AP1993/19191102p01.html.

[571] Zoroastrianism and the figure of Ahriman were well-established in the German literary tradition by this time, for example, the poetry and translations of Friedrich Rückert, the linguistic studies of Franz Bopp, the religious studies of Max Müller, and the philosophical writings of Fredrich Nietzsche.

thought" and "artificial light," describing the "most cunning of Ahriman's productions" as the "perfection of war-engines of destruction … guns and smokeless powders, and weapons for the mutual murder and decimation of men."[572] While Rudbøg suggests Steiner "in all likelihood" was familiar with Blavatsky's article, it is important to keep in mind that Steiner rarely claimed to be creating ideas but asserted instead that he saw spiritual truths clairvoyantly and was letting out secrets that all the initiates could see, including Blavatsky. That Steiner later called his journal *Lucifer* while heading the German branch of the Theosophical Society suggests he was indeed familiar with Blavatsky's journal articles, especially something as recent and relevant as the piece on Ahriman.[573] However, this depends on whether such articles were translated into German, for while Steiner was able to read English (as evidenced by the several English volumes in his personal library), he was no expert.[574] Steiner's view of Ahriman was different from Blavatsky's, however, because he considered Ahriman part of a triad of forces, opposed by the fallen archangel Lucifer and balanced by the cosmic Christ. Ahriman is necessary *and* evil, perhaps inspired by Goethe's myth of creation, in which evil is recast as the natural polarity of good.[575]

In a lecture in Berlin, Steiner claimed that if humanity doesn't infuse spirituality into its technology, in the future a "War of all Against All [*Krieg aller gegen alle*] will break out in the most terrible way. Great and mighty forces will ensue from discoveries that will turn the entire

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[572] Helena Blavatsky, "The Devil's Own. Thoughts on Ormuzd and Ahriman," *Lucifer* 8, no. 43 (1891):1–9, 6–8. See also Tim Rudbøg, "The Incarnation of Ahriman: Rudolf Steiner and Modern Technology," in *Asem*, edited by Sergey Pakhomov (2017), 194–209. For the western esotericism as the real or imaged "wisdom traditions" pointed to over the years, see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*.

[573] Blavatsky's flagship publication for the Theosophical Society was also called "Lucifer."

[574] See Martina Maria Sam, *Rudolf Steiners Bibliothek: Verzeichnis Einer Büchersammlung* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2019).

[575] Rudbøg also mentions this possibility about Goethe. For an excellent outline of Goethe's creation myth, see Tantillo, *The Will to Create*, 20–27. The idea that evil was necessary to bring about salvation was also a long-standing part of Christian theodicy and the idea of "the fortunate fall"—*felix culpa*.

globe into a kind of self-functioning electrical apparatus"—a description that hints at the coming World Wide Web.[576] Steiner presented a mythopoetic version of Weber's iron cage, a war of human beings against a machine mentality that lacked an ethical foundation or any sense of compassion, not far from the plot of the *Terminator* franchise. He believed "a higher body is being prepared for us today—a body of the future"—but that Ahriman was attempting to deceive human beings into accepting technological evolution at the expense of spiritual evolution.[577]

As a result of WWI and the terrible carnage it caused, Steiner upped his rhetoric and warned in 1917 that "the welding together of human beings with machines will be a great and important problem for the rest of the earth-evolution." Anticipating something like artificial intelligence, he added that in the future we will have the ability to "create remarkable machines, but only those that will relieve man of work, because they will carry a certain power of intelligence within themselves."[578] With such statements, Steiner was not ignoring the weapons of destruction (which he commented on elsewhere) but highlighting that the boundary between humans and machines would become increasing blurred. Since the "energies" of labor were a unique aspect of being human, as Marx had argued, this implied that the *flow* of human essence and potentiality was in a process of transferring to the technology.

This increase in technological dependency and saturation became a significant concern for Steiner, as he foresaw such developments paving the way for Ahriman to gain total control over humanity. In his cosmology, Steiner connected this scenario to the mysteries of what he called "sub-nature," which represented the realm of electromagnetic forces and quantum scale

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[576] Rudolf Steiner, *The Temple Legend and the Golden Legend: Freemasonry & Related Occult Movements: from the Contents of the Esoteric School: Twenty Lectures given in Berlin between 23rd May 1904 and the 2nd January 1906*, trans. John M. Wood (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1997), 115–116.
[577] Steiner, *The Temple Legend*, 206.
[578] Rudolf Steiner, *The Wrong and Right Use of Esoteric Knowledge*, Lecture 3 (GA 178; London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1966), https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA178/English/RSP1966/19171125p02.html.

phenomena, a realm in which human beings could gain knowledge of nature and the innermost function of atoms. Although he explained to his followers that such developments were necessary and played an important role in "earthly evolution," he urged them to cultivate a spiritual life suitable to the modern condition as an antidote to being dragged into sub-nature through the forces of technology. Human beings living in a modern technological civilization needed to develop "inner strength *not to go under*," by which he meant *under nature*, the realm of the electrical.[579] Matter was the realm of Ahriman, the cosmos the realm of the gods, and therefore, according to Steiner, the further one penetrated into the earth the more "evil"—or at least "alien" to humans—the energies became.

The question of how to balance the scientific method and the experiential immediacy of nature remained an ongoing project for Steiner. A purely rational, human-centered methodology that did not admit the spiritual beings of the world or the inner spiritual constitution of the scientist resulted, according to Steiner, in the proliferation of technology and the destruction of the natural environment. "Spiritual science," on the other hand, allowed for a type of clairvoyance or higher "supersensible" cognition that could perceive living beings—what Steiner calls "elementals"—who exist behind nature and are responsible for its continuous production.

As with Goethe, Steiner's ideas about a non-materialistic science emerged from the same stream of esotericism as that of the mediaeval alchemists. Alchemists in general did not believe one could perform transmutation unless the alchemist was spiritually pure. This belief provided the joke, for example, at the center of Ben Jonson's play *The Alchemist*, first performed in 1610, in which the character who hires the alchemist is named "Mammon" and the alchemist, who is in reality a fraud, then claims he was unable to succeed because the experiment had been ruined by

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[579] Rudolf Steiner, "From Nature to Sub-Nature," *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*, March 1925, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA026/English/RSP1973/GA026_c29.html.

Mammon's greed.[580] The alchemists also believed that this purification process, which any true alchemist must undergo, was a redemption of sin by means of fire, a trial or initiation in which impurities are burned away.[581] The Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1875–1961) attributed this "trial" phase in the process of creating the philosopher's stone—which he believed was a spiritual process—as *calcination*, in which the spirit of the alchemist is cleansed by various means of burning in the refiner's fire.[582] Steiner's view of technology as a necessary evil linked to the demon Ahriman encapsulates this alchemical tradition of spiritual purification by means of an encounter with the forces of death and destruction. In Steiner's theosophical language, this trial by fire was linked to the karma of humanity, and only some would become conscious enough to cross to the other side to begin anew as more spiritually developed persons.

The notion that there is something inherently evil or harmful in the process of industry and manufacturing using the materials of the earth, especially iron, goes back to the ancient world. For example, the Greek poet Hesiod wrote of successive stages of human existence, casting his own period as the Iron Age, a time in which humanity had declined, where "men are constantly worn down, day and night, by toil and misery, and the gods shall lay harsh cares upon them."[583] Hesiod's description was echoed by the fourth-century Greek poet Aratus and later carried over to Rome by Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, and Ovid, where it became an identifiable classical trope denouncing the evils of technology, which included mining, smithing, forging, navigation, even commerce.[584]

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[580] Allison Coudert, *Alchemy, the Philosopher's Stone* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1980), 43, 86, 105.
[581] Coudert, *Alchemy*, 89.
[582] On Jung's view of alchemy, See Gerhard Adler, et al., *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 14. Mysterium Coniunctionis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).
[583] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 176–178, quoted in Emily A. McDermott, "'The Metal Face of the Age': Hesiod, Virgil, and the Iron Age on Cold Mountain," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 17, no. 2 (2010): 244–256, 247.
[584] McDermott, "'The Metal Face of the Age,'" 249–253.

Mircea Eliade underscored the "sexualization of the earth" in his book on alchemy, the process of signification by which earth and its resources had been feminized and conceptualized as "mother earth" or *Terra Mater*—a belief that lasted at least to the times of Bacon and Newton and the birth of experimental science, a methodology by which mother nature was forced against her will to reveal her mysteries.[585] As Eliade points out, the history of the "Rites and Mysteries of Metallurgy" showed that miners had rites and rituals such as fasting, meditation, prayers and acts of worship to maintain an inner state of purity as they extracted precious metals from mother earth. Their profession required it, as they were entering a sacred realm and would be disturbing the spirits who ruled there. Contact was established with "something sacred which has no part in the usual religious sphere—a sacredness more profound and more dangerous." The feeling behind such practices, according to Eliade, had to do with the "mysteries of mineral gestation" taking place "in the bowels of the Earth Mother." Discovering such resources and extracting them was "meddling with the natural order of things ruled by some higher law and intervening in a secret and sacred process."[586] Such practices speak to what Carolyn Merchant referred to as "the death of nature," whereby modern technology turns nature (along with everything else) into a commodity to be exploited.[587]

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[585] Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), Chapter 4.

[586] All quotations Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, 56. This tradition continues today, for example in Peru, where demons known as *muki* are believed to inhabit the mines, and workers must leave patron statues of the creatures at the various entrances to the underworld in order to appease them. See Guillermo Salas Carreño, "Mining and the Living Materiality of Mountains in Andean Societies," *Journal of Material Culture* 22, no. 2 (2017): 133–150.

[587] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980). The story of the demon Ashmedai, King Solomon, and the building of the Temple in the Talmudic literature offers another example of how direct evil is connected to stealing resources from earth. In the well-known account, Yahweh forbids King Solomon from using iron tools in the building the Temple, and in response he consults his sages, who tell him he must locate the magical worm *shamir* that can pulverize rocks with its mere touch. But in order to obtain this magical worm, Solomon must capture the demon king Ashmedai, which Solomon succeeds in doing, after which he obtains the *shamir* and builds the Temple. This story was used as a way of interpreting the passage in 1 Kings 6:7 that claims neither "hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron" could be heard during the Temple's construction. Such interpretations gave rise to the folkloric tradition of Solomon, as master wizard, summoning demons to build the Temple for him, pressing evil into the service of good. Yet even Solomon, it seems, had not been spiritual enough, and in some accounts his lack of absolute purification was blamed for his

Steiner offered his own account of this dynamic between nature, technology, and evil in his four *Mystery Dramas*, theatrical plays he produced to convey his esoteric teachings. The first play, *The Portal of Initiation*, was modeled on Goethe's *Märchen von der grünen Schlange und der schönen Lilie* and premiered in Munich in 1910. These dramas feature a character named Strader, an inventor and a scientist. In the fourth scene of *The Portal of Initiation*, Strader and another character, Professor Capesius are brought into the "soul world," where they gaze over the expanse of the earth and encounter the "Spirit of the Elements," a representative of the forces of nature.[588] Capesius is meant to represent a "luciferic" tendency, Strader the "ahrimanic." Both men speak of their forms of human knowledge, the one scientific and the other a rational love of learning, suggesting that "man's best observation and research" can arrive at truth, and that by such means "nature stands transformed, idealized through man's creative work."[589] As they speak, thunder sounds and lightning flashes, and the Spirit of the Elements replies,

> Ye well can see, how little your bold words
> Bear weight in my domain: they do but loose
> The storm, and rouse the elements to wrath,
> As adversaries of the ordered world.[590]

In other words, the result of applying rational human-centered research to the realm of nature does not and cannot produce truth, but instead sends the elemental beings into a chaos. At this

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downfall and the Temple's ultimate destruction. For the scholarship on this story, see Joseph M. Davis, "Solomon and Ashmedai (bGittin 68a–b), King Hiram, and Procopius: Exegesis and Folklore," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 106, no. 4 (2016): 577–585; Raʿanan Boustan and Michael Beshay, "Sealing the Demons, Once and for All: The Ring of Solomon, the Cross of Christ, and the Power of Biblical Kingship," *Archiv Für Religionsgeschichte* 16, no. 1 (2015): 99–129.

[588] Rudolf Steiner, *Die Pforte der Einweihung. Ein Rosenkreuzermysterium* (GA 14; Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, Brigham Young University, 2010), 55–67. English translations for "Scene Four" taken from *Rudolf Steiner Archive*, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA014/English/APC1925/GA014-1_scene04.html.

[589] „So wäre vor den Ewigkeiten ein irrer Wahn, was Wahrheit scheint dem besten Menschenforschen!"; „Und wenn Natur, zu Idealen verklärt, ersteht in Menschenwerken, ist sie belohnt genug durch ihre echte Spiegelung." Steiner, *Die Pforte der Einweihung*, 59, 61.

[590] „Ihr konntet sehen, wie wenig eure kühnen Worte in meinem Reiche gelten. Den Sturm entfesseln sie, und Elemente rufen sie zu aller Ordnung Gegnern auf." Steiner, *Die Pforte der Einweihung*, 62.

point, the Spirit of the Elements departs and another character in the play, the "Other Maria,"

emerges from the rocks in astral form and covered in precious stones. Maria represents the lily

from the Goethe's fairy tale, but in this form, as the "Other Maria" (*die andre Maria*), she

represents the serpent. Yet the Other Maria is a multivalent symbol, also representing the earth

itself, especially as the being who seeks to "clothe the rock's own will in human words" and

"think the Earth's own thoughts in human heads."[591] She represents mediation—that is, science

and technology—as both presume to translate the "earth's own thoughts" into human language.

However, the Other Maria is a living spiritual mediator, and not an inanimate technical one.

What follows is a discourse in which both parties attempt to speak, the one in the language of

nature, the others in the language of science and rationality, but they are not able to understand

one another. Their words must be translated by the other into their own language in order to be

understood.[592] In their quest for wisdom and knowledge, the Other Maria beseeches the two men

to "renounce your spirit's pride" and "forget what reason doth command"; let "the touch of

nature conquer you," and "in your men's breasts let your child-soul have sway."[593] Strader

rejects such words, claiming that this is not the path appropriate for human thinking, that "in our

language" (of science and rationality), such talk is called "Schwärmerei," a derogatory term

denoting unrealistic enthusiasm or emotional fanaticism, originally coined by Luther and other

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[591] This is my translation: „Ich ringe mich durch Felsengründe und will der Felsen eignen Willen in Menschenworte kleiden; Ich wittre Erdenwesenheit und will der Erde eignes Denken im Menschenkopfe denken; Ich wittre Erdenwesenheit und will der Erde eignes Denken im Menschenkopfe denken." Steiner, *Die Pforte der Einweihung*, 64. On the symbolism in Steiner's mystery plays, see Alexander G. Höhne, *Spiegelmetaphorik in Rudolf Steiners "Vier Mysteriendramen": Textsemantische Untersuchungen* (Tübingen: A. Francke, 2006); Adrian Anderson, "Anthroposophy: Identification and Contextualization of Primary Features of Rudolf Steiner's 'Anthroposophy', As Expressed in His 'Mystery Drama', Die Pforte Der Einweihung (the Portal of Initiation)" (PhD Diss., University of Otago, 2005); Edmund B. Lingan, *The Theatre of the Occult Revival: Alternative Spiritual Performance from 1875 to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[592] For this insight I am indebted to anthroposophical author and dramatist Richard Ramsbotham, who has presented on the symbolism of this scene in several anthroposophical venues.

[593] „Vergessen, was Vernunft gebeut, Natursinn erst erobern eurem Wesen, in Mannesbrust die Kindesseele, von des Gedankens Schattenbildern unberührt Natürlich walten lassen." Steiner, *Die Pforte der Einweihung*, 66.

early Protestants to describe "fanatics" who deviated from the official Reformation movement.[594] The final message here is that science and technology applied in a strictly rational sense, devoid of "touch" and the "child-soul," effectively prohibits access to the realm of nature and disenchants it.

Steiner's apprehensive attitude toward technology was less about the development and deployment of machines than about concern over the "non-spiritual" logic *behind their implementation*, especially in relation to human beings and nature. In a lecture given in 1914 on "Technology and Art," he elaborated on this picture by describing the process by which "Ahrimanic spirits" came into existence.[595] Here Steiner describes how people have been ripped from their connection to nature through the experience of "modern life," the "hammering and knocking of the ahrimanic spirits," the result of extracting resources from nature and refashioning them into machines based on the laws of natural science. According to Steiner, two stages inform this process: first, "smashing and wearing down the interrelationships in nature"; and second, "taking what we have extracted from nature and putting it together again as a machine according to the laws we know as natural laws."[596] The elemental sprits of the natural world are driven out through the process of destroying nature and replaced by Ahrimanic spirits of the new machines constructed around abstract principles. As Rudbøg explains,

> when the structures of nature are broken down and reduced to material, to building
> blocks for artificial structures, these are not without life, but the new lives that

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[594] See Manfred Engel, „Die Rehabilitation des Schwärmers. Theorie und Darstellung des Schwärmens in Spätaufklärung und früher Goethezeit," in *Der ganze Mensch. Anthropologie und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schings (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994), 469–498; „Das ‚Wahre', das ‚Gute' und die ‚Zauberlaterne der begeisterten Phantasie.' Legitimationsprobleme der Vernunft in der spätaufklärerischen Schwärmerdebatte," *German Life and Letters* 62 (2009): 53–66.
[595] Rudolf Steiner, "Technology and Art," in *Art as Seen in the Light of Mystery Wisdom* (Rudolf Steiner Press, 1984), available online at https://wn.rsarchive.org/Arts/GA275/English/RSP1984/19141228p02.html.
[596] Steiner, "Technology and Art."

incarnate in these structures are ahrimanic spirits. We are thus consciously producing a whole new type of existence for ourselves…[597]

Wolfgang Schivelbusch has analyzed the horrifying yet captivating effect the oscillating movement of pistons—a movement not found in nature—had on 19th century European psyches. This abnormal, monotonous, mechanical movement was similar to Steiner's "knockings" of modern life.[598] The pistons of the steam engine eventually became analogous to the cylinders of the firearm, as both produced "power out of nowhere," whereas, prior to the invention of the piston-driven steam engines, which produced power out of a vacuum, motion had to be "removed, or *borrowed*, from an external natural source (wind, water, animal) and transferred *to* the tool or machine or vehicle in question."[599] Elsewhere, Steiner explicitly makes the connection between demons and the steam engine. By citing the passage from Genesis 2:7, in which the "the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," Steiner claims the creative activity of Yahweh is associated with the element of air. Consequently,

> man chases Yahweh away when he creates a space of rarified air! Ahriman gains the opportunity to establish himself as a demon right into the physical by constructing the steam engine in this way. When one constructs the steam engine, one provides an opportunity for the embodiment of demons.[600]

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[597] Rudbøg, "The Incarnation of Ahriman," 204.

[598] Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 7–12.

[599] Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 16.

[600] This is my translation: „Während Jahve in den Menschen hereinströmt durch die Luft, verjagt der Mensch den Jahve, wenn er den luftverdünnten Raum herstellt! Ahriman gewinnt die Möglichkeit, bis in die Physis herein sich als Dämon festzusetzen, indem auf diese Weise die Dampfmaschine konstruiert wird. Wenn man die Dampfmaschine konstruiert, gibt man Gelegenheit zur Verkörperung der Dämonen." Rudolf Steiner, *Das Karma des Berufes des Menschen in Anknüpfung an Goethes Leben* (GA 172; Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, Brigham Young University, 2010), 192.

This means that our "great, admirable progress has brought about not only demonology, but a demonic magic, and modern technology is often demonic magic."[601]

However, Steiner was not a Luddite, and in 1914 he admonished his audience that "it would be all wrong, if you were to now say, that you have to resist what technology has brought us in modern life, you have to beware of Ahriman, you just have to withdraw from this modern life."[602] What Steiner meant by this statement is that modern technology was not to be rejected but "moralized." As he said in a 1906 lecture, the "mechanical and the moral must interpenetrate each other, because the technical is nothing without the moral."[603] Steiner described moralized technology as an "etheric technology." This idea was based on an earlier American theosophist inventor named John Keely, who purported to have developed the "Keely Motor" which ran on the "vibratory sympathy" and "etheric forces" of the operator.[604] Steiner's version of this type of "etheric technology" placed more emphasis on the "moral forces" of the operator to make the machine function. He told his audience that Keely

> was not deceiving people about this; for he had in him that driving force originating in the soul, which can set machines in motion. A driving force which can only be moral, that is the idea of the future; a most important force, with which culture must be inoculated, if it is not to fall back on itself.… In the future machines will be driven not only by water and steam, but by spiritual force, by spiritual morality.[605]

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[601] „Der neuere große, bewundernswerte Fortschritt hat nicht nur eine Dämonologie gebracht, sondern eine Dämono-magie, und die moderne Technik ist vielfach Dämonomagie." Steiner, *Das Karma des Berufes des Menschen*, 193.
[602] „Es wäre das Allerfalscheste, wenn man nun etwa sagen würde, da müsse man sich sträuben gegen das, was nun einmal die Technik uns in dem modernen Leben gebracht hat, man müsse sich hüten vor dem Ahriman, man müsse sich eben zurückziehen von diesem modernen Leben." Rudolf Steiner, *Kunst im Lichte der Mysterienweisheit* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990), 26.
[603] Steiner, *The Temple Legend*, 285.
[604] Relatively little has been published on John Worrell Keely. See, for example, Theo Paijmans, *Free Energy Pioneer: John Worrell Keely* (Kempton, Ill: Adventures Unlimited Press, 2004).
[605] Steiner, *The Temple Legend*, 285.

In other words, machines would not work by running electricity into them, but rather by whether or not the operator was a spiritually good person and the vibrations that person introduced. In the mystery dramas described above, the character Strader invents a machine that works in exactly this way, referred to as "Der Strader-Apparat" by anthroposophists. One of Steiner's followers, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, attempted to create such a device based on indications given personally to him by Steiner, but he was unsuccessful. This led Steiner to conclude that human beings were not yet ready for such power.[606] However, attempts to design such machines continue to this day.[607]

As we have seen, Steiner's deep ambivalence about the technologies that had developed in his lifetime and his fear of the kinds of technologies that might be produced in the future were central to his esoteric philosophy. The figure of Ahriman symbolized these fears and occupied a central position in his mystical vision of humanity's future. In 1909, he predicted that Ahriman would incarnate in the third millennium after the birth of Christ:

> just as there was an incarnation of Lucifer at the beginning of the third pre-Christian millennium, as there was the Christ Incarnation at the time of the Mystery of Golgotha, so there will be, also around the third post-Christian millennium, a Western incarnation of the being of Ahriman sometime after our present Earth existence.[608]

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[606] T.H. Meyer, *Ehrenfried Pfeiffer. A Modern Quest for the Spirit* (Chestnut Ridge: Mercury Press, 2010), 167. For more information about Steiner's indications for building such devices, see Paul Eugen Schiller, *The Schiller File: Supplements to the Collected Edition of Rudolf Steiner* (Delabole: Henry Goulden Books, 2007).

[607] Although Steiner appears to have rejected making these kinds of devices on the grounds that they could be misused, contemporary anthroposophists are still trying to create them. See Linus Feiten, "Rudolf Steiner on Technology. A Review," trans. David Heaf, *Jupiter* 7 (2012): 3–64. See also Paul Emberson, *Machines and the Human Spirit: The Golden Age of the Fifth Kingdom* (Edinburgh: Dewcross Centre for Moral Technology, 2013).

[608] „Geradeso wie es eine Inkarnation Luzifers im Beginn des 3. vorchristlichen Jahrtausends gegeben hat, wie es die Christus-Inkarnation gegeben hat zur Zeit des Mysteriums von Golgotha, so wird es einige Zeit nach unserem jetzigen Erdendasein, etwa auch im 3. nachchristlichen Jahrtausend, eine westliche Inkarnation des Wesens Ahriman geben." Rudolf Steiner, *Der Innere Aspekt des sozialen Rätsels; Luziferische Vergangenheit, Ahrimanische Zukunft* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989), 165.

