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An 'ancient sense of politics'? Weber, Caesarism and the Republican tradition

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M A X W E B E R ' S relationship to various traditions of Western thought
is a frequent topic of debate in the literature that deals with his political
ideas. The impact of Nietzsche, of Puritanism, of neo-Kantianism, but
especially of liberalism has often been rehearsed (see, notably, Beetham,
1989; Bellamy, 1992). But in 1986, speaking to members of the German
Society for Sociology, Wilhelm Hennis sought to locate Weber in a rather
different political context. After arguing that if Weber was a liberal, he was
one of a most peculiar type, Hennis went on to remark that in fact 'Weber
belongs to a different tradition of modern political thought, which can be
associated with the names of Machiavelli, Rousseau and Tocqueville...
Central to their political theory was the forcing of the individual into the
political order, allowing him to participate in the responsibilities and risks of
these orders'. Hennis adduces as evidence for Weber's 'ancient sense of
politics', his attack on 'satedness' ('corruption' in an older idiom) and the
importance in his work of the concept of *Hingabe* (which can be variously
rendered as 'surrender', 'devotion', 'dedication' or 'sacrifice'), presumably a
counterpart to the classical republican defence of the *res publica* and of *virtus*
(Hennis, 1988 [1987], 50, 196-197) (1).

Wilhelm Hennis is not alone in emphasising Weber's debt to classical and
republican discourses. Peter Breiner (1996), for instance, has argued that the
key to Weber's political thought lies in his adaptation of a theory of pru-
dence, or practical political judgement, with its roots in a 'tradition...
represented by such thinkers as Machiavelli and Thucydides'. On Breiner's
account, however (1996, p. 2, n. 5, 217-222) Weber's political theory is best
contrasted with Rousseau's, as it is, incidentally, with Aristotelian *phronesis*
(practical wisdom).

These analyses are important and can be read profitably by anyone
wishing to understand and augment Weber's ideas. But for the sociologist
apprised of recent debates in the history of political thought (2), there is
something strained and implausible about arguments that claim Weber to be
part of classical traditions. It is not only that such arguments are typically
pitched at a level so general it is impossible to validate or refute them. It is
also that they play on a confusion between a tradition and what an author
actively does to it. A prodigiously learned figure like Max Weber evidently
borrowed from a range of political traditions to create something that was
uniquely his own. 'Ancient' legacies, duly reformulated, are likely to have

(1) Hennis has expanded on this interpre-
tation in Hennis, 1996, 104-109.
(2) I am referring primarily to the work of
John Pocock on 'discourses', of Quentin
Skinner on 'ideologies', and of the German
mode of *Begriffsgeschichte* pioneered by Rein-
hart Koselleck. For an incisive overview of
these contributions, see Richter, 1995.

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been among them. However, once we reverse the perspective and examine the traditions themselves—as distinct from their modular adaptation by a later writer—it becomes far less credible to see Weber as a 'part' of them. This is what I hope to show in the following discussion of Weber's theory of modern democratic Caesarism and its relationship to classical republicanism. For Weber's analysis of modern democracy, it can be argued, was simultaneously the negation of classical, republican ideals and an index of their enfeeblement and malaise, of how decrepit they had actually become by the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it is precisely when we are concerned with deciphering the process of authorial creativity—to discern what an author is *doing* when he makes the conceptual innovations he does—that we need to be most attentive to the conventions from which the writer was deviating (Skinner 1969, 1970). That, after all, is the only way we can accurately calibrate the extent of an author's 'originality'.

I begin by clarifying the key terms of the discussion: republicanism and Caesarism. I then proceed to examine some aspects of Weber's own handling of the concept of Caesarism, employing in particular the resources of the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*) to do so. Finally, I examine the extent of Weber's departure from the 'ancient sense of politics'.