His followers developed this idea, to the point that anthroposophists today commonly believe that once the proper global technological infrastructure is in place, Ahriman will incarnate in the "West."[609] Steiner provided descriptions regarding the potential future of the earth, foreseeing the construction of a virtual or artificial double earth referred to as the "eighth sphere" (*achte sphäre*)—earth being the "fourth sphere" in the theosophical cosmology. This eighth sphere would be constructed of the densest forms of matter and ruled over by Ahriman (with the help of Lucifer) to entrap unwitting souls who succumbed to materialism and spiritless technology and who were consequently unable to progress spiritually.[610] Steiner warned that Lucifer and Ahriman "could succeed in destroying our Earth and in leading over all evolution … into the Eighth Sphere, so that Earth-evolution as a whole would take a different course."[611]

Elsewhere he added that people who live an immoral life by thinking only of themselves enter a condition of *avitchi*, a Sanskrit and Pali word signifying the nethermost region of hell in some Buddhist traditions. In the theosophical canon, Blavatsky explained that *avitchi* was not a specific location, like the Christian idea of hell, but "a state and a condition, and the tortures therein are all mental."[612] According to Steiner, the people in this condition are destined for the eighth sphere:

> If man uses life on earth only to gather what serves him alone, only to experience an elevation of his own egotistical self, in Devachan this leads to the state of Avitchi. The person who cannot get out of this peculiar condition comes to Avitchi. All these Avitchi people will one day become inhabitants of the eighth sphere. Avitchi is the preparation for the eighth sphere. The other people become

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[609] As a contemporary example of this line of thinking, see Nicanor Perlas, *Humanity's Last Stand: The Challenge of Artificial Intelligence, a Spiritual-Scientific Response* (Forest Row: Temple Lodge, 2018).

[610] Steiner mentioned the concept of the eighth sphere on numerous occasions, but especially see Rudolf Steiner, *Occult Movements of the 19th Century* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1973), 79–102.

[611] Steiner, *Occult Movements of the 19th Century*, Lecture 5, also available online at https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19151018p01.html.

[612] Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, *vol. IX* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1974), 136.

inhabitants of the continuous chain of evolution. The religions have formulated "hell" from this concept.[613]

The idea of an "eighth sphere" was important for Blavatsky, as well. She described the realm as "the allegorical Hades, and the Gehenna of the Bible," where souls went to be destroyed through "vice, fearful crimes and animal passions."[614] According to Blavatsky, "[t]his Gehenna, termed by the occultists the eighth sphere … is merely a planet like our own."[615] Jeffrey Lavoie points out that another concept, the "Planet of Death," introduced in the "Mahatma letters"— paranormal messages inspired by disembodied spiritual leaders of the Theosophical Society— was perhaps inadvertently merged with the concept of the eighth sphere to make both terms synonymous.[616] Although they sound similar, by connecting Ahriman with the eighth sphere Steiner endeavored to differentiate his notion of the eighth sphere from other theosophical interpretations, particularly that of British theosophist A. P. Sinnett, who described it as a place of annihilation for the soul.[617]

To his vision of the eighth sphere, Steiner combined an esoteric reading of the Book of Revelation. In line with the theosophical cosmology of involution and evolution, which held that

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[613] My translation: „Wenn der Mensch das Leben auf der Erde nur dazu benützt, zu sammeln, was ihm allein dient, um nur eine Erhöhung seines eigenen egoistischen Selbstes zu erfahren, so führt das im Devachan in den Zustand des Avitchi. Der Mensch, der nicht aus der Sonderheit heraus kann, kommt nach Avitchi. Alle diese Avitchi-Menschen werden einmal Bewohner der achten Sphäre. Avitchi ist die Vorbereitung zur achten Sphäre. Die anderen Menschen werden Bewohner der fortlaufenden Evolutionskette. Die Religionen haben aus diesem Begriffe die «Hölle» formuliert." Rudolf Steiner, *Grundelemente der Esoterik* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1987), 112–113. This means that people "live together" with ahrimanic beings in the eighth sphere. See also Rudolf Steiner, *The Mission of the Archangel Michael* Lecture III, (Spring Valley: The Anthroposophic Press, 1961), https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/MissMich/19191123p01.html.

[614] H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology, 2 vols* (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877), I:352.

[615] Blavatsky, *Isis, vol. I*, 328–329.

[616] Jeffrey Lavoie, "Saving Time: Time, Sources, and Implications of Temporality in the Writings of H. P. Blavatsky" (PhD Diss., University of Exeter, 2015), 10, 115.

[617] A. P. Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883; London: Trübner & Co., 1885), 162. Sinnett went into great detail concerning the eighth sphere in *Esoteric Buddhism*. Steiner later attacked his interpretation, accusing Sinnett of being deliberately misleading. See Steiner, *Occult Movements*, 79–102.

spiritual beings incarnate and evolve though different complex stages of matter, Steiner claimed

that during the opening of the seven seals of the Book of Revelation, humanity would be split

into two different species (*die gute und die böse Rasse*).[618] One species will develop spiritually

and accept the love and the Christ-impulse. The other species will reject this spirituality in favor

of egotism, materialism, and the conscious committing of evil:

> After the War of All against All, there will be two currents of humanity: on the one hand that of Philadelphia with the principle of progress, inner freedom, brotherly love, a small cluster made up of every tribe and nation; and on the other hand the great mass of those who will be lukewarm, the remains of those who are now becoming lukewarm, the current of Laodicea [in the biblical text] … little by little the evil current will be led over to good by the good race, by the good current. This will be one of the main tasks after the great War of All against All: to rescue what can be rescued from those who, after the great war, will only strive to fight one another and let the "I" express itself in extreme egoism.[619]

Steiner's belief that a massive increase in technology was on the horizon and that this would lead

to a war of all against all was a major theme in his writing and something his adherents took very

seriously. While informing his followers of this threat, Steiner seems, somewhat paradoxically,

to be telling them not to resist or halt the coming techno-tide that will culminate in the living

incarnation of the lord of evil, Ahriman. Rather, the entire situation is presented as necessary, as

a *felix culpa*. The mission was to become more spiritually conscious so that following the War of

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[618] See Rudolf Steiner, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes* (GA 104; Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, Brigham Young University, 2010), Chapter VIII, http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/vortraege/104.pdf. I use the word "species" here in place of "race" in order to avoid constructivist connotations, as Steiner seems to suggest that these two groups will in fact have different physical constitutions.

[619] „Nach dem Kriege aller gegen alle wird es zwei Strömungen unter den Menschen geben: auf der einen Seite die von Philadelphia mit dem Prinzip des Fortschrittes, der inneren Freiheit, der Bruderliebe, ein kleines Häuflein, aus allen Stämmen und Nationen sich zusammensetzend, und auf der anderen Seite die große Masse derer, die da lau sein werden, die Überbleibsel derer, die jetzt lau sein werden, die Strömung von Laodizea … nach und nach durch die gute Rasse, durch die gute Strömung die böse Strömung hinübergeführt wird zum Guten. Das wird eine der Hauptaufgaben sein nach dem großen Kriege aller gegen alle: zu retten, was zu retten ist aus denjenigen, die nach dem großen Kriege nur das Bestreben haben werden, einander zu bekämpfen, das Ich ausleben zu lassen im äußersten Egoismus." Steiner, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes*, 135.

All against All, the small cluster "of every tribe and nation" may "rescue what can be rescued" among those who have been dragged into the realm of sub-nature and "only strive to fight one another." This situation, culminating in the splitting of humanity and the realm of the eighth sphere, functions in Steiner's cosmological philosophy as a way to address the question of theodicy and explain why there must be evil. Indeed, the encounter with evil, the acceptance of it, and the consequent transformation of evil into the good is part of humanity's destiny.

For Steiner and his followers, new technologies have tremendous metaphysical weight attached to them. Yet the "evils" such machines and forces visit upon humanity are necessary, however difficult it is to accept this scenario. Steiner makes this clear in yet another lecture on the theme of modern machines and Ahriman, emphasizing the difference between the realm of nature and the artificial realm of modern societies, where we are surrounded by "mechanisms" (*Mechanismen*) of our own creation.[620] He reiterates that the act of "putting together physical materials" will always provide "an opportunity for an Ahrimanic demonic servant to unite with the machine," and that "a mechanism that we have built is something completely different from nature outside, which is built up and fitted together as a whole by the elementals."[621] We thus live with these demonic spirits and "permeate ourselves with them; we permeate ourselves not only with the squeaking and creaking of mechanisms, but also with that which in the most eminent sense has something destructive for our spirit, for our soul."[622]

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[620] All quotations in the following passage are my translation and taken from Steiner, *Menschenschicksale und Völkerschicksale*, 97–98.

[621] „Sondern dadurch, daß wir Teile der Materie zusammenfügen, geben wir jedesmal Gelegenheit, daß ein ahrimanisch dämonischer Diener sich mit der Maschine vereinigt." „Ein Mechanismus, den wir auf erbaut haben, ist aber etwas ganz anderes als die Natur draußen, die auferbaut ist von den Elementargeistern."

[622] „Wir durchdringen uns mit ihnen; wir durchdringen uns nicht nur mit dem Gequietsche und Geknarre der Mechanismen, sondern auch mit dem, was im eminentesten Sinne für unseren Geist, für unsere Seele etwas Zerstörendes hat."

While this picture is frightening, he reminds his audience that it is the exact opposite and absolutely essential for the ultimate good of humankind: "what I say is not meant to be a criticism of our Ahrimanic age. For it must be this way, that we allow demons to pour in everywhere and let them surround us. That lies within the development of humanity."[623] It is not necessary to avoid modern life or establish a colony somewhere away from civilization, in which all modern innovations are shunned. Rather, Steiner's message seems to be, first, to allow these demons to enter us, and second, to spiritualize them and lead them to the good through one's own spiritual development.

Weber and the „stahlharte Gehäuse"

"Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved."

—Goethe quoted by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Weber described modern society as trapped inside an iron cage of reason—or, literally, a "hard-as-steel housing" (*stahlharte Gehäuse*). While some scholars have translated this notion as "the iron cage," it is important to note that Weber did not use a German word for cage (*Käfig* or even *Gehegen*), but a word signifying a connection to the house or home. A prisoner can break out of a cage, but the house is where we live and have our being, affecting everything including our thoughts and emotions. For the sake of comparing Weber's ideas to Steiner's, however, I will employ Talcott Parsons's traditional English translation of "the iron cage" to stress the lack of

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[623] „…es soll das, was ich sage, nicht eine Kritik unseres ahrimanischen Zeitalters sein. Denn das muß so sein, daß wir überall Dämonen hineinströmen lassen und uns von ihnen umgeben lassen. Das liegt in der Entwickelung der Menschheit."

freedom and the sense of being trapped, as well as the idea that the dangers of technology are closely connected to and reside within human beings.

Weber's clearest description of technology appeared in his political writings, in which he refers to a machine as "congealed spirit" (*geronnener Geist*).[624] Weber's use of the noun *Geist* is significant and when connected with the old-fashioned and pejorative adjective *geronnen* suggests something living that has been fixed or lost its spiritual vitality, as *geronnen* is an old-fashioned word with an extremely negative meaning. While generally translated as "congealed," it may be translated as "ruined" or "extinct." Weberians have puzzled over this odd-sounding phrase, conjecturing that it is a reference to Marx's concept of capital as "congealed labor" (*geronnene Arbeit*), a concept Weber would have known.[625] However, this doesn't explain Weber's use of this specific word *Geist* in connection with technology. The exact phrase *geronnener Geist* was popularized in 1798 by the romantic thinker and Christian theosophist Franz von Baader (1765–1841), who had argued that matter is congealed spirit (*Materie als geronnener Geist*).[626] Baader played a key role in romanticism and Weber and his contemporaries were strongly influenced by many romantic thinkers. It is more likely that instead of referring to Marx, Weber used this phrase in the context of his colleague Werner Sombart's idea of the "spirit of technology" (*Geist der Technik*), which both men discussed at this time. The expression plays a distinct and central role in European romanticism, which had a profound effect on Weber and his contemporaries. These influences suggest that Weber's view

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[624] Weber, *Political Writings*, 158.

[625] Lassman and Speirs suggest Marx. See Weber, *Political Writings*, 158.

[626] See Alberto Bonchino, *Materie Als Geronnener Geist: Studien Zu Franz Von Baader in Den Philosophischen Konstellationen Seiner Zeit* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014). On Baader's connection to Christian theosophy in the sense of mystics Jakob Böhme, Meister Eckhart, and Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, see Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Crossroad Pub, 2001), 1–2; Ernst Benz, *Les sources mystiques de la philosophie romantique allemande* (Paris: Vrin, 1968), 1; Roland Pietsch, "Franz von Baader's Criticism of Modern Rationalism," *Sophia Perennis* 2, no. 2 (2010): 15–29; Antoine Faivre, *Franz Von Baader Et Les Philosophes De La Nature* (Stuttgart: Eruc Schmidt Verlag, 1979).

of technology was shaped to some degree by the negative view of technology prevalent among

Romantics and shared by Sombart and Steiner.

Alberto Bonchino has demonstrated that Baader influenced the ideas of another romantic

philosopher, Friedrich Schelling, who acknowledged the expression in *Von der Weltseele*, which

also appeared in 1798, though Schelling retooled the phrase to make it his own, speaking of the

universe in terms of *geronnene logos* or *Wort*.[627] In Schelling's transcendental idealism, nature

becomes petrified or frozen intelligence. Both Baader and Schelling borrowed the expression

from an earlier contemporary, the Dutch philosopher and writer Frans Hemsterhuis (1721–1790),

who argued that the physical body was congealed spirit (*geronnener Geist*) and thus the universe

was God congealed (*geronnener Gott*).[628] Hemsterhuis belonged to the Münster circle of

Princess Amalie von Gallitzin, a group frequented by romantic thinkers such as Friedrich

Heinrich Jacobi and Johann Georg Hamann.[629] While Hemsterhuis may be the main source of

this expression for the German Romantics, Alberto Bonchino suggests Hemsterhuis may have

taken if from the occultist and mesmerist Karl Heinrich von Gleichen.[630] At any rate, this idea

influenced Goethe, who spoke of *geronnener Geist* in relation to the divine and nature.[631]

Schelling's son identified another source of the expression in Georg Bernhard Bilfinger (1693–

1750) as early as 1750 in the context of Leibniz's theory of monads.[632]

The expression turned up again in Weber's time in the work of the historian and writer

Ricarda Huch (1864–1947), who sometimes used the male pseudonym Richard Hugo. In a two-

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[627] Bonchino, *Materie Als Geronnener Geist*, 15–18. See also Michael Franz, *Schellings Tübinger Platon-Studien* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 80–82.
[628] Bonchino, *Materie Als Geronnener Geist*, 16.
[629] Siegfried Sudhof, "Gallitzin, Amalia Fürstin," *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 6 (1964): 51–53, https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118537342.html#ndbcontent.
[630] Bonchino, *Materie Als Geronnener Geist*, 68–72.
[631] Check this, how and did Goethe actually use it? Yes he did, he has a poem called this, and a passage in a poem.
[632] Bonchino, *Materie Als Geronnener Geist*, 20–21.

volume work on the Romantics, Huch re-established the importance of Hemsterhuis's expression for the German romantic tradition.[633] While Weber never mentions this book, Huch was close friends with Marie Baum (1874–1964), one of Marianne Weber's closest friends in the Women's movement in Heidelberg and a member of the circle that met at the Webers' house.[634] Baum was friends with Else Jaffé and took over for her in her position as a factory inspector in Heidelberg, a role Weber had secured for her. In the years following Weber's death, Huch moved to Heidelberg to live with Baum and befriended Marianne and the three women developed a strong bond. In other words, there is no way Weber could not have known about Huch and her work. The important point is that Weber's use of this expression is best interpreted, on the one hand, as participating in German romantic thought, and on the other, as inspired by the work of Sombart.[635] These streams draw Weber closer to Steiner, a thinker more overtly connected to romantic thought.

Both Weber and Steiner were anxiously worried about a specific type of intelligence or expression of human spirit (*Geist*). Steiner referred to this thought style as materialism, whereas Weber articulated it as a form of rationality focused on means-centered achievement of goals, instead of what he referred to as "ultimate values" that took into account morality and ethics. The means-end type of social action, Weber terms *Zweckrationalität* (from the German word *Zweck* indicating a purpose or function), which was translated into English as "instrumentally rational," presumably to signify the tool-like or functional application of this rationality and its

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[633] Ricarda Huch, *Die Romantik. Ausbreitung, Blütezeit und Verfall* (1899–1902; Tübingen: Wunderlich, 1985), 158.
[634] Baum was familiar with Steiner and anthroposophy and had visited the Goetheanum and heard Steiner lecture, and she reviewed the spiritual movement favorably in a national newspaper. See Rudolf Steiner, *Kunst und Anthroposophie. Der Goetheanum-Impuls. Sommerkurs /Summer Art Course Dornach 1921* (GA 77b; Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1996).
[635] Colin Loader suggests that Weber's use of this phrase could have been influenced by his brother Alfred Weber's vitalistic sociology, which carried a similar idea. See *Alfred Weber and the Crisis of Culture, 1890–1933* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 134, 237 note 3.

subordination to "the actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends."[636] Weber opposes this type of social action to "value rationality" or *Wertrationalität*, from the word *Wert*, which indicates not only positive value, but the act of attributing positive or even spiritual meaning (*Bedeutung*) to something.[637] Such actions are motivated by a "conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects of success."[638]

Weber applied the idea of instrumental rationality to government bureaucracy, which he saw as a kind of technology that had developed to accomplish various ends with no concern for the morality of the means. In other words, for Weber, bureaucracy is also technology; that is to say, social procedures controlled by an ever-expanding bureaucracy are congealed spirit—the spiritual activity of a human-created *Zweckrationalität*—that uses technology to organize society according to a means-end rationality, which relegates individuals to the iron cage of reason and deprives them of their freedom. Based on this reading of Weber's view of technology, this chapter argues that Steiner and Weber made essentially the same claim, one couched in mythopoetic terms, the other in sociological terms. For Steiner, materialism led to the death of nature and the eighth sphere, just as for Weber instrumental rationality caused disenchantment and the iron cage of reason. Instrumental rationality or *Zweckrationalität* is, however, materialism more precisely theorized.

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[636] Weber, *Economy and Society*, 24–26. Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* argued that the common good could be best attained if governments left individuals to make their own rational choices and did not interfere. This was the doctrine of the "invisible hand." Smith argued that bad choices, such as those based on greed or corruption, would be exposed and right themselves. Weber was, of course, intimately familiar with Smith and the Scottish philosophers and the economic theories they espoused.
[637] *Duden*, s.v. "Wert, der," accessed July 8, 2020, https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Wert.
[638] Weber, *Economy and Society*, 24–26.

The expression "congealed spirit" appears in a series of newspaper articles Weber wrote for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in the summer of 1917.[639] In these essays, Weber addressed the political situation in Germany as the conclusion of the war seemed near, focusing on the disastrous consequences that increasing bureaucratization had on political, social, and economic life. He warned that "the advance of bureaucratic mechanization is unstoppable," and the results of instrumental rationality "inescapable," therefore "the future belongs to bureaucratization."[640] Weber refers to bureaucracy as a "living machine" and the factory as a "dead machine," implying the former has a life of its own, which seems to be constructing the "housing" (by which he does mean a cage) of the future.[641] Here is the full passage:

> A lifeless machine is *congealed spirit*. It is only this fact that gives the machine the power to force men to serve it and thus to rule and determine their daily working lives, as in fact happens in factories. This same *congealed spirit* is, however, also embodied in that *living machine* which is represented by bureaucratic organisation with its specialisation of trained, technical work, its delimitation of areas of responsibility, its regulations and its graduated hierarchy of relations of obedience. Combined with the *dead machine*, it is in the process of manufacturing the housing of that future serfdom to which, perhaps, men may have to submit powerlessly, just like the slaves in the ancient state of Egypt…[642]

Weber's remarks here are framed against the backdrop of the war and the question of how to balance democracy and bureaucracy. While this has led Weberians to focus on the political implications of this passage, the other central issue concerns technology itself, as indicated by the metaphor of the machine. In this sense, Weber is not talking explicitly about the natural world, but the social, economic, and political world created by humans. Bureaucracy is a

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[639] The original title was "Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland. Zur politischen Kritik des Beamtentums und Parteiwesens." See Weber, *Political Writings*.
[640] Weber, *Political Writings*, 156, 159.
[641] Weber, *Political Writings*, 158.
[642] Weber, *Political Writings*, 158.

living machine in the sense that it is composed of living human beings in distinction to a factory, which has actual non-living machines. Bureaucrats therefore operate in an essentially inert and uncaring bureaucratic technology, operating according to instrumental rationality, whose living parts can be constantly replaced like cogs in a machine. This results in human beings themselves gradually becoming machines. "Congealed" is the opposite of "liquid," implying no flexibility or leeway in the "operation" since the function of a machine is determined by its original design. Bureaucrats, like machines, operate according to a rigidly deterministic structure with binding instructions and sanctions. Thus, lifeless machines and living machines constitute, for Weber, the technology of the rationalization process.[643]

The image of the modern world as a living machine operated by a specifically narrow rationality and enslaving humanity parallels Steiner's imaginatively and poetically expressed conclusions regarding the incarnation of Ahriman (physicalization of a materialistic rationality) and the enslavement of humanity in the eighth sphere. For Weber, modern human beings must, to some extent, live in an iron cage constructed around them using instrumental rationality and technology. That is because rationality and capitalism are the outcome of a long development of Western thought, which resulted in the disenchantment of the world and the removal of spiritual forces from nature. This then becomes a *necessary* or at least unavoidable scenario, like Steiner's concept of Ahriman as a necessary evil owing to scientific materialism being the unique destiny of the West. These future scenarios envision a narrow form of rationality overtaking its human developers and becoming their new master: for Steiner, the human developed materialism is physicalized in the incarnation of Ahriman and construction of the eighth sphere; for Weber, the

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[643] On this point, see also Krohn Wolfgang, "Eine Einführung in die Soziologie der Technik," Manuscript 2006, available online at http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/soz/personen/krohn/techniksoziologie.pdf.

culmination of Western thought as the technical organization of modern capitalism culminates in the iron cage of reason and disenchantment.[644]

The metaphor of disenchantment reveals that modern science has killed the belief in a living, spiritual world and, through a process of rationalization, replaced it with a mechanical, machine-like model, an iron cage in which the individual is imprisoned and deprived of his freedom. Weber referred to "modern science" as "the technical basis of capitalism," suggesting that *underneath and behind* capitalism a more fundamental stratum is present, namely, the technological scientific ground generated via instrumental rationality and externalized in bureaucracy.[645] Technology is the materialization (congealed spirit) of a restrictive type of knowledge, a process through which something with a living spiritual essence is killed and fixed in matter: *Materie als geronnener Geist*.

In these political writings, Weber argues the war has spread the iron cage throughout the world: "the present World War means above all the victory of this form of life [mechanical and bureaucratic] throughout the whole world."[646] From this perspective, Weber is thought to have developed one of the original deterministic arguments against democratic rationalization, that is, the use of technical thinking and technologies to flatten embedded social hierarchies.[647] Yet he simultaneously outlined a salvific politics based on impassioned individual action, referred to by

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[644] Weberians might argue against my characterizing Weber as a cultural pessimist because it would seem to reinforce a simplified version of Weber's ideas constructed during the 20th century. Guenther Roth, for example, has argued that Weber understood the inevitability of modern capitalism and was endeavoring to awaken contemporaries to this inescapable fact with his dystopian interpretations. However, this does not alter the fact that disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) remained central to Weber's sociological system. Even if Roth's interpretation is partly correct, it does not remove the problematic role technology plays in constructing a world devoid of freedom and magic for Weber.

[645] Max Weber, *Economy and Society,* 1194.

[646] Weber, *Political Writings*, 155.

[647] See, for example, Andrew Feenberg, "Democratic Rationalization: Technology, Power, and Freedom," in *Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition: An Anthology*, eds. Robert C. Scharff and Val Duse (Second ed.; Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 706–719.

Terry Maley as the "politics of disenchantment," through which meaning could survive in the meaningless world if individuals acted on their own ethical convictions.[648] Gilbert Germain further highlights the significance of the following important and often overlooked line in *The Protestant Ethic*: "No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals…"[649] Weber himself was not always clear on this issue and made conflicting statements, yet in light of such evidence it appears that Weber was not the thorough-going pessimist he is often thought to be, but left the door open.

During the First German Conference of Sociologists in 1910, Weber engaged directly with the idea of technology embodying a spirit (*Geist*). The sociologist and economist Werner Sombart, Weber's colleague and co-editor of the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, presented his preliminary thoughts about technology and culture.[650] Sombart had been working on a concept of the *Geist der Technik* or "spirit of technology," which he later integrated into the 1916 edition of his master work *Der moderne Kapitalismus*.[651] Like Weber, Sombart described an "instrumental" or "material" Technik informed by limited means-ends rationality. He referred to "production Technik"—the material production of goods, especially industrial technology—as

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[648] Terry Maley, "The Politics of Time: Subjectivity and Modernity in Max Weber," in *The Barbarism of Reason: Max Weber and the Twilight of Enlightenment*, eds. Asher Horowitz and Terry Maley (2nd ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 139–166. See also Raymond L. M. Lee, "Weber, Re-enchantment and Social Futures," *Time & Society* 19, no. 2 (2010): 180–192.

[649] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* 124. See also Gilbert Germain, "The Revenge of the Sacred: Technology and Re-enchantment," in *The Barbarism of Reason*, 248–266.

[650] Weber attended this presentation and Sombart's critical essay "Technik und Kultur" followed, appearing in the *Archiv* in 1911 as an expanded version of his conference presentation. Werner Sombart, "Technik und Kultur," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 33 (1911): 305–347.

[651] This phrase was absent in the original 1902 publication, which is often thought to have introduced the concept of "modern capitalism" with a focus on the "spirit" of its development even prior to Weber. Weber and Sombart mutually influenced one another and shared similar ideas, with Weber having written of *der Geist der moderne Kapitalismus* in 1904/05. See Reiner Grundmann and Nico Stehr, "Sombart, Werner," in *Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017); Whimster, *Understanding Weber*, 33–40.

forming "the basis of all other technologies insofar as almost all technologies are instrumental … [and] most of the goods they produce serve to secure a particular result."[652] Whereas technology represented the material means of production, culture, on the other hand, was partly immaterial and composed of ideas (of *Geist*), although ideas could be instantiated in material structures, for example, governmental or religious institutions. Macro forms of culture—economic, religious, scientific, medicine, scholarship, art, music—arose out of the basic substrate of some form of primary or production technology. Sombart went further claiming that since human beings are *homofaber*, they construct their surroundings, which in turn construct the humans themselves in specific ways, including biologically, psychologically, and spiritually.

Yet Sombart was not a technological determinist because he did not believe culture was a function of technology, which he supposed (perhaps incorrectly) Marx had believed. His point was that certain technologies exist precisely because we ourselves construct environments and situations that necessitate such technologies: "a number of so-called technological accomplishments that our age boasts about are no more than the wretched help necessary to remedy the bad conditions created by our culture in the first place."[653] The overall objective of Sombart's presentation was thus to combine *Materie* and *Geist* and demonstrate that technology and culture were, in fact, mutually constitutive, that each could influence and direct the other in certain directions, shaping it in various ways.[654] Each historical era had its own collective means of material production, which, taken in sum, formed the technological spirit (*Geist*) of that era. This notion provided the basis for Sombart's concept of *der Geist der Technik*:

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[652] Werner Sombart, "Technology and Culture," in *Sociological Beginnings: The First Conference of the German Society for Sociology*, ed. Christopher Adair-Toteff (Liverpool University Press, 2005), 95.
[653] Sombart, "Technology and Culture," 108.
[654] Schatzberg, *Technology*, 111–112.

> If one speaks of the "technology" of a certain epoch, for example of "modern technology," one does not only understand the sum of technical methods, which are a feature of that time. Rather, the speaker … is thinking of something like the special "spirit" of this technology, which are the general principles on which the technology is based: that the technology in our time is, for instance, a rational one in contrast to the earlier empirical technology; or that (according to my formulation) it leads to emancipation from the limits of organic nature, which is based, for example, on the conscious pursuit of the machine principle. Whoever speaks of "modern technology" … has in mind all sorts of things that can be called the technological style of an era.[655]

Sombart elaborated on this concept in the later edition of *Der moderne Kapitalismus*, where, in a chapter titled "Geist der Technik," he describes the cultural evolution of technology, focusing on the innate human will to invent and on specific inventors in European history, claiming that the exploitive form of modern theoretical science began during the European Renaissance. Like Weber, Sombart argued that the spirit of technology of modern capitalism possesses, at its base, modern science, which is disenchanted and devoid of sacred mystery, hence its catastrophic effects on humans, animals, and nature.[656]

According to Sombart, inventors of former technologies possessed a sense of mystery and awe, "that sacred fear of technical skill."[657] In other words, premodern technology was still

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[655] "Spricht man von der »Technik« einer bestimmten Epoche, also etwa von der »modernen Technik«, so versteht man darunter nicht nur die Summe von technischen Verfahrungsweisen, über die eine Zeit verfügt. Es schwebt dem Sprecher vielmehr offenbar noch etwas anderes, etwas mehr vor: er denkt an etwas, wie den besondern »Geist« dieser Technik, das sind etwa die allgemeinen Grundsätze, auf denen die Technik beruht: daß die Technik in unserer Zeit etwa eine rationale ist im Gegensatz zu der früheren empirischen Technik; oder daß sie (nach meiner Formulierung) auf die Emanzipation von den Schranken der organischen Natur hinaus geht, worauf beispielsweise auch die bewußte Verfolgung des Maschinenprinzips beruht: wer von der »modernen Technik« spricht, sage ich, denkt an allerhand derartiges, was man dann auch wohl als den Stil der Technik einer Zeit bezeichnen kann…" Sombart, "Technik und Kultur," 309.

[656] While technological progress forms one of the most important structures of modern capitalism, it does not provide its ultimate cause, for which, in Sombart's view, there must be present a certain tripartite combination "of economic mentality (spirit), of organizational and regulative norms (form) and of adopted technology" (131). Technology, then, is better thought of as connected to modernity specifically, as opposed to capitalism generally. See Gennaro Iorio, "Technology in Sombart's Sociology," *DADA Rivista Di Antropologia Post-Globale* Anno V, Speciale no. 1 (2015): 129–138.

[657] Werner Sombart, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus; Historischsystematische Darstellung Des Gesamteuropäischen Wirtschaftslebens Von Seinen Anfängen Bis Zur Gegenwart*, *Vols. I–III* (1916 ed.; Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1969), I.2: 469.

enchanted, for example, as with the alchemists described about. Talcott Parsons, who introduced Weber to Americans by his translations of Weber's work, described Sombart's understanding of the historical stages through which technology evolved as developing from a medieval stage (in which technical thinking was empirical and organic, transmitted from master to apprentice), to a rational-empirical stage of the early modern period, and finally to a modern scientific stage representing the union of science and technology.[658] Parsons points out that in Sombart's system the "elimination of God [*Entgöttlichung*] from the conception of nature corresponds [to] the elimination of man [*Entmenschlichung*] from the conception of technology."[659] That is to say, in modern technological thinking, theoretical science replaces the role of "man" in technology with rational automation (such as mechanical looms or even bureaucracy), resulting in the disenchantment of the world and the loss of human freedom: "If natural science thinks of the world as a mechanism … then technology artificially creates a world which runs according to the formulae set up by natural science *for the world as a whole*."[660] Sombart's formulations strikingly resemble Weber's, with added emphasis on the role of explicitly material technology in human culture.

Weber's similarities to Sombart become even more obvious in another passage in which Sombart argues that "[m]odern natural science is the creation of the practical will to power" and results in the disenchantment of the world ("*die entgötterte Natur*").[661] Modern technology is thus "the twin-sister of natural science … the essence of the two is fundamentally the same [*im*

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[658] Talcott Parsons, "'Capitalism' In Recent German Literature: Sombart and Weber," *Journal of Political Economy* 36, no. 6 (1928): 641–661.

[659] Parsons, "'Capitalism' In Recent German Literature," 655. Sombart's full sentence in German is "Der Entgöttlichung im Naturdenken entspricht die Entmenschlichung im technischen Denken," in Sombart, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus*, *Vol 3.1*, 81. See also Schatzberg, *Technology*, 163.

[660] Sombart, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus*, III.1: 81.

[661] Werner Sombart, *A New Social Philosophy*, trans. Karl Frederick Geiser (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1937), 228. Sombart quotes Schiller's poem "The Gods of Greece" here.

grunde dasselbe Wesen]: it is the modern view of nature, now seen from a theoretical, then again from a practical point of view."[662] The ever-encroaching development of a modern technological spirit "artificially creates a world which unfolds according to a formula set up for the universe by natural science," and its primary objective is "the removal (emancipation) of control from the barriers of living nature [*lebendigen Natur*]."[663] Sombart views modern technology as replacing the natural world (as well as human labor) with an artificial world, the "technical" or "machine age," which "goes so far as to value technique [i.e. technology] for its own sake without regard to the purposes which are to be realized through it."[664] "*Technik*," Sombart writes finally, "*ist Geist*."[665]

Weber publicly disagreed with Sombart in some respects—for example, over the place of religion in the development of capitalism and the relationship between technology and artistic evolution—yet he agreed with and adopted Sombart's ideas about *Technik* as a form of *Geist*. As Sam Whimster has shown, he likely picked up the term *Geist* and its relation to modern capitalism originally from Sombart, as well.[666] This is significant because Sombart's views parallel Steiner's and the Romantics, recognizing technology as a necessary aspect of human civilization but a potentially destructive one, drawing all three men into a closer connection than most people have recognized.[667]

This brings us back to my contention that, for all their apparent differences, when it came to technology Weber's and Steiner's views were remarkably similar only stated in a different

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[662] Sombart, *A New Social Philosophy*, 228–230, 228.
[663] Sombart, *A New Social Philosophy*, 230.
[664] Sombart, *A New Social Philosophy*, 232.
[665] Werner Sombart, *Vom Menschen: Versuch Einer Geistwissenschaftlichen Anthropologie* (Berlin: Buchholz & Weisswange, 1938), 87.
[666] Whimster, *Understanding Weber*, 34–35.
[667] Steiner quotes Sombart in several places—for example: Steiner, "Theosophie und Sozialismus," in *Lucifer-Gnosis*, Oktober/November (1903), where Steiner expresses his agreement with Sombart—and he even kept several of Sombart's books in his personal library (still held in Dornach today), copiously annotated with notations.

register, Weber expressing himself in the academic language of sociology while Steiner used

mythopoetic imagery in the form of a narration. In addition to envisioning a narrow form of

rationality that resulted in the disenchantment of the world, Steiner and Weber agreed that this

development ultimately leads to conflict, what Steiner described as a "war of all against all" and

Weber characterized as a "polytheism of values." Weber's disenchanted world was essentially a

meaningless one created by a modern science that could not create values but only undermine

them. Humans had to step in and create their own meaning from what Weber described as "value

spheres" (*Wertsphären*) or life-orders (*Lebensordnungen*), all of which were increasingly in

conflict as they underwent a process of rationalization.[668] In other words, people had to create

their own personal truth and reenchant the world from within these value-spheres, though not

based on any shared form of scientific knowledge, rather on the basis of their own personal

proclivities. As Weber explains:

> As intellectualism suppresses belief in magic, the world's processes become
> disenchanted, lose their magical significance, and henceforth simply 'are' and
> 'happen' but no longer signify anything. As a consequence, there is a growing
> demand that the world and the total pattern of life be subject to an order that is
> significant and meaningful.[669]

As Nicholas Gane remarks, this means that "values are free to circulate within their own self-

referential spheres."[670] This situation was present in ancient times but has become exacerbated

and/or resurrected with the emergence of modernity and increased rationalization of all value-

spheres. Modernity is characterized above all by polytheism because people make up meaning

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[668] Weber discusses value-spheres and life-orders in several places, notably his "Intermediate Reflections" (*Zwischenbetrachtung*) and "Wissenschaft als Beruf" lecture. For a discussion of value-spheres, see Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage,* 93–97; Ralph Schroeder, *Max Weber and the Sociology of Culture* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), 23–25.
[669] Weber, *Economy and Society*, 506
[670] Nicholas Gane, *Max Weber and Postmodern Theory: Rationalization Versus Re-Enchantment* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 29.

and truth for themselves, just as, according to Weber, in the ancient world one could believe in any god (i.e., truth or value) one wished to believe in.

Weber's most famous description of modernity as a polytheism of values appears in "Science as a Vocation," in which warring values are characterized as deities re-awakened by the disenchantment of the world and henceforth vie for dominion over human souls.[671] Here Weber explains, "[i]t is as it was in the ancient world, which had not yet lost the magic of its gods and demons, only in a different sense." His point is that in the modern world "[w]hat is accessible to understanding is only *what* the divine is for one or the other of these orders [value-spheres]," and "for each individual, depending on his ultimate position, one [ethic or value] is the Devil and the other one is God; and each individual must decide which one is God and which one the Devil *for him*[self]."[672] To illustrates this predicament, he offers an illuminating example: "I only ask how a devout Catholic and a freemason, who follow the same course of lectures on the forms of church and state or on the history of religion, can ever be made to agree on the same *valuation* concerning those subjects?!"[673] Gane interprets this to mean that Weber is not suggesting that the ancient gods are alive and it is now precisely as it was ancient times, but that Weber means such gods, always present, have now been disenchanted and become *impersonal powers*. This event signifies that "their power to generate new forms of community has been lost, and with this the struggle of the gods resumes and continues *ad infinitum*, not, however, in its traditional form but in the guise of a new conflict between different life-orders and opposing value-positions."[674] The crucial point is that in modernity such conflicts can never be solved and will therefore continue

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[671] "The numerous gods of former times, who have lost their magic and have therefore assumed the aspect of impersonal powers, rise up out of their graves, seek to dominate our lives and resume their eternal struggle among themselves." Max Weber, "Science as a Profession and Vocation," in *Max Weber: Collected Methodological Writings*, ed. Hans Henrik Bruun and Sam Whimster, trans. Hans Henrik Bruun (Routledge, 2012), 348.

[672] Weber, "Science as a Profession and Vocation," 348.

[673] Weber, "Science as a Profession and Vocation," 347.

[674] Gane, *Max Weber and Postmodern Theory*, 30.

indefinitely, the implication being they will ultimately grow worse and must be endured. Weber makes clear that anyone living in the modern world

> can only feel himself subject to the struggle between multiple sets of values, each of which, viewed separately, seems to impose an obligation on him. He has to choose which of these gods he will and should serve, or when he should serve the one and when the other. But at all times he will find himself engaged in a fight against one or other of the gods of this world...[675]

Conclusion

Weber and Steiner share a similar outlook concerning the ultimate problems of modernity and its relationship to technology. The increasing fragmentation caused by technology results in humans becoming unable to agree and possessing no recourse to a unifying intellectual (metaphysical or transcendental) system to arbitrate between clashing worldviews and ethical values. Hence, there is (or will be) a "war of all against all." These visions were constructed and refined against the backdrop of the First World War, which destroyed the Germany in which Weber and Steiner had grown up. Thus, it is safe to say that what is meant by this conflict is not only a mental (*geistige*) war, but also a physical one. As this chapter makes clear, however different their orientations, Steiner and Weber arrived at conclusions that are at the heart of postmodernism, namely, that the ability to produce meaningful truth accepted by all people would be lost, and people would look instead to machines to solve problems for them. The ideas of Weber and Steiner are becoming increasingly relevant in the context of our post-truth situation, which in some ways resembles, or at least calls to mind, warnings of a war of all against all and a polytheism of values. Steiner and Weber highlight the role of technology as the primary cause of this situation. Many philosophers and historians of science over the past several

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[675] Weber, *Political Writings*, 79.

years have been showing us how the materiality of technology constitutes a causative factor of our cultural, mental, and even biological changes and evolution as a species. Furthermore, the notion that science and technology have been combined as "technoscience" in the modern world is gaining more attention. For example, when artificially intelligent algorithms write articles that people read online thinking a human being wrote them, we have clearly entered a new phase of technology requiring a new focus and approach.

For Weber and Steiner, this came down to the question of method, of overreliance on and privileging of rationality—even a sort of succumbing to it. At the same time, while focusing their attention on what *lay behind* technology, they acknowledged the presence of material systems and creations, especially their interactions with and effects on humans and nature. Reconsidering Weber's and Steiner's ideas about technology is an argument for increased scholarly attention to technology, not only for theorizing modernity but to help us understand our present moment. It is a challenge to the methodological force behind the proliferation of gadgets and machines, as well as the software and infrastructure incorporating them. Weber and Steiner help us rethink technology as a specific type of congealed rationality, referred to as materialism by Steiner and instrumental rationality by Weber, a thought style that materializes in the world and modifies it accordingly. This type of narrow rationality modifies the world in ways that restrict human freedom. Steiner adds the potential for a different type of technology, his so-called "etheric technology," presumably based on a different logic not bound to a restrictive rationality. Weber, on the other hand, tries valiantly to discover various solutions that would allow humans to escape from their iron cages, none of which unfortunately solve the problem, as we have seen.

Light from the East

"Europe is urged, as it was two hundred years ago, to the follow the example of Confucian philosophy and to get a clear insight into the 'fundamental concepts' in order that Europe, like China of old, may construct for itself on that basis a solid conception of the world, and thereby attain to more stable political conditions."[676]

— Adolf Reichwein, *China und Europa*, 1923

The Foreign Other: From Race to Culture

In 1895, Kaiser Wilhelm II reported that he had had a prophetic dream in which he saw a town in flames, the rising smoke forming the image of a Buddha riding an Asiatic dragon, a scene that recalls Lucifer or Satan in the Book of Revelation, in which the devil is referred to as a dragon.[677] The Kaiser produced a drawing of the vision that included a group of allegorical female figures representing the European nations, who watched from a high cliff, a cross over their heads.[678] He commissioned a lithograph of the image by the artist Hermann Knackfuß, who modified the leading female figure into the archangel Michael, and it was later given to the Russian Tsar by Helmuth von Moltke during a "special mission."[679] The lithograph was entitled "Peoples of Europe, protect your most sacred values!" (*Völker Europas, wahrt eure heiligsten*

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[676] Adolf Reichwein, *China and Europe: Intellectual and Artistic Contacts in the Eighteenth Century* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1925), 10.

[677] Rev. 12:9. This refers to the Christian interpretation of the devil in Revelation.

[678] Heinz Gollwitzer, *Die gelbe Gefahr. Geschichte eines Schlagworts* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 42, 206; George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 426–427; John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats, *Yellow Peril: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear* (New York: Verso, 2014), 12–14.

[679] Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*, 427; Helmuth von Moltke, *Erinnerungen, Briefe, Dokumente, 1877–1916* (Stuttgart: Der Kommende Tag, 1922).

Güter), and the Kaiser wrote a letter explaining to the tsar that "[i]t shows the powers of Europe represented by their respective Genii called together by the Arch-Angel-Michael,—sent from Heaven,— to unite in resisting the inroad of Buddhism, heathenism and barbarism for the Defence of the Cross."[680]

Such imagery dominated the popular European imagination at the end of the 19th century following the First Sino-Japanese War and as colonial tensions between Christian missionaries and Chinese officials escalated in China, a situation that culminated in the Boxer uprising. Wilhelm II did not coin the term "yellow peril" or "yellow menace" (*Gelbe Gefahr* in German), but it was precisely the fear of an invading foreign race that he used to his advantage and that informed his evocative dream and drawing.[681] The trope existed as early as the 1870s in the United States in connection with the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was directed against Chinese labor migration.[682] At that time, it was precisely a racialized fear of an invading foreign race that remained central to the discourse surrounding European and Asian relations, justifying European imperialist excursions into China.[683]

But this would change, and by the First World War it was no longer racial fears *per se* on center stage, but rather concerns over invading cultural elements, hybridity, and especially those

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[680] Quoted in Thoralf Klein, "The 'Yellow Peril,'" *Europäische Geschichte Online* (EGO), ed. Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte (IEG), October 15, 2015, http://www.ieg-ego.eu/kleint-2015-en.

[681] The term was possibly coined in French by Russian-born sociologist Jacques Novikow with his article "Le péril jaune," in *Revue Internationale de Sociologie* (Paris: V. Giard & E. Brière Libraires-Éditeurs, 1897), available online at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/26350/26350-h/26350-h.htm. For the background of Chinese-Japanese relations in late 19th/early 20th century European history, see Akira Iikura, "The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Question of Race," in *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902–1922*, ed. Phillips Payson O'Brien (London: Routledge, 2004), and "The 'Yellow Peril' and its Influence on German-Japanese Relations," in *Japanese-German Relations, 1895–1945: War, Diplomacy and Public Opinion,* eds. Christian W. Spang and Rolf-Harald Wippich (London: Routledge, 2006), 80–97. On the connection to Wilhelm II, see Tchen and Dylan Yeats, *Yellow Peril*, 12–14.

[682] See Klein, "The 'Yellow Peril.'"

[683] On fears over the loss of Western dominance, see Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan- Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). On the history of the earlier, more racially tinged variant of the yellow peril," see Tchen and Yeats, *Yellow Peril.*

Europeans (and non-Europeans) who cooperated in or even advanced this cultural exchange.[684]

An idea popularized by Ostwald Spengler—but which was utterly pervasive in the West—was

that the West was in decline and required cultural rejuvenation.[685] As Chunmei Du points out,

the earlier fears of a "Yellow Peril" centered on racial contamination and miscegenation were,

during this time, replaced by fears of intellectual mixing.[686] In Germany, literary figures such as

Eduard von Keyserling (1885–1918) and Hermann Hesse (1877–1962), but also mainstream

scholars such as Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930), Leonard Nelson (1882–1927), and Rudolf

Pannwitz (1881–1969), looked outside their cultural homeland to those "exotic" lands of the East

in search of solutions to their own problems, hoping to critique the times in which they lived.[687]

This form of intellectual activity had its roots already in Germany through the Romantics and

major intellectual figures like Goethe and Herder.[688] Max Weber and Rudolf Steiner were

intimately involved in the ongoing conversation about West-East relations and were part of an

ever-growing number of thinkers who drew on non-European forms of knowledge to advance

critiques of Western culture, as well as to restore it. Notwithstanding their latent or ingrained

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[684] Widespread interest in non-European religions and mysticism in Germany was sometimes attributed, for example by Henri Massis (discussed below), to the loss of the war. However, this trend can be identified already at the turn of the century through the increased popularity of the Theosophical Society. See Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland*, 25–135.

[685] On the popularity of Western decline in Germany during this time, see Susanne Marchand, "Eastern Wisdom in an Era of Western Despair: Orientalism in 1920s Central Europe," in *Weimar Thought*; *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 2009).

[686] Chunmei Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 57-67, 69.

[687] Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha. Eine indische Dichtung* (Berlin: Fischer, 1922); Graf Hermann Keyserling, *Das Reisetagebuch Eines Philosophen* (Darmstadt: Otto Reichl Verlag, 1920); Rudolf Pannwitz, *Die Krise der europäischen Kultur* (Nürnberg: Carl, 1917); Leonard Nelson, *Gesammelte Schriften in neuen Bänden. Bd. VIII: Sittlichkeit und Bildung* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1971); Richard Wilhelm, *Chinesische Lebensweisheit* (Darmstadt: O. Reichl, 1922).

[688] On the history of orientalism in Germany, see Marchand, *German Orientalism*; Robert Cowan, *The Indo-German Identification: Reconciling South Asian Origins and European Destinies, 1765–1885* (New York: Camden House, 2010). For a useful history of orientalism more generally, see App Urs, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). App argues that European constructions of "the Orient" can be traced to Europe's "discovery" of Asian religions, particularly Buddhism and Hinduism, in contrast to Said's claims that modern orientalism is predominantly linked to colonialism and imperialism. On the trope of a wisdom-centered exchange between the East and West, see Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*.