Republicanism and the spectre of Caesar

Classical republicanism can be defined as a political idiom that received its most influential (post-Roman) expression in the Florentine Renaissance—its *locus classicus* is Machiavelli's *Discourses*—and was thereafter employed in various ways according to the culture in which it found expression. Classical republicanism featured prominently among English defenders of political and civil liberty in the seventeenth century—one thinks of Marchamont Nedham, John Milton, James Harrington, Algernon Sidney—as well as among eighteenth century 'independent whigs' like John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon. It was a palpable influence on the work of Montesquieu and Rousseau, each of whom sought to champion, in markedly different ways, republican '*virtù*'. And, in a plurality of mediations, classical republicanism became an integral element in the discourse of the American revolutionaries and constitution-builders, and of their counterparts in France.

The term 'republican' in these contexts, to be sure, is somewhat problematic. Many Renaissance and early-modern authors who are frequently described as 'republican' were not opposed to monarchy in principle; what they demanded was that it function within a regulated, or 'mixed', constitution. For this reason, Quentin Skinner (1998) now prefers the designation 'neo-roman' to republican, and his defence of that neologism is plausible. Moreover, republicanism as a set of discursive conventions was fully capable of being combined, in the linguistic repertoire of one and the same inter-

locutor, with a number of other idioms. This practice has been well docu-
mented by students of federalist and anti-federalist arguments over the
American constitution, for in this case the historical actors often drew
simultaneously on 'the languages of republicanism, of Lockean liberalism,
of work-ethic Protestantism and of state-centred theories of power and
sovereignty' to articulate their ideas (Kramnick, 1988, p. 4; Lutz, 1984,
p. 190ff.).

Equally, it is important to distinguish between active partisans of repub-
lican ideals and those who, drawing on a more inclusive republican inter-
pretation of ancient Rome, subscribed to what Addison Ward (1964) has
aptly called the 'Republican myth'. A marked preference for republican
virtue and for the Senatorial order over the corrupt Imperial system that
followed, was no monopoly, in other words, of active republicans like
Machiavelli and the English commonwealthmen. Nor was a monopoly
enjoyed in the condemnation of demagogues and usurpers like Caesar, or in
the lionizing of their enemies: Cicero, Cato the Younger, and Tacitus promi-
nent among them. Hence both critics of Hanoverian rule (such as John
Trenchard and Thomas Gordon) *and* its supporters (such as Conyers
Middleton and Thomas Blackwell) summoned up republican history to
bolster their cause; while both the Oxford-Bolingbroke ministry *and* that of
Walpole could be depicted as viciously Caesarean—by Jonathan Steele and
Alexander Pope respectively (see Turner, 1986, 579-80; Ward, 1964, 422-
425).

With these caveats, however, and at the risk of simplification, I shall
continue to use the familiar terminology of 'republican' and 'republican
thought' in the brief sketch that appears below. The key constituents that
concern us are the following:

a) First, a conception of authentic political life as active self-governance.
This amounts to the belief that the welfare of the commonwealth cannot be
left to rulers and their courts but must involve the efforts, energy and,
ideally, the *virtus* of the citizens themselves. On such an account, a state that
acts rightly is one that reflects, or at least is genuinely responsive to, the will
of the community, such a will being expressed though deliberative and ex-
ecutive organs. Vital to such arrangements is the ability of individual citizens
to play a role in the making of the law that will bind them to their polity and
that will protect 'their lives, liberties and estates' (Skinner, 1998, p. 20).
When we ask who these active, virtuous citizens are, we can say that typically
they include men of sufficient property to be able to engage in politics as
independent agents. Politics implies equality, but this is not social or eco-
nomic equality, nor the political equality of a universal suffrage. Rather, the
'true spirit of equality' consists, as Montesquieu put it, 'neither in making
everyone command nor in making no one command, but in obeying and
commanding one's equals' (1989 [1748], 113-114; Robbins, 1959, p. 49).