Eurocentrism, they began a serious engagement with the "Other." At the same time, as Edward Said demonstrated in his book *Orientalism* in 1978, European intellectual and artistic constructions in art and literature of an exotic "East" fueled the essentialized image of an Asia, which—compared to the masculine, rational, materialistic, active "West"—was feminine, passive, imaginative, spiritual, and, according to Said, in perfect need of rational political dominance, Christian redemption, and materialistic modernization and industrialization. Said's argument gave birth to the fruitful field of postcolonial studies, which in the following years vocalized the physically and culturally oppressed subaltern voices of global history, as well as illuminated the horrifying reality of European colonialism. The problem with Said's argument is not that his thesis is incorrect, but rather that it provides only a one-sided grand narrative of the cultural encounter between Europe and Asia across time. What scholars are now calling for are more historically precise and ideologically neutral accounts that remain attentive to complexity, contingency, discrete elements, and other forms of cultural transference and hybridity.

Figures such as Steiner, Keyserling—and Weber—reversed the image of Kaiser Wilhelm II's destructive Satanic dragon, illustrating instead the cultural benefits of Chinese civilization. These elements functioned as a potential antidote to the problems created by modern capitalism and its key role in disenchanting the world. The image of the "barbaric" Chinese was being transformed into something spiritual and noble. As Du explains:

> The changing imagery represented a cultural shift, with the East becoming increasingly positive, spiritual, and moral, a departure from earlier sinophobic literature that depicted China as a living fossil and Oriental despotism … imageries that used to represent Chinese immobility and backwardness, such as the Chinese coolie, the monarch, the literati, and Confucianism, were now discussed in new perspectives other than typical Orientalist ways. In contrast, mechanization, change, mass participation in politics, and imitation of the West were seen in a more

negative light. The new popular sinology now focused on spiritual renewal and self-regeneration through encountering the East and confronting the self.[689]

This positive reevaluation of the East presented an increasing problem for some Europeans (frequently from conservative Catholic or Protestant groups) who grew concerned over the preservation of a theoretically pure (and rational) Western culture from the threat of "oriental" mysticism. In the case of Steiner, taking Asian religions and philosophies seriously as a way to critique the West was accompanied by assurances to his audiences that this was precisely *not* what was happening (detailed below). In hindsight, it becomes clear that Weber's and Steiner's writings on East-West relations provided an important contribution to the forging of an intercultural, more globalized modernity.[690] Yet both Steiner and Weber went to great lengths to appeal to Europeans' sense of the West's uniqueness while simultaneously ushering Confucian ideals (Weber) and religious-philosophical concepts such as reincarnation and karma (Steiner) in through the backdoor.[691]

There were those who did not wish to see "Eastern" spirituality introduced into the European context. Following the war, books such as Henri Massis's *Defense of the West* (1927) began to appear, excoriating theosophists, Eastern enthusiasts, the "Anthroposophism" and "lotus flowers" of Steiner, and the orientalist scholars, all of whom Massis characterized in terms

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[689] Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*, 56.

[690] Weber's ideas, for example, were taken up in China and utilized as an intellectual tool for modernization. See: Liu Dong, "The Weberian View and Confucianism," *East Asian History*, no. 25/26 (2003): 191–217.

[691] In Europe, the doctrine of reincarnation had come back into favor—after being anathematized by the early Church—during the 17th century. See Allison Coudert, "The Kabbalah, Science, and the Enlightenment: The Doctrines of *Gilgul* and *Tikkun* as Factors in the Anthropological Revolution of the Eighteenth Century," in *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Rezeption—Integration—Konfrontation*, ed. Monika Neugebauer-Wölk (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2008), 299–316. This included a major reception of these ideas in the writings of the Weimar classicists. See Lieselotte E. Kurth-Voigt, *Continued Existence, Reincarnation, and the Power of Sympathy in Classical Weimar* (Columbia: Camden House, 1999).

of a new "Asiatic Peril."[692] He attacked cultural amphibians from foreign countries, such as

Gandhi, Tagore, and Gu Hongming, educated in the West and audacious enough to dictate to

Europeans how they ought to restructure their crumbling civilization—namely, by adopting

cultural elements from their own respective homelands, which, according to them, never plunged

into exponential decline.[693] "The supremacy to which Europe has been accustomed … is no

longer recognized by the Asiatic peoples," Massis proclaimed, describing such individuals as

engaging in a spiritual conflict with the Classical-Christian West.[694]

However, the problem was not so much the uprisings and rebellions against Western

colonialism and aggressive trading policies taking place throughout Asia as the fact that many

Europeans, particularly Germans, had lost interest in the colonial project, no longer willing to

assert dominion, flocking instead to learn about wisdom of "the East."[695] In Massis's depiction,

oriental wisdom had reversed-colonized German youth following the war. Massis also argued

that this was a form of "cultural cross-breeding," which represented a real danger to the integrity

of the West.[696] In the Forward to the book, the English writer G. K. Chesterton, a staunch

English Catholic, spoke of the "vast intellectual invasion from Asia."[697] Massis further argued

that those Germans who respected Asian culture and philosophy even now "raise at the same

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[692]   Henri Massis, *Defence of the West*, trans. F. S. Flint (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1927), 12n1. For Steiner references see 36, 141. Massis also criticizes Diederichs's publishing house in Jena (discussed more below), which distributed German translations of Taoist and Confucian texts (37).

[693] Du employs the term "cultural amphibians" to describe figures such as Gu Hongming: "individuals able to forge authentic identities across national, ideological, and cultural boundaries due to their sociocultural 'hybrid vigor.'" See Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*, 66. Massis refers to Gu and Tagore as "those Westernized Asiatics."

[694] Massis, *Defence of the West*, 8. Something similar happened in the United States during the emergence of Fundamentalism, as some American Christians such as William Jennings Bryan warned of a conflict between Eastern and Western civilization framed in terms of "Christianity versus Confucianism." See William Jennings Bryan, *Letters to a Chinese Official: Being an Eastern View of Western Civilization* (New York: McClure, Phillips & co., 1906), Chapter 8. See also Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*, 76–84.

[695] Paul Mazgaj, "Defending the West: The Cultural and Generational Politics of Henri Massis," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 17, no. 2 (1991): 103–123, 113.

[696] Massis, *Defence of the West*, 107.

[697] Massis, *Defence of the West*, vii.

time the question whether the humanist tradition of classicism matters to the whole of humanity, and is humanly eternal, or whether it was not simply the spiritual form of an age that is coming to an end…."[698] It was, in Massis's eyes, not only those Europeans who had embraced non-Western thought as a way to save Western culture who were to blame, but equally those who critiqued and analyzed the legacy of Western supremacy and concluded it had come to an end, such as Alfred Weber, who of course had a significant influence on his brother Max.

Weber's and Steiner's use of Chinese and Indo-Tibetan religions and philosophies functioned therefore as potential antidotes, reflections, and alternatives to their own view of a disenchanted European modernity. Their constructions of these cultures were based on the absorption of Eastern ideas typically through other Europeans traveling to Asian and India during the early modern and modern periods, as well through esotericists who ascribed to such ideas and wrote about them. A significant number of non-European thinkers and poets who were often educated in European universities also actively proposed the idea that modern Europe had lost its spirit and therefore required regeneration. While Weber and Steiner never physically traveled to the East or to any Asian countries, through their willingness to engage with the ideas and beliefs of non-European cultures—and notwithstanding their Eurocentric interpretations—they negotiated the fractures in time and meaning that characterize a specifically Western modus operandi for experiencing modernity: namely, the privileging of rationality and calculation over all other forms of knowing. This problem remains at the center of the contemporary discussion of globalization and secularity.

Comparing two Germans who are generally believed to be polar opposites—Weber a rationalist and Steiner an esotericist—with the Chinese thinker Gu Hongming (1857–1928)

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[698] Massis, *Defence of the West*, 45.

generates further insight into complex processes of intercultural social and religious exchange. Chunjie Zhang has argued for the importance of "reading from the other side" in the colonial encounter in order to restore agency and visibility to non-European peoples in the global historical narrative.[699] Along with the concept of *transculturality*, Zhang's approach highlights "the contribution of non-European cultures in European and German discourses while not ignoring Eurocentric and condescending elements."[700] Following Zhang's lead, this chapter emphasizes Gu's and other non-Europeans' contributions to European knowledge, self-image, and historical development.

Steiner had been interested in Gu as early as 1912 and discussed his book *China's Defense against European Ideas* (*Chinas Verteidigung gegen europäische Ideen*) in the private meetings of his own esoteric school with his closest students. This was Gu's first full-length publication in German, and its appearance was facilitated by travel writer and novelist, Alfons Paquet, who made several trips to China and Mongolia in the years leading up to the war. Paquet had met with Gu and suggested the title be changed from the English *The Story of a Chinese Oxford Movement* to a German title that more clearly stressed the tense relationship between the East and the West.[701] On returning to Germany, Paquet helped to get Gu's collection of essays published by Eugen Diederichs's publishing house in Jena. As we saw in the second biography chapter, Diederichs's publishing house was well-known to Weber and connected to the circle of esotericists, neo-romanticists, and nationalists in Jena.[702]

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[699] Chunjie Zhang, *Transculturality and German Discourse in the Age of European Colonialism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 3–20.

[700] Zhang, *Transculturality*, 8.

[701] Isabell Oberle, "Gu Hongming – vom Kulturvermittler zum Kulturheros?" in *Deutsch-Chinesische Helden Und Anti-Helden: Strategien Der Heroisierung Und Deheroisierung in Interkultureller Perspektive*, eds. Achim Aurnhammer and Chen Zhuangying (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2020), 119–132, 121–122.

[702] On this connection, see Weber biography chapter of this dissertation.

The forward to Diederichs's edition of Gu's most important work, *The Spirit of the*

Chinese People (*Der Geist des Chinesischen Volkes*), was written by the German writer Oscar

Schmitz, who characterized Gu as a bridge-builder between the East and the West:

> [Gu Hongming] belongs to the very rare characters that are free from nationalist narrowmindedness as well as from characterless internationalism. In fact, he is a nationally-minded Chinese, who regards the Europeanization of his country with utter indignation; nonetheless, he is fully aware of the fact that knowledge of European culture can be fruitful for China as long as she remains faithful to her own heritage. Gu Hongming is the epitome of such a successful fertilisation while fully preserving native ways and manners.[703]

Schmitz was a member of the circle of writers and artists around the poet Stefen George,

a group that was also critical of the present course of European history. George, who was a close

acquaintance of Weber and spent time with Weber and Marianne at their home in Heidelberg,

was connected to Diederichs's publishing activities in Jena, as Diederichs had published some of

George's poetry. Gu's writings and Diederichs's translations of other Eastern thinkers were thus

instrumental in facilitating the wide-spread interest of Germans, who, like Weber and Steiner,

turned to the East to help heal what they saw as the decline of the West.

Since the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, scholars have increasingly recognized that

the cultural exchange between the East and West was a two-way street and many Western as

well as Eastern intellectuals were convinced that the West needed to learn from the East. By the

19th century, "Orientalism" had become deeply embedded in Western culture—whether in art,

music, philosophy, or even dance—and not only in the demeaning ways Said suggests. Allison

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[703] Quoted in Gotelind Müller, „Gu Hongming (1857–1928) und Chinas Verteidigung gegen das Abendland," *Orientierungen. Zeitschrift zur Kultur Asiens* 1 (2006): 1–23. English translation available online as "Gu Hongming (1857-1928) and China's Defence Against the Occident" at https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/15423/. For Schmitz quote in English see Müller, "China's Defence Against the Occident," 5.

Coudert suggests that in the early-modern period many Europeans demeaned the "Orient" precisely because they recognized its superiority.[704] Susanne Marchand has demonstrated that orientalizing novels, as well as scholarship, flourished in Germany at this time and was "closer to the cultural impulse of the nation than ever before."[705] She focuses on "non-specialized literati"—such as Hermann Graf Keyserling and his *Schule der Weisheit*—who popularized non-Western knowledge to challenge the predominant culture and were "drawn to *Orientalistik*'s longstanding iconoclastic, anti-classical, and often neoromantic worldview."[706] Travelogues such as Keyserling's famous *Diary* were cosmopolitan, or, in the words of one scholar focusing on orientalist writing during the European Enlightenment, possessed a "dreaming with" quality aimed at exposing the mass public to a spiritual unity across cultures.[707]

Like Srinivas Aravamudan's *Enlightenment Orientalism*, esoteric orientalism was extremely popular in Europe and had a similar impact on the construction of a modern European Self and Other. Robert Cowan stresses the individual thinker in a German context, who "engaged in attempts to define themselves and understand their own history."[708] Rather than focusing on large populations, colonial projects, or academic institutions, Cowan highlights poets, artists, and philosophers who drew on South Asia to inspire within themselves new ways of re-defining and

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[704] Allison Coudert, "Orientalism in Early Modern Europe?" in *East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Transcultural Experiences in the Premodern World*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 715–755.

[705] Marchand, "Eastern Wisdom in an Era of Western Despair," 341. This widespread interest was not only limited to Germany, or to literature, and can be seen in the enthusiasm for orientalism in art, music, dance, and architecture that pervaded the 19th century popular and high culture. See, for example, Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2006).

[706] Marchand, "Eastern Wisdom," 341. Other than a wider and more widespread reach, this phenomenon was not exactly new. Something similar occurred also during the European Enlightenment. See Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[707] Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 8. Aravamudan's methodology follows "the itinerary of European knowledge regarding the East influenced by the utopian aspirations of Enlightenment more than materialist and political interest. Enlightenment interrogation was not innocent—no knowledge ever is—but it was a complex questioning, with multiple objectives and orientations…" (3).

[708] Cowan, *The Indo-German Identification*, 3.

regenerating a declining Europe. Though unable to overcome their prejudices, such individuals struggled with contradictory systems of thought to make sense of a radically changing world.

Marchand's essay illustrates this understudied aspect of intellectual life during the Weimar period, a period that also saw tremendous popular interest in "Eastern wisdom." Many late 19th/early 20th century thinkers grouped under the rubric of esotericism—such as Helena Blavastky, Steiner, and also Aleister Crowley—absorbed aspects of Asian philosophy and religion to develop new ideas that functioned as powerful critiques of the European status quo. Esoteric constructions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Tantra—among other traditions associated with "the East"—presented esotericists with valuable alternatives to orthodox forms of European knowledge, which, to them, seemed incapable of producing a meaningfully spiritual existence in the modern world.[709] This interest provoked many Germans like Weber and Steiner to look outside of the West for solutions for the problems they had diagnosed. Both used "Eastern-inspired" wisdom to critique European and North American over-reliance on a narrowly reductive form of rationality and to argue that Eastern thought exposed fundamental flaws in modern Western science.

Different Ways of Knowing

Europeans began to travel more frequently and in larger numbers to non-European countries from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries thanks to advances in modern

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[709] Djurdjevic, *India and the Occult*; Gandhi, *Affective Communities*; Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*; Lee Irwin, "Western Esotericism, Eastern Spirituality, and the Global Future," *Esoterica* III (2001): 1–47; Hans Martin Krämer and Julian Strube, eds., *Theosophy Across Boundaries: Transcultural and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Modern Esoteric Movement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020); Erik Reenberg Sand and Tim Rudbøg, eds., *Imagining the East: The Early Theosophical Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Isaac Lubelsky, *Celestial India: Madame Blavatsky and the Birth of Indian Nationalism* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012).

technology.[710] They also began reporting back on their experiences abroad, while at the same

time knowledge of non-European cultures flowed into Europe at the institutional level through

the formation of new scholarly disciplines such as philology and ethnography. More and more

Europeans asked themselves the question: What were these "outside" cultures with their

strikingly different beliefs and customs? How should Europeans respond? As mentioned above, a

growing number of Westerners became critical of Western philosophy and religion and took an

interest in the cultures of Asian—simplistically grouped together as "the East"—in search of new

models of human development and existence to fit the modern era.[711] This knowledge (or

frequently "wisdom") of the East encouraged them to question their "Western" versions of

history, religion, politics, and culture, often resulting in the adoption of new "ways of knowing"

aimed at finding solutions to their own cultural problems.[712]

The notion that there are different "ways of knowing" presents a problem. Can there

actually be different ways of knowing? If so, can they be transmitted between cultures? Rudolf

G. Wagner has argued that they can, while adding that the notion that certain things are

inherently "East" or "West" obscures the crucial importance of transcultural interaction. One

concept he introduces, which is useful for thinking about the oversimplified East/West binary, is

the idea of "outcome-oriented ways of knowing."[713] This emphasizes the circumstances in which

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[710] Tristram Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution: A Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to Modern Times* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007); Coudert, "Orientalism in Early Modern Europe?"; Aaron French, "Voyage to India with Sir William Jones: The Asiatick Society Remakes the West. The Travel of Texts and Their Transformative Power on Culture," in *East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, 622–646.
[711] Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*; Dorothy Matilda Figueira, *The Exotic: A Decadent Quest* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Irwin, "Western Esotericism"; Roger-Pol Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness: The Philosophers and the Buddha* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Eric S. Nelson, *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).
[712] See also John Krygier, "Wisdom of the East Series," *A Series of Series: 20th-Century Publishers Book Series*, https://seriesofseries.owu.edu/wisdom-of-the-east-series/.
[713] Rudolf G. Wagner, "Can We Speak of East/West Ways of Knowing*?" Know: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 2, no. 1 (2018): 31–46.

one culture constructs its one version of a concept taken from another culture in order to solve

certain current problems. To illustrate this, he uses the example of the history of Chinese-

European interactions. Based on promised outcomes, Europe looked to China to solve the

problem of the succession of the "enlightened despot" and the nobility's control of high offices

after the Thirty Years War. The solution was a Confucian type of rulership and bureaucracy—

although the Europeans were not interested in the complexity and the historicity of Chinese

governance.[714] One the other side, China displayed a similar outcome-based way of knowing

about "the West" in the mid- to late-1800s in its attempts to work out how the West had grown

so powerful given its size. This led to issues of modernization, nationalism, parliament, and

better communication systems across modern China.[715]

Wagner demonstrates that ways of knowing are inextricably linked to ways of acquiring

and communicating knowledge by "professionals in knowing" or "brokers of knowledge."[716]

These professional knowers select, mold, and present relevant knowledge to their superiors or

employers to satisfy certain desires and bring about certain outcomes.[717] Wagner goes to great

lengths to recast the position of agency in these transcultural encounters and demonstrates that

"the agency in transcultural encounter is with the pull and not the push."[718] Furthermore, "…the

neocolonial assumption that in an asymmetry of power the agency is with the superior part is not

supported by the actual processes."[719] As Du puts it, "The process of Othering ties One to the

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[714] Robert Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Madeleine Jarry, *Chinoiserie: Chinese Influence on European Decorative Art, 17th and 18th Centuries* (New York: Vendome Press, 1981).
[715] Wagner, "Can We Speak of East/West Ways of Knowing?" 35–37.
[716] Wagner, "Can We Speak of East/West Ways of Knowing?" 45. However, it was not limited to professionals but also included Marchand's "non-specialized literati."
[717] There is also, of course, the popular writers and esotericists who sometimes inhabited a "professional" identity or position and sometimes decidedly not.
[718] Wagner, "Can We Speak of East/West Ways of Knowing?" 45.
[719] Wagner, "Can We Speak of East/West Ways of Knowing?" 45.

Other; in defining the Other, what We are not, one identifies Oneself. East and West are imagined together."[720] Wagner's discussion of cultural exchange and its role in creating national and personal identity does not deny that exploitative power imbalances do exist, but it emphasizes that "transcultural interaction is the lifeline of culture," and "culture is also the anchor of identity."[721]

The Merger of East and West in Steiner's Philosophy

We can observe this process of "turning East" to diagnose and regenerate the West in the following remarks Steiner made to his followers in Dornach, Switzerland, in 1916, in which he plays with the idea that Europe must become more Eastern:

> Ku Hung Ming is quite convinced that European culture must go under if Europeans refuse to become like the Chinese and if Chinese conditions do not spread over Europe. The only salvation for European culture, so he says, is for Europeans to become Chinese, that is, become Chinese in their souls. Much of what he says is deeply impressive. One should not take it lightly that a wise man of today can find no way out for European culture other than finally merging it all … in good Chinese principles. I will not elaborate Ku Hung Ming's ideas on the methods for making Europe Chinese. Of course, we should see at once that we cannot become Chinese or return to the position of Chinese culture, but if there were no other way out than the one Ku Hung Ming sees, then that would be better than to continue on the path that European culture has taken. It would definitely be better.[722]

Steiner refers to Gu Hongming's book, *The Spirit of the Chinese People and the Way out of the War* (*Der Geist des Chinesischen Volkes und der Ausweg aus dem Krieg*), which Steiner called a "work of genius."[723] Gu, who returned to China after years of education abroad and was

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[720] Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*, 66. See also Zhang, *Transculturality and German Discourse.*
[721] Wagner, "Can We Speak of East/West Ways of Knowing?" 45.
[722] Rudolf Steiner, *Inner Impulses of Evolution: The Mexican Mysteries and The Knights Templar* (Spring Valley: Anthroposophic Press, 1984), Lecture IV, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA171/English/AP1984/19160923p01.html.
[723] Rudolf Steiner, "Hereditary Impulses and Impulses from Previous Earth Lives: Western Brotherhoods," *Rudolf Steiner Archive & e.Lib*, May 23, 2012, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19161119p01.html.

calling himself a reborn true Chinaman, interprets Confucianism in this book as "the religion of

good citizenship," and the Four Books and Five Classics of Confucianism as "the Confucian

Bible."[724] *The Spirit of the Chinese People* concludes with the following apocalyptic assertion:

> the one and only way for the people of Europe, for the people of the countries now
> at war, not only to get out of this war, but to save the civilization of Europe—to
> save the civilization of the world, and that is for them now to tear up their present
> Magna Chartas of liberty and Constitutions, and make a new Magna Charta—a
> Magna Charta not of liberty, but a Magna Charta of Loyalty; in fact to adopt the
> Religion of good citizenship [i.e., Confucianism] with its Magna Charta of Loyalty
> such as we Chinese have here in China.[725]

This religion of "good citizenship" was, for Gu, in reality no religion at all, at least not in

the European sense of the word. The religion of Europe was to be seen as a personal or church

religion, whereas the so-called religion of China (Confucianism) was a "social religion," a

religion of the state. "In Europe," writes Gu, "politics is a science, but in China, since Confucius'

time, politics is a religion."[726] The greatness of this political "religion," which belongs to the

state, lies in the fact that "without being a religion, [Confucianism] can take the place of religion;

it can make men do without religion."[727] In other words, Confucianism corresponds in important

ways to the disenchantment of Western modernity since it is rational, but it is rational without

eliminating spirituality and replacing it with materialism and capitalism. Instead: "The real

Chinaman, I have shown you, is a man who lives the life of a man of adult reason with the

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[724] Gu Hongming, *The Spirit of the Chinese People: With an Essay on "The War and the Way Out"* (Peking: Peking Daily News, 1915).

[725] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 168. See also Huaiyu Wang, "The Lost Confucian Philosopher: Gu Hongming and the Chinese Religion of Good Citizenship," *Philosophy East and West* 71, no. 1 (2021): 217–240. Wang argues that Gu's ideas "promise a new vision to move beyond moral universalism and relativism, a key problem of cross cultural discourse against the backdrop of the 'clash of civilizations'" (218–219).

[726] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 27.

[727] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 16–17.

simple heart of a child, and the Spirit of the Chinese people is a happy union of soul with intellect."[728]

Steiner was one of the many Europeans who turned to China to find a cure for European problems, and he was particularly taken with Gu's book. Gu maintained that in modern times, European religion, especially in Great Britain, had become what he refers to as "the religion of mob-worship" or the "religion of the mob," essentially democratic populism or civil discontent and mass uprisings, which he claims British politicians have exploited to their own political advantage, for example, to make the Boer war in Africa. The solution was for the people of Britain, America, and France to learn to "behave themselves" and become "good citizens."[729] This cultural phenomenon did not exist among the population of China because theirs was in fact a religion of no religion, but rather of good citizenship. Chinese people, Gu argues, "do not adore and worship Confucius as the mass of the population in Mohammedan countries adore and worship Mohammed, or as the mass of the population in European countries adore and worship Jesus Christ."[730]

This "religion of the mob" represented the "direct" cause of the First World War and had resulted in the "immediate" cause, "the *worship of might* in Germany."[731] This was due to the "moral fiber" of Germans, their intense love of righteousness and equally intense hatred of unrighteousness, of "untidiness and disorder (*Unzucht und Unordnung*)," which prompted them to put their trust in the worship of might. As Gu explains,

> Now the reason why I say that it is the worship of the mob in Great Britain which
> is responsible for the worship of might in Germany, is because, the *moral fibre*—
> the intense hatred of unrighteousness, of untidiness and disorder in the German

[728] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 70 –71.
[729] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 6–8.
[730] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 64.
[731] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 166.

nation makes them hate the mob, the worship of the mob and the mob worshippers in Great Britain. After the German nation saw how the mob and the mob-worshipping politicians of Great Britain made the Boer war in Africa, their *instinctive* intense hatred for the mob, the mob-worship and the mob-worshippers in Great Britain made the German nation willing to make heavy sacrifices, made *the whole German nation ready to starve themselves to create a Navy* with the hope to put down the mob, the mob-worship and the mob-worshippers in Great Britain. In fact, the German nation, I may say, found themselves surrounded on all sides by the mob, mob-worship and mob worshippers encouraged by Great Britain in all Europe and this made the German nation believe more and more in might, made the German nation worship might as the only salvation for mankind. This worship of might in Germany created by the haired for the Religion of mob worship in Great Britain, thus created the enormous monstrous German Militarism which everybody now hates and denounces.[732]

The way that Germans could "put down their absolute belief in and worship of might" was to turn to Goethe, who, according to Gu, had developed a version of the religion of good citizenship.[733] Perhaps we understand Steiner's approval of this, himself a devotee of Goethe, who claimed something similar about Goetheanism and its salvific power for Central Europe and the outcome of the war. The same was true for Gu, who believed the only way the German people could give up their worship of brute force was to fully embrace the great words of Goethe: "*There are two peaceful powers in this world: Right and Tact* (Es gibt zwei friedliche Gewalten auf der Welt: Das Recht und die Schicklichkit)."[734] Tact here is the German word *Schicklichkit*, which might be translated as decency or proper social behavior or proper conduct. This right and tact is, according to Gu, "the essence of the Religion of good citizenship which Confucius gave to us Chinese here in China."[735] For Gu, Goethe is a Confucian "gentlemen," a

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[732] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 6–7. Gu cites a telegram sent from the Kaiser Wilhelm II to the President of the South African Republic, Paul Kruger, in which he congratulated him on putting down a group of rioters who had attacked the Republic in the interest of the British. Gu interprets this event as "an *instinctive* outburst of indignation of the true Germanic-soul with its moral fibre against Joseph Chamberlain and his Cockney class in England, who manipulated the Boer War."
[733] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 16.
[734] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 16.
[735] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 16.

Junzi, and he likely has the concept of *Li* in mind when referring to Goethe's right and tact, which in Confucianism came to signify the civil code that defined proper human conduct and ritual social actions.

As much as Steiner agreed with Gu about the need for an infusion of Eastern thought into the West, he turned to Buddhism as a more profound source of healing and spiritual renewal than Confucianism. This became increasingly clear as he developed his own teaching of anthroposophy, which combined Christian and Buddhist teachings with German Idealism, romanticism, and European esoteric traditions transmitted to him during the time he was a member of the Theosophical Society.[736] He had more strictly academically trained orientalist followers, such as Hermann Beckh (1875–1937), who believed anthroposophy contributed to Buddhist studies from a less Christian-dogmatic perspective while at the same time rejecting the theosophical interpretations of Buddhism. Beckh further assisted Steiner in gaining an albeit Eurocentric understanding of Tibetan and other forms of Buddhism.[737] Steiner, who was himself extensively educated in the sciences and Kantian philosophy, as we have seen, claimed after joining the Theosophical Society that the Buddhist Eightfold Path held truths that far surpassed

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[736] On reception East and South Asian religions in early theosophy, see Tim Rudbøg, "Early Debates in the Reception of Buddhism: Theosophy and Esoteric Buddhism," and Tim Rudbøg and Erik Reenberg Sand, "H. P. Blavatsky's Early Reception of Hindu Philosophy," in *Imagining the East: The Early Theosophical Society*, 75–96, 97–120.

[737] Beckh studied Sanskrit and Tibetan languages and was one of very few Western scholars at the time who were able to read and edit Tibetan manuscripts. For example, Hermann Beckh, *Udanavarga: Eine Sammlung Buddhistischer Sprüche in Tibetischer Sprache* (Berlin: Verlag Von Georg Reimer, 1911). Beckh attained a popular reputation with his book *Buddha and his Teachings* (Leipzig: Sammlung Göschen, 1916). After becoming a professor, he met Steiner in 1911 and adopted the anthroposophical worldview, eventually becoming an ordained priest in Steiner's esoteric Christian renewal movement *der Christengemeinschaft*. He and Steiner published articles in the anthroposophical journal *Die Drei: Monatsschrift für Anthroposophie und Goetheanismus*, and although Steiner was writing and lecturing on "the East" before meeting Beckh, this orientalist must be considered as having an important influence on Steiner's ideas. See „Kurt von Wistinghausen ‚Beckh, Hermann,'" in *Neue Deutsche Biographie 1* (1953), available online at https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd119529602.html; Gundhild Kačer-Bock, *Hermann Beckh: Leben Und Werk* (Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 1997). For an English account, see Hermann Beckh, *From Buddha to Christ*, trans. Alan Stott and Maren Stott (Forest Row: Temple Lodge, 2019), esp. the Appendix.

those of Kant.[738] His lecture cycles on the four gospels are filled with references to the Buddhist teaching of the Eightfold Path, which, generally speaking, is a set of spiritual practices aimed at cultivating virtue and attaining liberation from the karmic wheel of rebirth.[739] According to Steiner, the Buddha gave to humanity "the teaching of compassion and love contained in the eightfold path" that represents a "great ethic of humanity," which humans would "acquire as their own during the civilisations yet to come."[740] Only when a "considerable number of human beings have reached the stage where the principles of the Eightfold Path can arise as knowledge *born of their own souls*" could humanity then make real spiritual progress.[741] To accomplish this, Steiner offered a Western meditative path in *Knowledge of Higher Worlds and Its Attainment*, in which he detailed a step-by-step process for opening a "sixteen-petalled lotus-flower" within the human subtle bodies.[742] These spiritual streams—the Eightfold Path from the East representing individual liberation and the esoteric Christian teachings of Europe—would come together and offer salvation to a declining (Western) world.

By appropriating a theosophical doctrine of involution and evolution—which holds that spirit incarnates into matter and dis-incarnates back into spirt over millennia—Steiner linked his ideas of spiritual development to a spiral evolution of consciousness, in which bodhisattva-like beings reincarnate in the flesh to carry out karmic tasks on earth and act as spiritual teachers who help human beings rise up. This wisdom-centered consciousness was, according to Steiner,

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[738] "…all the philosophical and moral teachings since produced by humanity are no more than a feeble beginning of what was established by Buddha. However greatly people may admire different philosophies, however fervent their enthusiasm may be for Kantian thought and other such systems — everything is elementary compared with the all-embracing principles of the Eightfold Path." Rudolf Steiner, *The Gospel of St. Luke* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1964), Lecture VIII, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA/GA0114/19090924p01.html.

[739] Especially the Gospel of Luke and of Mark.

[740] Rudolf Steiner, *The Christ Impulse and the Development of the Ego-Consciousness* (London: Anthroposophical Publishing, 1926), Lecture I, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA116/English/APC1926/19091025p01.html.

[741] Steiner, *The Gospel of St. Luke*, Lecture VIII.

[742] For first appearance in English, see Rudolf Steiner, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923).

brought to earth and rooted in human beings through the incarnation of Lucifer, the bringer of

light or wisdom, who incarnated in China as, possibly, Huang-di, the so-called Yellow

Emperor.[743] Steiner never actually names this historical personality, but merely gives a date of

the beginning of the third Millennium BCE, although later anthroposophists have suggested

Huang-di and others.[744] From this incarnation, the enlightened wisdom concerning social action

and ritual—but also adherence to "old ways"—was stabilized in humans who had up to that

point lacked this level of consciousness awareness. Lucifer for Steiner was therefore not seen as

an entirely negative figure, but rather as a redemptive figure of knowledge, something akin to

Prometheus in the ancient Greek mythology who stole the invention of fire from Zeus and gave

this knowledge to humans.

To understand how and why Steiner transformed a figure that had been so vilified by

Christians for centuries into an emissary of enlightenment and redemption, it is important to

explore the background of the figure of Lucifer in Steiner's cosmology and broader field of

esotericism.[745] Steiner's characterization of Lucifer was essentially positive, however, in certain

respects it did become more "negative" later in his life.[746] What is important for this section is to

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[743] Rudolf Steiner, "The Ahrimanic Deception," *Rudolf Steiner Archive & e.Lib*, October 23, 1997,
https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19191027p01.html. The Yellow Emperor is one of the legendary culture heroes of
Chinese civilization. Some recent anthroposophists speculate that the incarnation of Lucifer in China "at the
beginning of the third millennium" was not Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor, but rather Fuxi (also Fu His), another of
the mythological deity rulers in Chinese myth and legend who invented the *I-Ching* and was referred to as "The
Shining One."

[744] For example, Robert Powell, *Christ and the Maya Calendar: 2012 and the Coming of the Antichrist* (Great
Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 2009) and *Prophecy, Phenomena, Hope: The Real Meaning of 2012 Christ and the
Maya Calendar, an Update* (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 2011); Are Thoresen, *The Lucifer Deception: The
Yellow Emperor Unveiled - Secrets of Traditional Oriental Medicine* (W. Sussex: Clairview Books, 2020).

[745] For the background of Luciferianism and Satanism in the history esotericism, see Ruben van Luijk, *Children of
Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Massimo Introvigne,
Satanism: A Social History (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Per Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer As the Liberator of
Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Bill Ellis, *Lucifer Ascending: The
Occult in Folklore and Popular Culture* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004); Ernst Osterkamp,
Lucifer: Stationen eines Motivs (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979).

[746] Still, the fact that Lucifer has become a mostly negative figure in anthroposophy may have more to do with
Steiner's followers and his later interpreters.

understand Steiner's reevaluation of Lucifer as a positive influence in the history of human development, especially as it concerns the peoples of Asia. Reading Steiner this way reveals that he was *not* a typical orientalist in his approach to the East but rather was engaged in a different sort of intellectual activity. The manner in which some anthroposophists presented Steiner's ideas about the East throughout the 20th century lend themselves to orientalist interpretations, and scholars have criticized the orientalist aspects of anthroposophy.[747] This chapter focuses on and emphasizes Steiner's *positive* view of Lucifer to demonstrate that Steiner was claiming that the peoples of "the East" were in some ways superior to the peoples of the West and could serve as the potential inspiration for healing Western culture and as a way out of Western decline. In other words, while some scholars have rightly pointed out Steiner's Eurocentrism, what has been missed is Steiner's positive reassessment of Lucifer in connection to Chinese civilization, which, when taken into account, effectively complications these claims.

This brief excursion into the figure of Lucifer is also necessary to understand how it differs from the more traditional Christian and imperialistic forms of orientalism described by Said. Steiner's reevaluation of Lucifer functioned as an esoteric polemic against the traditional way of viewing the history of Eastern civilization. Steiner argued against the long history of the Christian denigration of Lucifer by claiming that Lucifer, and by extension China, was the redeeming figure for the future of humanity. He projected this idea on the "East," whose inhabitants he referred to as "Children of Lucifer," a phrase he borrowed from another occultist Édouard Schuré (1841–1929), who published a play entitled *Les Enfants de Lucifer* in 1900. This

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[747] See, for example, Sergei O Prokofieff, *The East in the Light of the West. Vol Parts One to Three* (Forest Row: Temple Lodge, 2009). For critiques of Steiner's eurocentrism, see Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland*; Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism*; Ansgar Martins, *Rassismus Und Geschichtsmetaphysik: Esoterischer Darwinismus Und Freiheitsphilosophie Bei Rudolf Steiner* (Frankfurt: Info3-Verl, 2012); Myers, "Colonial Consciousness," 389. Myers, nevertheless, even recognizes that "Steiner's thought manifests a different kind of colonial discourse from the one found in state-oriented Orientalism."

play, which takes place in the ancient Mediterranean and has nothing to do with China, culminates in the main characters evoking Lucifer, who appears but abruptly vanishes, signifying that the earth was now to fall under the oppressive influence of the Christian Church. However, as Lucifer vanishes, he proclaims, "I shall break my chains, I shall stir up my torch. There will come a time when we will rule together over earth."[748] Schuré includes such exclamations of adoration as "O my Genius, my God, my Lucifer!"[749] This redemptive Luciferianism was important for Steiner, and Marie von Sivers/Steiner translated this play and Schuré's other works into German. She and Steiner thought so much of this play that they staged the "Children of Lucifer" in 1909.[750]

Schuré, a self-proclaimed acolyte of Lucifer, held the belief of many esoteric thinkers, including Steiner, that Lucifer was the bearer of "individuality" for human beings and therefore the bringer of human freedom.[751] It was Lucifer, working through the peoples of the East, who brought freedom to all human beings. The line "we will rule together over earth" in Schuré's play communicates another idea held by many European esotericists that in the future the Christ and Lucifer would rule the world together as embodiments of wisdom-freedom and Christian brotherly love. Schuré, in fact, refers to Lucifer explicitly as "the current of science."[752] Such a belief provides the basis for an esoteric principal, espoused by Schuré and Steiner, which is contained in the following phrase that appeared in Schuré's *L'évolution divine* in 1912: "Christus Luciferus verus: SENTENCE ROSICRUCIENNE."[753] Schuré claims the phrase "Christ is the true Lucifer" is a Rosicrucian "sentence," which links the belief about Christ and Lucifer

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[748] Édouard Schuré, *Le théâtre de l'âme* (Paris: Perrin, 1900), 1– 159, 140.
[749] Schuré, *Le théâtre de l'âme*, 51.
[750] On Schuré and Steiner see Helmut Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland,* 1018–1024.
[751] See especially Schuré's diagram in *L'évolution divine. Du Sphinx au Christ* (Paris: Perrin, 1912), 21.
[752] Schuré, *L'évolution divine*, 421.
[753] Schuré, *L'évolution divine*, 415.

specifically to the Rosicrucian tradition in European history, a secretive, quasi-real fraternity that sought to bring an end to the religious wars and synthesize religion and science in Germany in the 1600s.[754]

The founder of the Theosophical Society, H.P. Blavatsky, held a similar positive view of Lucifer and entitled the premier journal of her society with the very name, "Lucifer."[755] The inaugural issue featured a complete history of the planet Venus in order to justify the name, arguing that Lucifer—whose name literally means "bearer of light," just as Christophorus denotes "bearer of Christ—is Venus, Aurora, Aphrodite, Isis, even nature herself.[756] "By choosing it [i.e. Lucifer]," writes Blavatsky, "*we throw the first ray of light and truth* on a ridiculous prejudice which ought to have no room made for it in this our 'age of facts and discovery.' We work for true Religion and Science, in the interest of fact as against fiction and prejudice."[757] Schuré and Steiner, as well as Blavatsky (whom they both read), were influenced by the earlier French occultist Éliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant) (1810–1875), who followed romantic writers such as Blake and Byron—a tradition one author has referred to as "Romantic Satanism"—in restyling Lucifer as "the Angel of Liberty, Light, and Science," a "generous spirit of revolt and noble pride," while simultaneously distancing Lucifer from Satan (as Blavatsky, Steiner, and Schuré would also do).[758] From this perspective, the figure of Lucifer

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[754] For the most part, historians believe the whole thing to be a ruse, however its cultural impact is undeniable. See Christopher McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason: Eighteenth-Century Rosicrucianism in Central Europe and Its Relationship to the Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011). Susanna Åkerman, *Rose Cross Over the Baltic: The Spread of Rosicrucianism in Northern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

[755] Steiner later revived this magazine in German in 1904 with the title "Luzifer-Gnosis," in which wrote that "All who strive for knowledge and wisdom are children of Lucifer (*Kinder des Luzifer sind alle, die nach Erkenntnis, nach Weisheit streben*)." Rudolf Steiner, *Lucifer-Gnosis. Grundlegende Aufsätze zur Anthroposophie und Berichte aus den Zeitschriften „Luzifer" und „Lucifer-Gnosis" 1903–1908* (GA 34; Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1987), 28.

[756] H.P. Blavatsky, "What's in a Name? Why the Magazine Is called 'Lucifer,'" and "The History of a Planet," *Lucifer* 1, no. 1 (1887): 1–7; 15–22.

[757] Blavatsky "What's in a Name?" 5–6.

[758] Alphonse Constant, *La Bible de la Liberté* (Paris: Le Gallois, 1841), 17–22. See also Luijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 121–147.

became a popular symbol for freedom, enlightened reason, and gender equality in the modern

esoteric tradition.[759]

Steiner employs the phrase "Christus verus Luciferus" as early as 1908 in his lectures on

the esoteric interpretation of the Book of Revelation, claiming it was a phrase used in the first

days of Christianity.[760] The first appearance of such symbolism in the Christian tradition is in

Rev. 22.16, where the author has Christ say, "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the

bright and morning star."[761] In the following year, Steiner told audiences "we revere this Light-

bearer as the being through which alone we learn to understand the whole of the deep, inner

meaning of the Christ," and "in Rosicrucian science it is Lucifer who gives us the faculty for

describing and understanding the Christ."[762] Steiner continued by extolling Lucifer as a gnostic

savior who would bring humankind to a true understanding of the world:

> Real Christians to-day know that humanity needs something more than the
> Christianity of the egoists; they realise that the world can no longer be satisfied with
> the old Gospel tradition, and that the light from Lucifer's kingdom must be thrown
> upon it…. And when in the future, man desires again to ascend to the external
> spiritual world hidden behind the veil of the sense-world, and is not willing to stop
> short at the external and material, he must penetrate through the sense-world into
> the spiritual world and must allow himself to be borne to the light by the 'Light
> Bringer' ... [where] Lucifer will intensify our understanding and comprehension of
> the world.[763]

If Christ and Lucifer are to be seen as brothers, only when they "unite themselves in

love" will humanity be saved from the destruction of the purely Western demon Ahriman.[764] As

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[759] See Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism*. See also the work of Jeffrey Burton Russell on Satan, Lucifer, and the devil.
[760] Rudolf Steiner, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Anthroposophical Publishing Company, 1958), Lecture VII,
https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA104/English/APC1958/19080624p01.html.
[761] KJV.
[762] Taken from the first authorized English translation of the 1909 lecture series. Rudolf Steiner, *The East in the light of the West* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), 6, 120.
[763] Steiner, *The East in the Light of the West*, 122, 125.
[764] Steiner, *The East in the Light of the West*, 7. He refers to them in terms of brothers on 123.

Lucifer redeems humanity, so the East redeems the West. One can only imagine the response

such words would attract from the conservative Protestant elites, and indeed Steiner was often

attacked by Protestant theologians.[765] Steiner's reevaluation of the figure of Lucifer performed

by Steiner effects the radical reversal of former colonialist Christian accounts of Eastern

religions, which interpreted these religions as demonic and should therefore be silenced,

exorcised, and stamped out. In Steiner's very different multicultural worldview, these brothers

must join forces for the sake of humanity.

According to Steiner, the cultural wisdom emanating from the incarnation of Lucifer in

China was merged with the development of rationalism in the "Semitic" peoples, which blended

together and culminated thousands of years later when the Christ spirit, one of the biblical

Elohim that Steiner claimed dwelled in the sun, incarnated in the human body of Jesus of

Nazareth and brought "individual interiority" and personal godhood to humans.[766] This is

signified by the phrase attributed to Jesus in the New Testament, "the kingdom of heaven is

within you." Europeans had become the carriers of this "higher evolved thinking," by which he

meant rationality and reason. However, this style of thought was not higher in the sense of

superior and would inevitably result in the incarnation of another demonic being in the West.

Christ's incarnation and message of the essentially spiritual nature of human beings was not fully

comprehended by Christians. Instead of embracing their spirituality, Europeans turned to reason,

science, and technology creating a mechanical, material prison in which they would eventually

become incarcerated. This unfortunate situation would lead to the incarnation of the demon

Ahriman, who represented human egoism and non-spiritual thinking, who would have to be

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[765] See, for example, Carl Clemen, "Anthroposophy," *The Journal of Religion* 4, no. 3 (1924): 281–292.
[766] See Rudolf Steiner, *The Fifth Gospel: From the Akashic Records* (Forest Row: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2013). On this merger, see Steiner, *The Gospel of St. Luke*, Lecture VI, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA/GA0114/19090920p01.html.

overcome if humans were to set themselves free. Steiner thus turned to Eastern thought to heal

the damage done to Western philosophy and religion by this overemphasis on instrumental

rationality, which had turned Western culture into a materialist wasteland without clear values—

a perspective he shared with Weber.

Like many of his contemporaries, Steiner's abiding fear that Europeans were destroying

themselves as a result of their loss of spirituality and emphasis on reason caused him to turn to

the East in order to create a new form of European spirituality that included the ideas of Goethe.

Only this would deter the kind of European materialist thinking that would destroy Western

civilization. As can be seen from the following long passage written by Steiner toward the end of

the war, Steiner was convinced that unless Westerners embraced their true spiritual natures, the

wisdom of the East would be obliterated by Western economic expansion and the materialism

that came with it:

> We can say, and I beg you to take this very seriously, that unless a spiritual scientific impulse permeates the world, the East will gradually become absolutely incapable of directing its own economic life, of developing its own economic thinking. The East would come into a position of being only able to produce; that means, of actually cultivating the soil, of working upon the immediate products of nature with the instruments transmitted from the West.
> …
> From this point of view the catastrophe of the World War which has just run its course is nothing but the beginning of the tendency … to penetrate the East by the West in an economic way. That means making the East a sphere in which people work, and the West a sphere in which economic use is made of what is derived from nature in the East.
> …
> If this tendency which is dominant to-day were to continue, if it is not permeated spiritually, then it would undoubtedly come about … that the whole East would become economically an object of exploitation for the West. And people would regard this course of development as the proper course laid down for humanity on earth. It would be regarded as entirely just and taken for granted as self-evident. There exists no other means of bringing into this tendency that which does not turn

half of humanity into slaves, and the other half into users of these slaves, than by permeating the earth with a common spirituality that is again attainable.[767]

Steiner maintained and assured his audiences that he did not advocate that Europeans became like modern Chinese, because they had been corrupted by European colonialism and the opium wars. What he hoped for instead was that Europeans would see past these modern developments and look to the true spiritual nature of Asian spirituality and recognize that, contrary to what Europeans are taught in school, inventions like gunpower and the printing press were developed thousands of years earlier in China.[768] Furthermore, the introduction of opium into China by the British had spiritually crippled and stunted the Chinese, and therefore "the present condition of the Chinese, which we may say is degenerate and uncultivated, has actually come about from centuries of ill-treatment at the hands of the Europeans."[769] Thus, he wrote that China had to be approached with something spiritual, with "universal humanity," not only with economic activity, for otherwise the relationship would end in disaster.[770] "When the Asiatic criticises European civilisation," claimed Steiner, "something from out of the cosmos speaks in him."[771] Steiner further argued that the hearts of such people in Asia were, despite the apparent decadence of their civilization, filled with love, possessing an altruistic spirit that was "anything

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[767] Rudolf Steiner "Incarnation of Lucifer and Ahriman: Differentation of Primeval Wisdom into East, Middle, West," *Rudolf Steiner Archive & e.Lib*, April 8, 2013, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA191/English/ZS3903/LA3903_index.html. Translated by RS Archive with slightly modifications after checking it against the original German. See Steiner, *Soziales Verständnis aus geisteswissenschaftlicher Erkenntnis* (GA 191; Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989), 250–251. Steiner's word for "slaves" here is "Heloten," a reference to a group or class of public slaves in ancient Sparta.
[768] Here is a clue that Steiner expects resistance and is thus trying to figure out a way to reach resistant people: "If one utters these things to-day most people prefer to reject them. The man of to-day is only too inclined to wave these things aside with a movement of his hand, for the simple reason that it is externally uncomfortable for him to face the true reality." Steiner, "Incarnation of Lucifer and Ahriman."
[769] Rudolf Steiner, *The Evolution of the Earth and Man and The Influence of the Stars* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1987), Lecture V, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA354/English/RSP1987/19240712p01.html.
[770] Steiner quoted in the introduction in Steiner, *The East in the Light o(f the West*, xi.
[771] Rudolf Steiner, "East and West, and the Roman Church," *Rudolf Steiner Archive & e.Lib*, February 15, 2018, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA203/English/UNK1970/19210205p01.html.

but dead," and that they were the only ones who could facilitate the foundations for "an altruistic, industrial form of civilization," and furthermore that "the mode of thought for an actual brotherly impulse upon our earth is to be sought amongst the Asiatic peoples, the peoples of Asia."[772] Thus, we see Steiner's ideas were in part inspired by his reading of Gu, which is important to recognize because in this case it restores the agency to a non-European historical actor, which, after all, is a major objective of post-colonial theory.

Confucianism and Re-Enchantment in Weber's Sociology

"The mystics upheld the slogan: as little bureaucracy as possible…"[773]

The role of esotericism must be considered central to Weber's notion of "disenchantment"—even if Weber himself did not refer to it directly—because the role of "the East" had become implicit in his sociological theories during a time in which, in many ways, the East and the esoteric were becoming synonyms. The Weber biography and Ascona chapters revealed that Weber was connected to a specific strain of neo-Kantianism connected to the Russian form of neo-Kantianism, which was influenced by Steiner and his followers (Steiner's wife was also Russian), as well as other esotericists connected to the Stefan George and Munich Cosmic Circles. This section again builds on Weber's neo-Kantian connections to draw him closer to his esoteric and romantic contemporaries who looked to the East in order to rejuvenate the West. Weber, like Steiner, cannot therefore be interpreted only as a typical orientalist in Said's understanding, but rather as a Westerner who looked to the East for inspiration precisely because modern capitalism had not emerged there. Without modern capitalism, the world would

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[772] Rudolf Steiner, "Cosmogony, Freedom, Altruism," *Rudolf Steiner Archive & e.Lib*, November 15, 2017, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA191/English/LA1963/19191010p02.html.
[773] Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (New York: Free Press, 1964), 184.

never have produced the iron cage of reason or become disenchanted. In other words, by characterizing the East as using a different form of rationality to "adjust" rather than "master" the world, Weber actually agreed with Steiner that this was overall preferable to the current decline of the West.

The neo-Kantians were similarly interested in China, especially in Confucianism, which they viewed as a potential antidote for Europe's historical decline. Pedagogical reformer Adolf Reichwein (1898–1948) completed his dissertation on China and Europe in Marburg as the student of the leading neo-Kantian thinker Paul Natorp (1854–1924).[774] Reichwein observed that two distinct groups in Europe had taken an intellectual interest in the East: one was "irrational, consisting of the followers of Lao Tzu [here he placed Steiner and the esotericists], the other rational, consisting of those who are attracted by Kung Fu-tzu [here he situates the neo-Kantians]."[775] Natorp, a leader in the Marburg School, was a member of Hermann von Keyserling's *School of Wisdom* in Darmstadt and supported Richard Wilhelm's China Institute in Frankfurt.[776] During the war, he remarked that "the expiring occidental turns his face back to the rising place of the spiritual sun, the true birthplace of Man and of all his profound dreams of God and Soul—to the East."[777] Natorp published a book with Diederichs's publishing house in Jena, condemning the industrial evils of modern Europe and asking Westerners and Easterners to come

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[774] „Adolf Reichwein: Pädagoge und Widerstandskämpfer: ein Lebensbild in Briefen und Dokumenten (1914–1944)," eds. Gabriele C. Pallat, Roland Reichwein, and Lothar Kunz (Paderborn; München; Wien; Zürich: Schöningh, 1999), http://www.adolf-reichwein.de/Adolf-Reichwein-Biographie.
[775] Reichwein, *China and Europe*, 10. Reference to Steiner, 7.
[776] Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*, 58. On the history of the Institute, see Jay Goulding, "The Forgotten Frankfurt School: Richard Wilhelm's China Institute," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41, no. 1-2 (2014): 170–186. Keyserling and Wilhelm also cited and quoted Gu, and Gu quoted Wilhelm in return. See Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*, 190.
[777] Reichwein, *China and Europe*, 3. Reichwein quotes Gu in the same paragraph.

together in brotherhood to save humanity.[778] Reichwein's "irrational and rational" groups thus in reality frequently overlapped, and Weber was well-poised between the two.

Neo-Kantianism emerged predominantly in two different schools: The Marburg School around Natorp, Hermann Cohen, and Ernst Cassirer and the Southwest or Baden School led by Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert, in part from Heidelberg.[779] Weber remained in close contact with the latter group and was deeply influenced by their ideas. There was another group of neo-Kantians in Göttingen—sometimes called the neo-Friesian school after Jakob Friedrich Fries—which included Leonard Nelson and Georg Misch (1878–1965), and this group is important because these two philosophers were directly involved with Gu and helped to facilitate German translations of his writings.[780] All three neo-Kantian groups, despite their differences, shared much, principally an active interest in knowledge and cultures from the East. They were attracted to Chinese culture for many of the same reasons as Weber and Steiner, and it is in this context that Weber's work on China must be situated. In some ways, Weber's *Confucianism and Daoism* could be considered representative of the Southwest neo-Kantian school's interpretation of China in the sense that Weber imbibed and deployed many of their concepts in his analysis, as explained below.

By the time of WWI, the neo-Kantians were fighting against three intellectual "forces of darkness" that they felt dominated the conversation in Weimar and were attempting to erode the

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[778] See also Paul Natorp, *Stunden mit Rabindranath Thakkur* (Jena: Diederichs Verlag, 1921).

[779] On the Marburg school, see Ulrich Sieg, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des Marburger Neukantianismus* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1994). On neo-Kantianism more generally, which includes a history of the Southwest school, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism, 1796–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[780] Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*, 191n91. For a background of the Göttingen school, see Tomasz Kubalica, "The Polemic between Leonard Nelson and Ernst Cassirer on the Critical Method in the Philosophy," *Folia Philosophica* 35 (2016): 53–69; Otto Friedrich Bollnow, "Lebensphilosophie und Logik. Georg Misch und der Göttinger Kreis," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 34, no. 3 (1980): 423–440.

moral foundations of German culture.[781] These were historicism (which represented a radical adherence to historicity, especially of values), nihilism (a belief in nothing; meaninglessness), and pessimism (especially in terms of historical progress). A thinker such as Ostwald Spengler was thought to embody these forces of darkness, and he was opposed not only by them, but by Weber and Steiner as well.[782] Nevertheless, they, like Spengler, all turned to the East in hopes of finding inspiration and liberation. Nelson and Misch in Göttingen were strong opponents of Spengler and interpreted Gu as an important thinker who offered a valuable alternative to Spengler's pessimism.[783] Du suggests that Nelson first learned about Gu through Keyserling's *School of Wisdom*, with which both Weber and Steiner were closely connected.[784] Nelson read Gu's publications in German and sought out a correspondence with him during the war— although they apparently did not connect until after—and helped to facilitate the translation and promotion of Gu's ideas throughout his life.[785] Incidentally, at this time Weber was involved in facilitating the translation of another, more romantically inclined author from the East: the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore.[786] Gu was critical of Tagore and dismissed him as a dreamy poet and India as "mythic," whereas he, Gu, was a rational Confucian.[787] This suggests that Weber was, in

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[781] Frederick Beiser, "Weimar Philosophy and the Fate of Neo-Kantianism," in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, 115–132, 116. According to Beiser, the neo-Kantians used the term "forces of darkness" to describe these intellectual influences.

[782] "…this Oswald Spengler is an eminently intelligent man, that one has to be so intelligent as he is, so as to be able to produce such grandiose stupidities such as he has produced." See Rudolf Steiner, "Healing Factors for the Social Organism: Lecture I," *Rudolf Steiner Archive & e.Lib*, June 30, 2016, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA198/English/UNK198Z/19200717p01.html;mark=46,24,39#WN_mark.

[783] Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*, 57–58.

[784] Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*, 57–58. Steiner, Weber, and Keyserling mentioned each other in their writings. They corresponded and even met on several occasions (separately). Toward the end of his life in Munich, Weber was planning a course on philosophy to be given in the School, which unfortunately never took place because of Weber's death. (This information is thanks to Dr. Edith Hanke of the Max Weber Collection at the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities.)

[785] Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey,* 58, 191. See also Holger Franke, *Leonard Nelson: Ein Biographischer Beitrag Unter Besonderer Berücksichtigung Seiner Rechts- Und Staatspolitischen Arbeiten* (Ammersbek bei Hamburg: Verlag an der Lottbek Jensen, 1997).

[786] Weber, *Gesamtausgabe. Band II/8: Briefe 1913–1914*, 497, 754, 762.

[787] Gu Hongming, "Rabindranath Tagore et les Chinois," in Francis Borrey, *Un Sage Chinois: Kou Hong Ming* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1930), 72.

fact, also interested in the mystical and romantic forms of Eastern thought as represented by Tagore.[788]

Another major neo-Kantian in Göttingen to correspond with Gu, Georg Misch, took a deep interest in Confucianism and, like Weber, presented Confucius as a type of "Chinese Socrates," i.e., as the bringer of a new philosophical cultural awareness and tradition. As one scholar suggests, "Weber, Misch, and a few decades later Karl Jaspers in his writings on the axial age and the great foundational exemplary thinkers interpreted the figure of Confucius as inaugurating, much like Socrates, an ethical transformation of society."[789] Like Weber, Misch claimed in *Der Weg in die Philosophie* that Confucius was responsible for a revolution in ethics that aimed at a *this-worldly* liberation, which did not remain dependent on a transcendent form of salvation.[790] This represents the view of Steiner, whose Lucifer as "culture bearer" incarnated in China to produce a wisdom-filled development in consciousness and the liberatory impulse for humanity.

Nelson and the other neo-Kantians saw Gu as an ally in the fight against Spenglerian moral relativism, or as Weber would describe it, a polytheism of values—or in Steiner's way of thinking, a "war of all against all." The neo-Kantian philosophers and the Westerners seeking spiritual wisdom from the East thus had a common ground. Du explains that "like the School of Wisdom that tried to provide internal revival by confronting the Self and encountering the East, neo-Kantian philosophers such as Nelson and Natorp defended common sense and found

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[788] Weber was also interested in the mystical poetry of the Persian Hafis, whose "Divan" had also had a profound influence on Goethe. Weber inscribed lines from Hafis in a collection of books he gave to his lover Mina Tobler as a gift, suggesting that he associated eroticism with Eastern spirituality. These books are still held by the Max Weber Collection at the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Munich and were seen by the author in 2019. In 1913, the time when Weber was visiting Ascona, he quoted a line from Hafis's poetry to Frieda Gross, reminding her of how much she had liked it. See Weber, *Gesamtausgabe. Band II/8: Briefe 1913–1914*, 205.

[789] Nelson, *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy*, 31. For the Weber reference, see *The Religion of China*, 113–114.

[790] Georg Misch, *Der Weg in die Philosophie* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1926), 193. See also Eric S. Nelson, "Heidegger, Misch, and the Origins of Philosophy," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 39 (2012): 10–30.

inspiration from the East when fighting the dominant trends of materialism, moral relativism, and nihilism."[791] This is exactly what preoccupied Weber and Steiner, except that both Weber and Steiner agreed that values were subjectively determined and thus some new form of *Geisteswissenschaft* was needed—social science and spiritual science, respectively—a science that didn't rely purely on the mechanics of natural science in order to determine what was right and wrong, good and bad. In reality, Weber and Steiner were also critical of Kant, as were the neo-Kantians themselves, but the point is that the Konigsberg philosopher remained central to their intellectual development and needed to be reassessed in order for Western philosophy to proceed. They shared with their explicitly neo-Kantian colleagues an interest in the potentially salvific power of Eastern thought to halt Western decline through the active engagement with Confucian morality and ethics.

This similarity between Kant and Confucius is not as far-fetched as it may seem. Already in the 19th century Nietzsche, for example, referred to Kant as the "Chinaman of Königsberg."[792] Stephen Palmquist argues that this remark can actually be read in a positive light, as a reference to Kant's interest in "perspectival reversal"—that is to say "effecting a deep 'reversal' of Western values," which is characteristic of Chinese philosophy (in Nietzsche's eyes).[793]

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[791] Du, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey*, 59. See also Marchand, "Eastern Wisdom in an Era of Western Despair," 351. On the problem of relativism in Germany in Weber and Steiner's time, see Katherina Kinzel, "Wilhelm Windelband and the Problem of Relativism," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (2017): 84–107. Windelband was one of the first philosophers to study the way in which relativism emerges, as well as why it was dangerous to Western philosophy. Windelband founded the Southwest school of neo-Kantianism and was a close colleague of Weber's in Heidelberg. The problem of relativism thus loomed large for Weber, even as he gradually moved away from the Southwest school to develop his own approach to values, which, in a certain sense, followed Nietzsche: "The fate of an epoch which has eaten of the tree of knowledge is that it must know that we cannot learn the meaning of the world from the results of its analysis, be it ever so perfect; it must rather be in a position to create this meaning itself." Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1949), 57. See Antonio Cerella, "Encounters at the End of the World: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt and the Tyranny of Values," *Journal for Cultural Research* 20, no. 3 (2016): 266–285.
[792] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), 210.
[793] Stephen R. Palmquist, "How 'Chinese' Was Kant?" *The Philosopher* 84, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 3-9. Quotations taken from the updated online version, available at https://philpapers.org/rec/PALHCW.

Palmquist further argues that Kant can in fact be read through a Confucian lens based on his emphasis on public duty and adherence to filial piety—which again recalls the concept of "Li," i.e. proper action in accordance with social rituals—as well the influence of Swedenborg's mysticism on his mature thinking, which informed a "private belief" in the world of spirits.[794] Kant's emphasis on immediate experience in relation to the structure of the metaphysical prompted Alfred Weber to claim that Kant's "three Critiques culminate in absolute spiritualism."[795] This association of Kant and mysticism was therefore known to his brother Max.

It is not surprisingly, then, to find a connection between Kantianism and the modern philosophical school of neo-Confucianism in China, for example, in the writings of one of the founders of this school Mou Zongsan.[796] Mou was possibly the first to translate Kant's three *Critiques* into English. As Guang Xia observes, "in comparing Confucius with Kant, one would readily find a fundamental similarity between them: both, while taking an agnostic attitude toward the world beyond, presume its metaphysical existence…"[797] Mou positioned his own interpretation and approach to Kantianism as the rectification of certain Western omissions, especially concerning intuition, as they were present in Kant's philosophy.[798] Based on such connections, Palmquist concludes that Kant can be situated directly "at the point where Chinese

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[794] Palmquist, "How 'Chinese' Was Kant?" 8–9. On the Swedenborg connection, see Stephen Palmquist, *Kant and Mysticism: Critique as the Experience of Baring All in Reason's Light* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019). The author Honoré de Balzac had remarked in 1832 that "Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus Christ, and Swedenborg had identical principles…" Honoré de Balzac, *Seraphita, Louis Lambert, and the Exiles*, trans. Clara Bell (London: Dedalus Ltd, 1995), 238.
[795] Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy* (1896; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 383.
[796] Wing-tsit Chan, ed., *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), especially Li Zehou's chapter, "Some Thoughts on Ming-Qing Neo- Confucianism," 551–569.
[797] Guang Xia, "Confucianism and Its Modern Relevance: A Dialogue with the West" (PhD Diss., University of Toronto, 1998), 76.
[798] Wing-Cheuk Chan, "Mou Zongsan's Transformation of Kant's Philosophy," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33, no. 1 (2006): 125–139.

and Western tendencies cross," which helps explain why this generation of German philosophers well-schooled in Kant sought out Eastern thought so enthusiastically.[799] This also helps us better understand Kant's famous line, which Steiner had read as a young boy: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe … the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."[800] That is to say, it reveals an inherent link between adherence to moral laws and social rituals and a private agnosticism in the encounter with the infinite.

This added context draws Weber closer to the circle promoting Gu's ideas, even though Weber never mentions him directly. While Gu never referred to Kant directly in his writings, in his translation of the Chinese Confucian Classic *Zhongyong* he included this same famous line from Kant about the starry heaven above and the moral law within on the front page. As Wang argues, this suggests that Kant's notion of duty and moral law influenced Gu's interpretation of Confucianism.[801] Weber in fact made similar remarks as Gu in his essays on Confucianism and Taoism, which appeared in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* in 1915–1916. In the first footnote, where he lists his sources, he mentions that "von Wilhelm has edited a good selection of Chinese mystics and philosophers (Diederichs, Jena)," adding that "the study of Taoism has recently become almost fashionable."[802] This reveals that he did indeed consult authors published by Diederichs, of which Gu was one.

As Radkau points out, Weber likely did not reveal all of his sources and notes when it came to his writings on India and China, especially those that came from the popular sphere.

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[799] Palmquist, "How 'Chinese' Was Kant?" 13. Perry Myers would likely consider these similarities as connected to the decline of the *Bildung* tradition (which they were). However, they were equally a response to the disenchanting power of Western science and industrial technology.

[800] Guyer, "Introduction: The Starry Heavens and the Moral Law" in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, 1.

[801] Wang, "The Lost Confucian Philosopher," 227.

[802] „Die Beschäftigung mit Taoismus war neuerdings fast Mode." Weber, *The Religion of China*, 250. Wilhelm was publishing with Diederichs as early as 1910. Weber also cites the well-known Traditionalist esotericist Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in these essays.

From this Radkau concludes that another of Diederichs's authors, the esotericist and travel writer Hermann Keyserling, was likely "chief" among Weber's sources on Eastern religions.[803] Keyserling, who in a certain sense embodied these non-Western practices and had traveled to the places about which Weber was writing, was friends with Weber's brother Alfred, and Keyserling and Max began corresponding around 1911. In 1912, Keyserling stayed with the Webers for four days and made a deep impression on them.[804] As Radkau suggests, this event must have inspired Weber to return to his essays on Asian religions around the same time. In these essays, Weber built on the success of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and designed them to test the idea that the work-related ethics of Protestantism and Luther's "calling" were responsible for the emergence of modern capitalism in the West. Weber's thesis had established religion as the direct catalyst for industrialization and rationalization, a process triggered by the European Enlightenment and Puritan ethics, which resulted in Europeans being trapped in an invisible prison or "iron cage" of reason. Using similar methodology, he now sought to discover why this same fate had not befallen the people of China.

In his analysis, Weber makes a distinction between Confucian and Protestant forms of rationalism, claiming that although Confucianism developed a form of rational ethics, it never produced the "rational mastery of the world" as Protestantism had simply because for Weber "Confucian rationalism means rational adjustment to the world," while Protestant rationalism meant radically transforming the world.[805] According to Weber, Protestantism cut through tradition as well as family ties and hierarchical social stratification, with the pursuit of capital and an individual's "vocational calling" taking precedence over everything. This, he claims, was

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[803] Radkau, *Max Weber*, 466.
[804] Radkau, *Max Weber*, 467–468.
[805] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 248.

not the case with Confucian rationalism, which adhered closely to social traditions, placed the highest value on familial piety, looked to the spiritual ancestors for guidance while seeking to always do them honor, and rigidly stuck to a hierarchical social stratification of peasants at the bottom, literati at the top, and no bourgeoisie. Weber concludes that modern capitalism and total rationalization—as well as disenchantment—could therefore not have developed in China without the influence of the West because a belief in magic was never fully eradicated and consequently disenchantment had not occurred.[806]

As with Steiner and Gu, Weber was deeply concerned with the effects of the war, and he saw the event as a break, a separation from all that had come before. Because of this, he rushed to have his writings on Confucianism and Taoism published in the *Archiv*, writing in the first footnote that "it would be completely impossible to make up for all this after the end of the war. For this break (*Einschnitt*) is so strong that it excludes, or at least makes it unreasonably difficult, to take up again a series of thoughts from the time before."[807] Therefore, he published his writings on Asian religions when he did, understanding the urgency of the current moment.

During this time, Weber was experimenting with a variety of approaches to identify the best path forward for both himself and Germany during the war, including making trips to Ascona, Switzerland (as detailed in a previous chapter). Weber referred to this hotbed of irrationality, passion, Daoist philosophy, and spiritualist seances, as a "world full of enchantresses, grace, danger and desire for happiness…"[808] Describing his experience of spending the Easter holiday in Ascona, he wrote home to his wife:

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[806] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 119–226.

[807] Max Weber, „Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen. Religionssoziologische Skizzen," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Band 41 (1916): 1–87, 1n1.

[808] Weber, "Letters from Ascona," in *Max Weber and the Culture of Anarchy*, 60.

They had the Easter procession here yesterday with Chinese lanterns and pictures of Christ carried and so on. Everything illuminated with lights and lanterns, vivid pictures of the 'annunciation.' On the street in front of the cafe with a full moon! It was magical.[809]

This experience at Ascona made him appreciate how exhilarating a magical appreciation of the world could be and how contrary it was to Protestantism and the disenchanted Western world it had helped to create.

the most characteristic forms of Protestantism have liquidated magic most completely. In principal, magic was eradicated even in the sublimated form of sacraments and symbols, so much so that the strict Puritan had the corpses of his loved ones dug under without any formality in order to assure the complete elimination of superstition. That meant, in this context, cutting off all trust in magical manipulations.[810]

This is precisely what he believed *did not* happen in China, which he referred to as a "magic garden"—an expression that resonates with his description of the Asconan Easter framed in Chinese lights.[811] This continued enchantment was why modern capitalism could not emerge organically in the East.

At the same time, Weber claims that "a superstructure of magically 'rational' science" brought technical innovation to Chinese society without disenchanting it.[812] While he admits there was early mercantile capitalism in ancient China, there was never a "rational depersonalization of business," which meant an absence of the bourgeoisie.[813] Instead there were the sibs, temple notables, village administrators, and literati, who represented different state officials, office holders, and other functionaries, an organizational system that left the

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[809] Weber, "Letters from Ascona," in *Max Weber and the Culture of Anarchy*, 62.
[810] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 226.
[811] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 200.
[812] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 199.
[813] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 87.

bureaucracy open to all members of society.[814] In the cities, small-capitalist communal

entrepreneurial workshops were organized with an intensive division of labor, which "protected

the individual against the danger of proletarization and capitalist subjugation."[815] Without the

presence of an economic system that was organized using a purely means-end rationality, China

lacked the rationalized bureaucratic management of the West, retaining instead a holistic and

integrated society.

Weber further differentiates between Confucianism and Taoism in Chinese society. He

emphasizes this apparent "polar opposition" because, for his argument, this makes the Chinese

"irrational" overall and consequently unable to cultivate the totalizing Puritanical rationalization

of the West. The Taoist belief in magic and the possibility of human deification ensured the

continuation of a "magical worldview," while the aura surrounding the literati and Confucian

"gentlemen" who had passed the state exams kept alive an element of charisma in society. Weber

understands the Confucian gentleman as the ideology of the Chinese bureaucratic caste, however

because they are not thoroughly disenchanted, as this "caste" was in the West, there is no

industrial capitalism in China and no iron cage. According to Weber, Confucianism was never

"internally capable of eradicating the fundamental, purely magical conceptions of the Taoists,"

which means, in the words of one scholar, that Confucianism remained "magic-tolerant and

magically infused."[816]

Unlike Protestants, Confucians had no predestination, no original sin, and consequently

retained the possibility of perfecting themselves through activities and achievements in this

world, such as the state examinations. For Confucian gentlemen (those who had passed these

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[814] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 47.
[815] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 97.
[816] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 200; Jack Barbalet, *Confucianism and the Chinese Self: Re-Examining Max Weber's China* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 146.

exams), self-perfection subsequently brought wealth; for Protestants, wealth was an unintended result, but an important symptom of virtue. Confucian gentleman wanted this-worldly value and self-perfection; Protestants looked to a status in the afterlife based on deeds performed in this world (i.e., how much capital accumulated). Thus, Weber concludes that unlike Protestants, the Chinese saw themselves as integral to this world and not as alien and disapproving intruders:

> the Chinese lacked the central, religiously determined, and rational method of life which came from within and which was characteristic of the classical Puritan. For the latter, economic success was not an ultimate goal or end in itself but a means of proving oneself. The Chinese did not deliberately cut himself off from the impressions and influences of the 'world'—a world which the Puritan sought to control, just as he did himself, by means of a definite and one-sided rational effort of will. … Alien to the Confucian was the peculiar confinement and repression of natural impulse which was brought about by strictly volitional and ethical rationalization and ingrained in the Puritan.[817]

Here Weber inserts a footnote, remarking that "Very good remarks about this are to be found in Ludwig Klages' writings," revealing that again Weber is influenced by the ideas of an esotericist.[818] Like Klages, Weber argued that modern capitalism arose from the peculiar nature of Protestant ethics, which stipulated that salvation rested entirely in the hands of God. Nothing an individual could do could influence God's decision. But since Protestants wanted some way to assess their chances of salvation, they looked for signs of God's favor, and that favor became associated with wealth. This led to what Weber described as "The Protestant Ethic" according to which making money became the ultimate goal, a goal entirely divorced from ethics. His claims about China imply that the Chinese had no such systematic religious ethics, despite his comparison of Protestantism and Confucianism on seemingly equal grounds, equal in the sense that both apparently constitute some form of religion. Taoism, off to one side, merely provided

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[817] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 243–244.
[818] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 297.

the buttress against secularization by keeping "irrational" elements and popular religiosity alive. Weber thus believed the Chinese were not religious in the same sense as Europeans, that they lacked something "religious" in the Western understanding of the word. They lacked a tradition of prophecy and monotheism, and they possessed "no proclamation of a religious truth of salvation through personal revelation."[819] There existed instead forms of popular religion, which remained "a completely unsystematic pluralism of magical and heroistic cults."[820] That such a scenario resembles Weber's description of a "polytheism of values" in the modern West—a condition that emerged following rationalization and disenchantment, in which "the individual has to decide which is God for him and which is the devil"—seems not to have dawned on Weber.

The question must be asked, did anyone in China believe anything like this? At least one person did, Gu Hongming. Weber never cites Gu directly (though he was doubtless aware of him), but he likely would have agreed with Gu's conclusion:

> Some people say that the Chinese have no religion. It is certainly true that in China even the mass of the people do not take seriously to religion. I mean religion in the European sense of the word. The temples, rites and ceremonies of Taoism and Buddhism in China are more objects of recreation than of edification; they touch the aesthetic sense, so to speak, of the Chinese people rather than their moral or religious sense; in fact, they appeal more to their imagination than to their heart or soul. But instead of saying that the Chinese have no religion, it is perhaps more correct to say that the Chinese do not want—do not feel the need of religion.[821]

Weber's understanding of Chinese religions is not as simplistic as a cursory orientalist reading of his rationalization theory and writings on the religions of Asia would suggest. Many

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[819] Weber, *Economy and Society*, 466.
[820] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 142-143. See also Timothy Brook, "Weber's *Religion of China*," in *Max Weber's Economic Ethic of the World Religions. An Analysis*, ed. Thomas C. Ertman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 87–108, 90.
[821] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 166.

scholars, such as Timothy Brook, have pointed out the inherent Eurocentrism in Weber's argument, claiming that Weber invokes China in order to "put it at a disadvantage vis-à-vis Protestant Europe as incomplete, underdeveloped, and involuted."[822] This chapter argues the opposite, that Weber, like Steiner, was pessimistic and disheartened by the disenchantment of Europe and looked East in the hope of making sense of and even amending this distressing situation. Weber attempted to re-enchant the world by studying and writing about China, as some part of him was undoubtedly impressed by the Confucian gentlemen, who, based on his own actions and convictions, possessed the kind of charisma Weber advocated for modern German politicians. Weber's study of Chinese thought and the Chinese economy was therefore part of his effort to find a way to reenchant the West, similar to Steiner and the other esotericists, even though he ultimately decided there was no way that the West could emulate China.

Weber, like so many of his contemporaries looked beyond Europe for solutions to the problems the West had made for itself. However ethnocentric Weber's thought may have continued to be in actuality, the fact that he expended so much time and effort studying Eastern philosophy and religion provides further evidence that Said's analysis of 19th century orientalism is flawed because it failed to recognize the role orientalism played in Europe's analysis of its own deterioration.[823] The fact that Weber published these writings during the First World War suggests he was looking to the East to find out why the West had failed—why, specifically, industrial capitalism had emerged in the West. Modern capitalism, that great unprecedented force was, yes, according to Weber, unique to the West, but this was not a wholly

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[822] Brook, "Weber's *Religion of China*," 88. Lütfi Sunar similarly suggests that Weber analyzed non-Western religions only in order to identify the unique nature of the West so that Europeans would remain positive about modernity and Western progress. See Lütfi Sunar, *Marx and Weber on Oriental Societies: In the Shadow of Western Modernity* (Farnham Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 156.
[823] Allison Coudert makes a similar argument about the early modern period in "Orientalism in Early Modern Europe?"

desirable development. The war and the endless death toll had revealed with absolute clarity what technology could do when left to bureaucrats motivated by instrumental rationality devoid of ethics. The war was exactly what one would expect as the Protestant ethic was allowed to run its course without interference. As Weber feared the Western world had become a polytheism of values, Gu similarly worried that European civilization was now a *battlefield of divided interests*, "a continuous warfare for the divided interests of science and art on the one hand, and of religion and philosophy on the other … a terrible battlefield where the head and heart—the soul and the intellect—come into constant conflict."[824] The cause of this was terrifying situation was modern industrial capitalism, that "hard as steel housing" of rationality, which was prevented in China thanks to Confucianism and Daoism. Could the West learn from this different way of knowing?

It is significant that Weber was instrumental in the formation of a neo/new-Confucianist philosophy in modern China, which is concerned first and foremost with ethical cultivation and maintaining the connection between heaven and earth.[825] For example, the Chinese philosopher Chen Lai interpreted the May Fourth debates on Chinese culture using Weber's ideas about value rationality and instrumental rationality—the same debates Gu took part in during his own lifetime from the position of a committed Confucian.[826] As Els Van Dongen observes, "Chen's moral conservatism upholds Weber's value rationality in that it defends values on the basis of their inherent value. This is in accordance with the argument of Tu Wei-ming [who also drew on Weber] and other New Confucians, claiming that Confucianism can be a moral cure against the erosion of meaning and community in a modernized world."[827] The similarity of Weber's and

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[824] Gu, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, 14.

[825] Els Van Dongen, *Realistic Revolution: Contesting Chinese History, Culture, and Politics After 1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 137.

[826] Van Dongen, *Realistic Revolution*, 148.

[827] Van Dongen, *Realistic Revolution*, 152. Van Dongen refers to this as the "Max Weber Dilemma" due to the "double role of Confucianism as both a spiritual antidote and a facilitator of capitalism as … we find the same ambiguity in Max Weber." Van Dongen, *Realistic Revolution*, 158.

Chen's argumentation here suggests a reinterpretation of Weber's interest in Chinese culture, namely, that he was not interested in putting it down and elevating the West, as many scholars have claimed, but rather seeing it as a source of insight into solving the very European problem of disenchantment and modern value polytheism, the same reason Steiner looked East and lectured on Gu.

It is important to note that neo-Confucianism has been used to justify capitalism in China, which would seem to contradict Weber. However, the argument is rather that there is another form of capitalism, different from the instrumentally rational capitalism of the West that, as Weber recognized, results in disenchantment and the iron cage, and this alternative capitalism is based on another form of rationality and another way of knowing. Weber believed that "The Chinese in all probability would be quite capable, probably more capable than the Japanese, of assimilating capitalism."[828] He did not deny the Chinese rationality but maintained that the "Confucian rationalism meant rational adjustment to the world; Puritan rationalism meant rational mastery of the world."[829] As one Weber scholar summarizes: "The Chinese used reason as the means towards health, happiness, and long life, and they embraced magic in dealing with this world. The Puritans rejected this world and were condemned to isolation and inner loneliness because they could not answer the question whether they were members of the Elect."[830] Weber thus might have seen from his own analysis of the Chinese economy that a kind of spiritualized or ethically driven capitalism could have emerged in China, as he recognized that the Chinese were rational like Western capitalists, but unlike Western capitalists, they had not divorced ethical considerations from their commercial dealings.

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[828] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 248.
[829] Weber, *The Religion of China*, 246.
[830] Christopher Adair-Toteff, "Max Weber on Confucianism versus Protestantism," *Max Weber Studies* 14, no. 1 (2014): 79–96, 79.

Scott Lash has suggested the idea of a non-hegemonic rationality, while Sang-Jin Han has written about the possibility of an affective rationality in China.[831] The recent book *When China Rules the World* also argued that there are other modernities beside Western modernity, and that Chinese modernity is different and will lead the future world.[832] As we have seen, a different form of a rationality was sought by Steiner, as well, namely a spiritual science, and he used China as a mirror of the West in order to develop it. As Shadi Bartsch has shown, this same strategy is used by neo-Confucian scholars in China to this day who attack "instrumental rationality"—an idea borrowed from Weber—and differentiate between "Western rationality (characterized as instrumental and scientific) from Chinese rationality (characterized as value-driven rather than ends-driven)."[833] Yuk Hui has asked the question of whether there is even technological thought in China in the Western sense, calling for a form of "cosmotechnics" that is more global and universal and informed by Asian ways of knowing, an attempt to solve the technology problem through Confucianism and Daoism and create a non-disenchanted modern industrial world.[834] This means that Weber's ideas about China and the West, written at the same time as Steiner and Gu, are currently being used by some Chinese scholars to advance many of Steiner's and Gu's same arguments.[835]

Conclusion

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[831] See, for example, Sang-Jin Han, *Confucianism and Reflexive Modernity: Bringing Community Back to Human Rights in the Age of Global Risk Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), especially interviews with Scott Lash in the appendix.
[832] Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World* (London: Allen Lane, 2008).
[833] Shadi Bartsch, "The Rationality Wars: The Ancient Greeks and the Counter-Enlightenment in Contemporary China," History and Theory 59, no. 4 (2020): 127–143, 128.
[834] Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media, 2016).
[835] See Bartsch, "The Rationality Wars," 136–143.

While neither Weber nor Steiner set foot in Asia, they assiduously read the work of those who had during the early modern and modern periods. Additionally, Asian intellectuals such as Gu Hongming came to a similar conclusion that modern Europe had lost its spirit and needed to be inspired by Eastern thought in order to avoid cultural disaster. A certain misconstrual of Weber's ideas persists in the history of economics, often referred to as business history. This is the concept of the "Great Divergence," which has become a topic of much scholarly debate. This theory, alternatively called the "European miracle," purports to track an economic shift during the 19th century that resulted in Europe superseding India, China, Japan, and the Islamic regions as the world's most rich and powerful civilization.[836] Generally speaking, the European Renaissance, the Age of Discovery, the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, colonialism, and novel advancements in technology are cited as causes for this divergence. Today, it is fashionable to speak of the "Great Convergence" instead, in light of changes brought about by neo-liberalism and globalization.[837]

It is of interest to ask whether Weber, Gu, and Steiner would have agreed with the theory of the Great Divergence or the newer theory of Convergence? As such a theory forms a major part of scholarly debate concerning the cultural and economic trajectories in history, it is instructive to revisit such thinkers as Weber, Gu, and Steiner, in order to better understand how they perceived these asymmetrical relations in a time when, like today, many taken-for-granted socioeconomic and sociocultural truisms were being reexamined and often times replaced with more accurate—or at least more appropriate—ways of understanding. Such an undertaking will

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[836] Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[837] Geoffrey Jones, "Business History, the Great Divergence and the Great Convergence*," Harvard Business School Working Knowledge*, August 1, 2017, https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/business-history-the-great-divergence-and-the-great-convergence.

provide us with different and more globalized ways of knowing, helping to create a more

inclusive intellectual conversation about the causes and consequences of economic development.

Conclusion

The goal of this dissertation has been to reexamine the existing binary categories that

many historians of the 20th century have utilized—and in many cases still do—to make sense of

the emergence of the modern age. As I have argued, the reevaluation of esotericism has

important implications for the way "modernity" is conceptualized and for what it means to be

"modern." At the same time, highlighting esotericism and its role in European discourse and

history has implications for what has been characterized as an "anti-modern" position and what it

means to be considered a European or a non-European. It is important to bring so-called esoteric

thinkers like Steiner into the mainstream by drawing comparisons between their work and

figures like Weber who have been recognized as seminal because this sheds light on the

problematic separation of "insider" and "outsider" forms of knowledge. The point of the

dissertation has not been to investigate the influence of one strand of thought or one thinker on

another but rather to stress convergences in order to demonstrate that Weber and Steiner, as

different as their thought may have been, were concerned with similar problems and questions

about the direction the modern increasingly industrial, technological, and urban West was

taking.[838] Breaking down categorical binaries that presuppose esotericism to be the opposite of

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[838] It is possible that Steiner and Weber never met or influenced each other directly because Weber may have been reluctant to associate with figures as *deeply* into the occult as someone like Steiner. Mystic poets and bohemians and radical psychotherapists and anarchists were, perhaps, more palatable to Weber than someone like Steiner, who had publicly embraced occultism. For Weber, this could have been a question of reputation, as, for the most part, he was an "insider" in the world of academia, whereas Steiner had become a clear "outsider." Steiner in his own time already acquired the reputation of being irrational, although in reality he may have been more educated in the hard sciences—and therefore more ostensibly rational—than Weber, as pointed out in the biography chapters. However it is important to realize that Weber's wife, Marianne, struck up lifelong friendships with people who were closer to anthroposophy, for example, the German social scientist, activist, and education reformer Marie Baum, who attended courses at the Goetheanum in 1921 and met Steiner. Baum wrote a favorable review of her experience in a French journal for the art of education, in which she praised the anthroposophists for providing actual solutions to modern problems instead of mere abstract theorizing. See Steiner, *Kunst und Anthroposophie*, 211–217. Marianne herself attended at least one lecture on anthroposophy later in life. This was delivered by another friend and member of her scholarly circle, the art historian Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub (1884–1963), who had been an acquaintance of

rationalism is essential if scholars and people at large are to gain a better understanding of modern Germany. Writing esotericism back into the historical record reveals that esotericists were just as engaged in trying to solve life's existential problems as the countless other reformists who, as Kevin Repp has shown, were dealing with the exact same problems.

According to the binary framework of many 20th century historians, someone like Weber has represented the classic modern intellectual: liberal, rational, progressive, secular, skeptical, and scientific. Steiner, on the other hand, was considered to be the classic anti-modernist: spiritual, charismatic, esoteric, in short, an irrational opponent of liberal progress. But as I have argued, such categorical interpretations are neither accurate nor useful. Comparing these two seemingly disparate individuals reveals that modernity is better described as an *entanglement of positionalities*, a pluralistic landscape of layered emotional states (hopes and dreams, anxieties and fears, desires and hatreds) and religious and intellectual commitments separated by porous boundaries. The generation into which Weber and Steiner were born—particularly the intellectual members of this generation—were challenged to direct all their mental and physical energy to address radical disruptions in traditional ways of thinking about the world, human beings, nature, and God, all of which had tremendous repercussions on their daily lives and relationships. Moreover, many members of Weber's and Steiner's generation grasped the immense opportunity they had *to make a new world for themselves*, what Repp refers to as "coming to terms with the future," a future free of the constraints, limitations, and oppressions of the traditional society in which they grew up.[839]

Steiner. See Bärbel Meurer, *Marianne Weber: Leben Und Werk* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 575. The point is that although there was no direct connection between Steiner and Weber, there were numerous indirect influences, which illustrates the certain climate of opinion that was pervasive at the time. This climate was discussed at length in the biography chapters using Mannheim's theory of generations and Repp's idea of the "generation of 1890." See also Marianne Weber and E.S., "Academic Conviviality," *Minerva* 15, no. 2 (1977): 214–246.
[839] Kevin Repp, *Reformers*, 1–18.

The misperception of modernity as disenchanted and secular is especially apparent in

Germany, where, following the outcome of the two world wars, a simplistic dichotomy between

anti-modern irrational Germans and modern democratic and rational "Westerners" became

entrenched in the academy. This "classical" interpretation of German modernity emphasized its

backwardness, the persistence of traditional elites, a romantic strain of *völkisch* ideology, the

rejection of reason and science, and a politics of despair, all of which are credited with bringing

about the collapse of the Weimar Republic—and therefore of democracy in Germany—and the

takeover by the National Socialists.[840] This view became extremely popular after the Second

World War when the remaining Nazis were tried for "conspiracy" by the Allied Powers, an

accusation which implied the Nazis highjacked Germany and derailed it from a normative track

into a modern Western way of life. In other words, German modernity was thought to be an

anomaly.[841] Kim Christian Priemel has recently demonstrated that, in addition to setting a new

international legal precedent with the prosecution of war criminals, the Nuremberg trials aimed

at promoting a larger historical narrative, namely, that Germany had betrayed the "Western

liberal path" and could only find its way back again once it recognized its "divergence."[842]

Scholars such as Franz Neumann, A. J. P. Taylor, Edmond Vermeil, Alexander Gerschenkron,

and Friedrich Hayek were in agreement with this diagnosis. To quote Priemel:

> the German nation had fatefully deviated from a common trajectory of Western
> civilization with its liberal market economies, pluralist democracies, individualist
> concepts of man, and the rule of law, had modernized belatedly and incompletely,
> and had compensated for these deficiencies by asserting an aggressive, militarist
> nationalism.[843]

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[840] For example, Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*; Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik;* Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology;* Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft.*

[841] See Kim Christian Priemel, *The Betrayal: The Nuremberg Trials and German Divergence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[842] Priemel, *The Betrayal*, 402–418.

[843] Priemel, *The Betrayal*, 57.

Given the atrocities committed by the National Socialists and the suffering experienced during the war, this view of German history is, of course, understandable.

The goal of this dissertation is not to devalue the vast body of scholarship from 20th century scholars but to build on post-colonial theory and more recent scholarship (including the study of esotericism) that has allowed a much more fluid picture of modernity to emerge. Edward Ross Dickinson has remarked that historians of German modernity now seem less concerned with identifying "the 'logic' of modern development … the underlying pattern that explains why—for example—National Socialism came to power in Germany," and more concerned with "contingency, complexity, and indeterminacy."[844] These approaches outline "open-ended histories, not determined histories" and are more interested in "potentials than in imperatives, in complexities rather than logics, perhaps even in agency rather than dynamics."[845] In such histories, theory is deployed as a heuristic, rather than an explanatory instrument uncovering essences, patterns, or structures. The result has been to illustrate that *fin de siècle* Germany was not a binary of modern/anti-modern positions but "an organizational and intellectual landscape of gargantuan complexity."[846] This complexity is nevertheless thought to contain (at least) three tendencies: optimism about the future, a state of permanent crisis, and the insistence upon a sovereign science, a totalizing system of knowledge, which could identify and

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[844] Edward Ross Dickinson, "Not So Scary After All? Reform in Imperial and Weimar Germany," 166. See also Dennis Sweeney, "Reconsidering the Modernity Paradigm: Reform Movements, the Social, and the State in Wilhelmine Germany," *Social History* 31 (2006): 405–434; Frederick Cooper, "Modernity," in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, ed. Frederick Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Richard Maguire, "Guilt by Association? The Hazards of Linking the Concept of the State with Violence," *European Review of History* 13 (2006): 293–310; Jens Hacke and Matthias Pohlig, eds., *Theorie in der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2008).
[845] Dickinson, "Not So Scary," 166.
[846] Dickinson, "Not So Scary," 170.

solve new threats (such as technology).[847] As we have seen, Weber and Steiner combined all three tendencies in their work. While keenly aware that Europe was in a state of crisis largely caused by the threat science and technology posed for human agency and integrity, they were committed to finding solutions that would contribute to the emergence of a more just, equal, and morally sensitive society.

As suggested in the chapter on Ascona, one line of reasoning in the recent literature dealing with modernity and 20th century history prefers to speak of "multiple modernities," a concept originally developed by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt to counteract assumptions of a collective, homogenous, inherently "positive" modernity.[848] As Dickinson remarks, "The varying possible constellations of power in modern societies create 'multiple modernities', modern societies with quite radically differing potentials."[849] Multiple modernities were often interconnected yet separate, porous yet contained, dramatic yet banal—in a word, *contradictory*. These various modernities were experienced differently, not only by different nations and cultures, but even within the "West," as this comparison of Weber and Steiner demonstrates. Weber was influenced by many of the same individuals as Steiner, individuals who have been described as anti-modern, while Steiner was influenced by the thinkers deemed modern, secular, progressive, and rational. All these individuals, including Weber and Steiner, were busily engaged in creating a modern world (and a modern future) based on their hopes, fears, ideas, ideals, and beliefs. If we are to grasp the reality of this situation in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century as well as in

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[847] Edward Ross Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy," 2.
[848] See Shmuel Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Eliezer Ben Rafael, Yitzak Sternberg, and S. N. Eisenstadt, eds., *Comparing Modernities: Pluralism Versus Homogenity. Essays in Homage to Shmuel N. Eisenstadt* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); see also Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
[849] Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy," 36. This concept has been criticized, for example, by Frederick Cooper, who argued that the idea of multiple modernities sidesteps the problem. This is true unless infinite plurality and not homogenization is the actual state of affairs in any given historical context (which, as the monographs pile up, seems to be the case). See Cooper, "Modernity," 127.

other parts of Europe and the Western world, a new perspective is needed that excludes binary thinking and takes into account the broad spectrum of beliefs that existed at the time. My deliberate pairing of Weber and Steiner, who are rarely brought together, is an attempt to do just this by breaking down outmoded ideas about esotericism that see it as basically obscurest, anti-modern, and, according to the worst scenario, a forerunner of the kind of totalitarian thinking that has left such an indelible and tragic mark on 20th century history.

Appendix

Steiner, Esotericism, and Fascism

Unfortunately, in books such as *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* by Eric Kurlander there remains a strong inclination to link occult, esoteric, and so-called pseudoscience to a teleology that culminates in fascism, racism, and the rise of National Socialism. *Hitler's Monsters* explores the potential connection between occultism and Nazism, a connection that was increasing popularized in mainstream culture after the end of the Second World War.[850] In seeking to uncover the validity of this image, Kurlander argues that "no mass political movement drew as consciously or consistently as the Nazis on what I call the 'supernatural imaginary'—occultism and 'border science', pagan, New Age, and Eastern religions, folklore, mythology, and many other supernatural doctrines."[851] Although Kurlander recognizes that the Nazis were critical of occultism, this does not stop him from concluding that "National Socialism, even when critical of occultism, was more preoccupied by and indebted to a wide array of supernatural doctrines and esoteric practices than any mass political movement of the interwar period."[852] Kurlander references a few scholars of esotericism, such as Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Marco Pasi, Egil Asprem, and Joscelyn Godwin. However, he states that the field as a whole has a central blind spot—basically, the same argument that kept the study of

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[850] Popular books such as *The Morning of the Magicians* (1964), *The Spear of Destiny* (1982), and *Die Schwarze Sonne von Tashi Lhunpo* (1991), as well as film series like *Indiana Jones* (1984–2008), video games like *Castle Wolfenstein* (1981), and comic books like *Hellboy: Seed of Destruction* (1994) succeeded in solidifying a particular image of the Nazis as practicing black magic. On Nazism and occultism in popular culture, see Eva Kingsepp, "Nazityskland i populärkulturen: minne, myt, medier" (PhD Diss., Stockholms universitet, 2008), and "The Power of the Black Sun: (oc)cultural perspectives on Nazi/SS esotericism," *ContERN*, November 3, 2012, https://contern.org/cyberproceedings/papers-from-the-1st-international-conference-on-contemporary-esotericism/eva-kingsepp-the-power-of-the-black-sun-occultural-perspectives-on-naziss-esotericism/.
[851] Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters*, xi.
[852] Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters*, xiv.

these knowledge practices out of academia during the 20th century—namely, that occultism, esotericism, and "pseudoscience" culminate in irrationalism, authoritarianism, and Nazism, and should therefore be viewed with suspicion.[853] In relation to the scholarly study of esotericism, he opposes himself to what critics have pointed out to be a strawman when he writes:

> German occultism was neither as universally progressive nor as closely interwoven with science as many revisionist scholars suggest. Many natural scientists, journalists, and liberal sceptics were *already* exasperated by—and devastating in their critiques of—occult and border scientific thinking during the first third of the twentieth century. To pretend that professional biologists, chemists, and physicists, both inside and outside Germany, were as prone to occult ideas as amateur 'scientists of the soul' is therefore unhelpful, especially in eliding long-running and heated contemporary debates over occult charlatanry between mainstream and 'border scientists'.[854]

This statement ignores the fact that all kinds of ideas that might be and were dismissed by some as occult—such as parapsychology, eugenics, and Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy—were being investigated at the time by reputable scientists. All credible scholars of esotericism admit that esoteric ideas could go either way politically and scientifically. Kurlander is not wrong here but one-sided and narrow. The historian of science and medicine Andreas Sommer has written a scathing review of Kurlander's book, and he is not the only one. Sommer refers to Kurlander's argument as an "unhelpful historical scapegoating exercise," and that "impartial, rigorously researched historical scholarship the book is not."[855] He responds to the above quotation from Kurlander by stating that

> the one thing that historians like Anne Harrington (1996), Corinna Treitel (2004) and Heather Wolffram (2009) did do for the German context was not to "pretend" but present concrete evidence that various occult beliefs have been far more widespread in progressive lay and scientific circles than previous historians have assumed.

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[853] Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters*, xiii.
[854] Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters*, xiii–xiv.
[855] Andreas Sommer, "Hitler's Monsters? A Look at German "Scientific Occultism" and Fascism. Part 1/2," *Forbidden Histories*, May 10, 2019, www.forbiddenhistories.com/hitlers-monsters-part-1-2/.

Another problem is the vagueness of Kurlander's methodology. He attacks those who blurred the "lines between science and the supernatural,"[856] without defining an epistemologically authorized science or the supernatural—or esotericism, for that matter. These three aggregates of knowledge are extraordinarily complex and resist simple definition, making it difficult to opportunistically assign one or the other to any simplified binary categories in order to support an argument. The reality of the historical situation is more complex, as many scholars have painstakingly shown. Rather than defining esotericism, Kurlander groups together a historically diverse set of alternative and non-conventional spiritual groups, ideas, and traditions under the equally unhelpful category of "occultism." As Sommer points out, he then contrasts "this monster with its heroic conqueror 'mainstream science', which he [Kurlander] portrays as inherently 'naturalistic' and simultaneously universally humanistic." In doing this, Kurlander conveniently paints the picture of an "occultism" that is universally fascistic.[857] Sommer again: "instead of facing ugly facts, [Kurlander] tries to save the popular image of his ideal of 'mainstream science' as intrinsically humanistic by whitewashing its history." Sommers supplies many examples of scientists attacking "occult beliefs" because they were linked to a regressive state of human evolution, one of the foundational platforms of the colonization project.

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[856] Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters*, 149.

[857] This is accomplished, for example, by declaring that eugenics was only a "border science" opposed by heroic mainstream science. This is simply not the case. See Mark B. Adams, ed*., The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics. Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Gabriela Imboden, Sabine Braunschweig, Hans Jakob Ritter, and Regina Wecker, eds., *Wie nationalsozialistisch ist die Eugenik? What is National Socialist about Eugenics?* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2009); Fabiola López-Durán, *Eugenics in the Garden: Transatlantic Architecture and the Crafting of Modernity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018); Marius Turda, ed., *The History of East-Central European Eugenics, 1900–1945: Sources and Commentaries* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

Historian of esotericism and politics Julian Strube has also written a long critical review, pointing out that Kurlander cites reference works that draw different conclusions from the argument he is using them to support.[858] For example, Peter Staudenmaier's *Between Occultism and Nazism* employs a nuanced approach and confronts the reader with the "irreducible ambiguities of modernity," whereas Kurlander seems more interested in reinforcing 20th century binary categories.[859] In Strube's words, *Hitler's Monsters* "represents less a valiant struggle against a revisionist hegemony than an attempt to reinforce perceptions that are predominant among the public at large but were long ago dismissed by specialists."[860] Kurlander does briefly address this in the book's introduction, writing that "given occultism's broad impact on Weimar culture, including a number of left-wing and Jewish artists, it would be inaccurate to suggest that occultism was inherently racist or fascist."[861] However, the picture he goes on to paint in the book tells a much different story. Here he explicitly states that "there was no such relationship between politics and occultism on the left," which, as Strube points out, is "factually wrong."[862]

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[858] Julian Strube, "Review of *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich*, by Eric Kurlander," *Correspondences* 5 (2017): 113–139, 139.

[859] Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism*, 6. More recently, Staudenmaier also published an article denying the connection between Nazism and occultism, see "The Nazis as occult masters? It's a good story but not history," *Aeon*, June 9, 2017, https://aeon.co/ideas/the-nazis-as-occult-masters-its-a-good-story-but-not-history.

[860] Strube, Review of *Hitler's Monsters*, 131.

[861] Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters*, 76.

[862] Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters*, 88; Strube, Review of *Hitler's Monsters*, 135. Just a few examples of the many studies of occultism and esotericism on the left: Strube, *Sozialismus, Katholizismus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts*; Lagalisse, *Occult Features of Anarchism*; Alberto Valín Fernández, "De masones y revolucionarios: una reflexión en torno a este encuentro," *Anuario Brigantine* 28 (2005): 173–198; Manon Hedenborg White, *The Eloquent Blood: The Goddess Babalon and the Construction of Femininities in Western Esotericism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Birgit Menzel, Michael Hagemeister, and Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, eds., *The New Age of Russia: Occult and Esoteric Dimensions* (München: Otto Sagner, 2012); Julia von Boguslawski and Jasmine Westerlund, "Putting the spiritual into practice Anthroposophy in the life and work of Olly and Uno Donner," *Approaching Religion* 8, No. 1 (2018): 48–68; Tiina Mahlamäki, "'A touch of the spiritual world?' An anthroposophical core in the life and work of Kersti Bergroth (1886–1975)," in *Finnish Women Making Religion: Between Ancestors to Angels*, eds. Terhi Utriainen and Päivi Salmesvuori (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 103–21; Stephen C. Finley, Margarita Simon Guillory, and Hugh R. Page, Jr., eds., *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience: "there Is a Mystery,"* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Bruce Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life: Oskar Goldberg and the Vitalist Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017). Oskar Goldberg was caricatured as a Jewish proto-fascist in the Weimar period, but the point is that he was both a Jewish Zionist *and* an occultist.

Eva Kingsepp's review of *Hitler's Monsters* is also worth mentioning. Kingsepp focuses on Kurlander's use of the literature on esotericism, and his claim that these ideas influenced Nazi ideology.[863] The review devotes several pages to fact checking Kurlander's claims against references he cites, which, in many cases, do not correspond. Based on "the author's treatment of his referenced sources being misinterpreted and/or distorted in order to support the narrative," as well as other problems mentioned above, Kingsepp concludes that *Hitler's Monsters* is "a myth with footnotes."[864] Kingsepp goes further, referring to the book as a "simulacrum":

> The abundance of signs connoting on the one hand fact and on the other elements familiar from popular culture, occulture, et cetera, results in an experience of cognitive satiety easily interpreted as evidence of authenticity. Although the signifiers are often both empty and floating, together they give an impression of validating popular belief, which for many readers might be more important than actually getting hard facts.[865]

Such observations are then used to build a devastating case about the lack of responsibility displayed by Yale for choosing to publish the book, and even floating accusations of mock scholarship in relation to Kurlander's skills as a historian.[866] What is going on here, and how could this have happened? As detailed throughout this dissertation, this situation is caused by the historical blindness and misunderstanding of esotericism and perhaps more so because of the way German modernity has been conceptualized by scholars and taught to students since the Nuremberg trials—namely, that it is a deviation from some normative state of being in the world. Is this an act of "internal Orientalism," as Kingsepp suggests, as "the irrational, essentially primitive Other within a western world otherwise characterized by Enlightenment values and

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[863] Eva Kingsepp, "Scholarship as Simulacrum: *The Case of* Hitler's Monsters," *Aries – Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 19 (2019): 265–281.
[864] Kingsepp, "Scholarship as Simulacrum," 265–266. This idea was originally introduced in the work of Bruce Lincoln. See Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 207–209.
[865] Kingsepp, "Scholarship as Simulacrum," 266.
[866] Kingsepp, "Scholarship as Simulacrum," 279.

modernity[?]"[867] Such statements are contradicted, not only by scholarly works that stressed the animosity the Nazis displayed toward occult groups, but also by direct statements by high-level Nazi leaders that reveal they considered the "Jewish problem" not in irrational occultic but rational scientific terms.[868] For example, Himmler's secret speeches justifying the "Final Solution," in which he, implementing a bacterial analogy, ordered members of the SS not to take any of the wealth they had confiscated from the Jewish people "because at the end of this, we don't want, because we exterminated the bacillus, to become sick and die from the same bacillus."[869] Hitler also drew on medical analogies to justify the killing of the Jews, such as the following statement that was used as evidence in the Nuremburg Trials: "They [the Jews] had to be treated like tuberculosis bacilli, with which a healthy body may become infected."[870] Steven Katz drew attention, back in the 1990s, to the fact that it was commonplace within the Nazi bureaucratic arrangement to refer to Jewish people headed to the camps as "cargo," and to their dead bodies as "garbage," further revealing their tendency to frame the situation in materialistic terms.[871] Katz explains that under the Nazi technocratic mentality,

> Nothing, including Jewish bodies living or dead, has innate worth, only instrumental, extrinsic value. Driven by this original modern technocratic consciousness, the

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[867] Kingsepp, "Scholarship as Simulacrum," 267. On internal orientalism, see David R. Jansson, "Internal Orientalism in America: W. J. Cash's The Mind of the South and the Spatial Construction of American national identity," *Political Geography* 22 (2003): 293–316, and Madeleine Eriksson, "(Re)Producing a Periphery—Popular Representations of the Swedish North" (PhD Diss., Umeå Universitet, 2010).

[868] For a discussion of the relationship between Nazism and occultism, see Julian Stube, "Doesn't occultism lead straight to fascism?" in *Hermes Explains*. Furthermore, more conventional scholars of German history, such as Richard J. Evans, have also criticized Kurlander for his use of sources, maintaining that whatever connections *did* exist between the Nazis and occultism, they were much more "prosaic." See Richard J. Evans, "Nuts about the Occult," Review of *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich*, by Eric Kurlander, *London Review of Books* 40, No. 15 (2018), available online at https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n15/richard-j.-evans/nuts-about-the-occult.

[869] „Denn wir wollen nicht am Schluss, weil wir den Bazillus ausrotten, an dem Bazillus krank werden und sterben. Heinrich Himmler, "The Complete Text of the Poznan Speech," *Holocaust History Project*, March 16, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20120212053624/http://www.holocaust-history.org/himmler-poznan/speech-text.shtml.

[870] "Nuremberg Trial Proceedings," *The Avalon Project*, Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/03-21-46.asp#Goering8.

[871] Katz, *Historicism, the Holocaust, and Zionism*, 200–204.

physicians, engineers, builders, scientists seek to discover what is possible when operating without moral restraints in their areas of expertise, to push to the limit their research under the motive of discovery rather than virtue.[872]

Thus, even for the camp managers,

> This is not murder done out of passion or as the result of hubris; the rhetoric of emotion and commitment is inapposite. What he or she is doing is solving an intellectual puzzle rather than responding to visceral, emotional, intuitive, or other human feelings. Genocide has become a logistical challenge; it has ceased being an overwhelming ethical dilemma.[873]

Such examples founded on rational, medical ideas are readily available and widespread, whereas statements justifying the final solution for the sake of *occult beliefs* are more difficult to produce.

Kurlander problematically asserts a direct connection between Steiner's esoteric ideas and Nazi "supernatural" ideology and condemns them without quoting or citing primary Steiner material but relying exclusively on quoting conclusions from secondary literature. As the three above reviews have pointed out, Kurlander relies on secondary sources for much of his argument (especially concerning anthroposophy), or, worse, reinforces an interpretation of events leading to 1933 by citing highly unreliable sources, such as occultist Rudolf von Sebottendorf. To give just one example, Kurlander claims that "it should come as no surprise that Steiner, along with Hübbe-Schleiden and Hartmann, was affiliated with the racist and antisemitic Guido von List Society."[874] While Steiner did have connections in the German theosophical milieu with some occultists who were members of the Guido von List Society, to claim Steiner was "affiliated" with this group is a damning accusation and simply false, which Kurlander would have known if

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[872] Katz, *Historicism, the Holocaust, and Zionism*, 215.
[873] Katz, *Historicism, the Holocaust, and Zionism*, 212.
[874] Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters*, 19.

he had taken more time to actually read Steiner, rather than just relying on secondary sources.[875]

To be fair, this is part of the overall problem concerning an academic blindness to the historical reality of esotericism. Steiner clearly addressed his relationship to von List in 1917 in response to a book published by Max Dessoir, a professor of philosophy at the University of Berlin, titled *Vom Jenseits der Seele. Die Gehimwissenschaften in kritischer Betrachtung* (*From the Far Side of the Soul. A Critical look at the Occult Sciences*). Dessoir attacks Steiner and anthroposophy using the same tropes as Kurlander, including connecting him to Guido von List. Steiner responded to these attacks and referred to List's esotericism as a "strange racialist mysticism,"[876] explaining to his audience in a lecture:

> [Dessoir] brings up the racialist mysticism of Guido von List. I have no other relationship with Guido von List beyond the fact that I once, so far as I know, received from him—back when he was a sensible man and had written his novel "Carnuntum" in the beginning of the 1880s—an essay, during the time when I was still publishing "Lucifer-Gnosis"; I sent it back as dilettantish and unusable. That is the only relationship that I have to Guido von List.[877]

Such a flawed analyses perpetuates a limited understanding of the relationship between esotericism and conspiracy theories, as well. For example, Thomas Milan Konda's recent book *Conspiracies of Conspiracies* suffers from this problem and claims that the most "disturbing" movement of the theosophical milieus at the beginning of the 20th century is Steiner's

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[875] Staudenmaier also attempts to link Steiner to von List via the occultist Karl Heise, who was, for a period, a troubled follower of Steiner and a member of Guido von List Society, as well as through some ariosophists such as Johannes Balzli, Max Seiling, and Max Heindel, who appeared to have a partially favorable view of some of Steiner's ideas. In the end, however, all of these ariosophists broke with Steiner over central doctrinal issues, including biological racism. Furthermore, the fact that Staudenmaier cites Heindel as an ariosophist reveals a limited understanding of the history of esotericism and its complexity. See Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism*, 84–86.

[876] "absonderlichen Rassenmystik." Rudolf Steiner, *Von Seelenrätseln. Anthropologie und Anthroposophie. Max Dessoir über Anthroposophie. Frarnz Brentano (Ein Nachruf). Skizzenhafte Erweiterungen* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1983), 74.

[877] Rudolf Steiner, *Menschliche und menschheitliche Entwicklungswahrheiten. Das Karma des Materialismus* (GA176; Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1982), 94. My translation.

anthroposophy, which was "confusingly similar" to ariosophy, insinuating that Steiner saw

Jewish people as his main enemy.[878] In fact, Konda's entire treatment of the theosophical

movement reeks of dilettantism, which is unfortunate because, as we have become aware, the

intersections between esoteric and "conspiratorial" ideas is an important area of research. The

point here is that Konda's analysis of esotericism is not ultimately "wrong" but one-sided and

reinforced by Eurocentric biases which consider modern Western rationality as *sui generis* and

the arbiter of truth. Kurlander and Konda are only able to present such an image of theosophy

and Steiner by leaving out certain things that contradict their "expert" interpretation.

This kind of misinterpretation of esotericism reveals a basic lack of knowledge of its

multifaceted nature and establishes a central problem this dissertation addresses by bringing

together a noted esotericist with a renowned academic and comparing them on equal footing.

This does not necessarily reflect a lack of ability on the part of these scholars, but rather of the

historical blindness to esotericism exhibited by the academy during the 20th century. A recent

book, *Eco-Alchemy: Anthroposophy and the History and Future of Environmentalism*, does a

better job with handling Steiner and the race issue.[879] In response to such superficial treatments

as those of Konda and Kurlander—and a certain extent Staudenmaier—McKanan argues that

their charges of racism and fascism "are one sided and disconnected from anthroposophy's

present complexity, but they point to phenomena that cannot be ignored."[880] He points out that

Steiner was critical of Hitler (as Hitler was of Steiner), but that after Steiner's death and the rise

of the Nazis, those in the leadership of the Anthroposophical Society sought to gain acceptance

among the National Socialists who were critical of Steiner and the anthroposophists for being in

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[878] Thomas Milan Konda, *Conspiracies of Conspiracies: How Delusions Have Overrun America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 60, 62.
[879] McKanan, *Eco-Alchemy*.
[880] McKanan, *Eco-Alchemy*, 195.

league with the Jews, freemasons, and communists. In the end, Steiner's writings were banned and the Anthroposophical Society was forced to cease its activities, with some members taken to concentration camps, while others remained followers of the Nazis and continued to collaborate.[881] There are clearly many tangled threads to unwind for a full understanding of the history of anthroposophy. McKanan demonstrates familiarity with the ideas and principles of esoteric movements that employ an alchemical approach to balancing and synthesizing polarities as part of a "great work" and interplay between spirit and matter—the same ideas that influenced Steiner.[882] He points out that reverence is the "fundamental principle" of Steiner's esoteric path, a path devoted to "the ennoblement of humanity and world evolution," a sentiment Steiner echoed continuously.[883] Following from this, McKanan makes the important observation that "students of Steiner resist the notion that the only way to defeat racism is to uproot any distinction between 'higher' and 'lower.'"[884] Followers of Steiner tend to highlight passages where Steiner did indeed condemn any discrimination based on race, sex, class, etc., yet at the same time admonishing his students that racial differences were real and there were essential features of different races, which were rooted in geographical location and different spiritual beings that watched over these different ethnicities. McKanan sums up Steiner's complex position on race in the following passage:

> we [Steiner's students] are not only to avoid the prejudice that might cause us to treat people unequally but *also* the prejudice that might cause us to imagine that racial differences do not exist at all (or, perhaps, in contemporary language, the prejudice that race is merely a social construction). Steiner was thus neither a *racist,* if that term implies a willingness to treat people differently on the basis of race, nor an *antiracist,* if that implies a social constructivist view of racial differences. He was what is

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[881] McKanan, *Eco-Alchemy*, 195–197.
[882] McKanan, *Eco-Alchemy*, 196.
[883] Rudolf Steiner, *How to Know Higher Worlds: A Modern Path of Initiation*, trans. Christopher Bamford (GA 10; Great Barrington: Steiner Books, 1994), 24–25, 62.
[884] McKanan, *Eco-Alchemy*, 197.

sometimes called a "racialist": he believed that racial differences are real but *not* a basis for differential treatment of individuals.[885]

It is important to point out that Steiner himself would have rejected the idea that his philosophy was racist or even racialist, as his above statement about Guido von List reveals. That is, Steiner seems to have found any form of racial mysticism repugnant and considered himself to be engaged in something different. At the same time, as with many early 20th century esotericists, Steiner was influenced by Social Darwinism, but the way Konda dismisses Steiner and claims he had "much more racism" than H.P. Blavatsky (the founder of the Theosophical Society) ignores the historical complexity of the situation and Konda's own positionality as a modern Western scholar.[886]

Steiner did come to believe that "older" races were "less" developed, a belief that is the hallmark of Social Darwinism. Steiner was keenly invested in scientific developments from an early age and took these ideas on board and merged them with the religious ideas of the Far East, South Asia, and Tibet, which he had encountered in the Theosophical Society. Steiner seems to have understood this structure only intellectually, or, according to his followers, "spiritually." In other words, the biological racism remains absent, one of the many reasons why ariosophists and

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[885] McKanan, *Eco-Alchemy*, 197.

[886] Konda, *Conspiracies of Conspiracies*, 60. Scholars often misunderstand Blavatsky, as well, and for the same reasons. In Julie Chajes's recent book *Recycled Lives: A History of Reincarnation in Blavatsky's Theosophy*, Chajes thanks Blavatsky as her inspiration in the Foreword. Why would a scholar currently based in Israel publish such a remark if we are to believe what Konda writes in his book? This contradiction reveals a lack of knowledge and an academic disconnect concerning these issues. See Chajes, *Recycled Lives: A History of Reincarnation in Blavatsky's Theosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Steiner is even less understood. Scholars are quick to point out his antisemitism yet struggle to interpret other things he said that contradict their claims. For example, Steiner's statement about Europe needing the Jews and the Jews needing Europe, as well as his writings against antisemitism at the end of the 19th century. See Steiner's many contributions in the *Mitteilungen aus dem Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus* (Announcements from the Association for the Defense against Anti-Semitism), available online at http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/literatur_eng.html.

later National Sociologists denounced anthroposophy. According to Steiner, and Blavatsky's theosophical teachings, "older" races, despite being "atavistic," are more spiritually in touch with nature and the spirit world, a classic motif of orientalism. Yet Steiner then claims that the next evolution of human beings on the planet would be a mix of the "old" race, which was spiritually connected to the earth, and the "advanced" materialism that European development had brought. Therefore, two races, old and new, needed each other and must learn to come together. So, is Steiner both a Social Darwinist and an orientalist? To some extent. But in many ways something else, something worthy of further study.

Following the World Wars, a "real" conspiracy was initiated by British and American governments and media linking authoritarian regimes, communists, and National Socialists to occultism, thus demonizing occultism. Unfortunately, the legacy of this trope lives on, especially in academic books such as those by Konda and Kurlander. We know this from now-declassified documents of the US Military Intelligence Division held in the National Archives, which show American intelligence and military officers, likely tipped off by the British, claiming that Steiner was an undercover leader of the Illuminati and a communist posing as a spiritual leader. This was a real threat, the report claims, because Steiner was friends with Lenin and had met secretly with him in Switzerland.[887] There are indeed several books by Lenin in Steiner's private library in Dornach, but the exaggerated MID report portrays Steiner as a potential secret agent trained for military subterfuge under the cloak of a religious leader.[888] Such claims are substantiated in

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[887] MID 9140-808.
[888] See the entry for "Lenin" in *Rudolf Steiners Bibliothek*. For the military intelligence files, see MID 9140-808, "Rudolf Steiner and the Anthroposophical Society," 21 April 1923; MID, 9140-808, Office of Naval Intelligence, "German Suspects," 10 July 1917. There exists a further file on Steiner in the Archives from 1920 signaling his connection to the Union of Socialist Intellectuals.

the report using familiar conspiracism tropes. This presents another view of Steiner and needs to be evaluated for us to get a full picture of Steiner's political views and loyalties.

One question worth asking is, was Steiner some type of esoteric centrist? Was such a position possible during this period? In any highly polarized dialectic, the centrist position offends both sides, which is what Steiner seems to have done continually (and still does). Mapping the various positions Steiner occupied in order to synthesis them promises to reveal the degree to which these illustrate his *actual* position. Steiner was highly, almost egregiously, contradictory because he sometimes worked from a larger universalist perspective and sometimes from a local, ethnic perspective. Steiner frequently contradicts narrow and limited interpretations, as well as his own positions, as he addressed extreme historical positions of his time (e.g., Darwinism, determinism, materialism, creationism, Christian orthodoxy, even theosophy itself). As with the title of his book on Nietzsche, Steiner was a fighter against his own time, fighting against extreme positions he believed himself up against. Weber's activities and ideas also appear as contradictory, which illustrates the degree of intellectual mobility and fluidity demanded by reformers during this time of transition and increasing polarization. However, when one takes into account *the whole of Steiner's esoteric system*, the final expression of which advocated a balanced middle point between two extremes, these shifting positions make more sense. German moderns such as Steiner and Weber—an esotericist and a mainstream academic—covered wide swathes of intellectual territory, exploring a plurality of positions to resist the emergence of a modernity in Germany that carried any one position to an extreme. Taking Steiner seriously and investigating the unexpected similarities between his thought and Weber's thus not only contributes to the reevaluation of esotericism that began in the 1960s and continues to this day, but creates a more accurate picture of European history.

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