b) Second, republicanism entails the view that individual freedom is
impossible without a *civitas libera*, a free polity, or, to be more specific, that

each implies the other. For without individual freedom, a polity cannot be said to have the rational consent of the governed, while without a free polity, individual liberties are at the mercy of the sovereign's arbitrary inclinations and prerogatives.

c) A third principle of republican political thought concerns the definition of liberty itself. Republicans articulate an expanded notion of freedom in which the absence of dependency—'nondomination' in Philip Pettit's (1997a, 61-66; 1997b, 51-109) language—is at least as essential, if not more essential, than non-interference in the lives of the governed. The reason for this is that non-interference, or 'negative liberty', is actually compatible with a despotic order so long as the latter chooses not to invoke its sanctions; in that case what citizens precariously enjoy is freedom on sufferance, authoritarian toleration. But where an authority is in a position to undermine the liberties of citizens, even if it does not choose to exercise that power, citizens generally live a craven life of servitude knowing full well what can happen to those who earn the despot's displeasure. Instead of virtue, people display the odious characteristics of obsequiousness, sycophancy, and cowardice. They are fearful to anger, and determined to appease or curry favour with, those on whom their fate depends.

d) Finally, republicans tend to assert that law is a vital instrument in coercing, or at the very least constraining, individuals to assume their responsibilities as free citizens. (This is what I assume Hennis alludes to in his comments about Max Weber quoted in the Introduction to this paper.) Such a view indicates clearly enough that 'virtue' alone cannot be relied on to undergird a body politic because, as Cicero remarked in the *Tusculan Disputations* (III.1.2 = Cicero, 1945, p. 227), while the 'seeds of virtue are inborn in our dispositions' they soon fall on the stony ground of less commendable aspects of human nature. Citizens, because they are also human, have a pronounced tendency towards 'corruption', a term with multiple associations in republican discourse: satedness, vainglory, unmanliness, decadence. Hence law must substitute for nature's insufficiency. In Machiavelli's gloss on this problem, the great leaders of republics are those active lawgivers and exemplars of virtue who set down the foundation of political life; or who, confronting civic torpor, reconstruct these foundations in such a way as to return the polity to first principles. Conversely, the worst kind of leaders are those who exploit human corruption for factious purposes; while the worst kind of laws are those that, purporting to uphold republican manners and mores, are in fact mere smokescreens intended to hide the depth of depravity and bondage to which a people has actually sunk (Machiavelli, 1970 [1550], 134-138).

This digest of republican or neo-roman principles is familiar enough. Less often recognised, however, is the role that Julius Caesar played in their formulation and reformulation.

For republican political theory to have life, to be vivid, it needed more than abstract postulates; it required *dramatis personae*: a set of individuals

that were the very embodiments of republican ideals and of their negation. Moreover, such a pantheon, and anti-pantheon, was particularly important in an age for which political thought was supposed to instruct and improve rather than simply be a vehicle for the explanation of historical events. The individuals who played the heroic role in republican thought were typically models of austerity and simplicity whose commitment to the public good was unequivocal and unbending. As such, they represented a stark alternative to Caesarean extravagance and corruption. Like Lucius Junius Brutus, republican titans are men who *found* republics and are willing to pay any price to maintain them, even if that includes the execution of disloyal family members. They are men like Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, who are *saviours* of their commonwealth, summoned in emergency to protect it from invasion. Or they are men like Cato the Younger, uncompromising *defenders* of the republic, who even as they fall in defeat epitomise the shining contrast between republican rigorism and squalid decadence.

Conversely, no one—not even Catiline or Cromwell—figures more frequently as the negation of republican values and of the *bonus vir* than Julius Caesar, an individual whose name typically functions in two ways. First, it possesses what one might call 'polarity': the ability of a term to generate its antipode. Thus to describe Caesar as heinous, as a manipulator, as a demagogue, as a cunning opportunist, as a man who conducted a conspiracy against his own homeland, is simultaneously to invite a contrast with all those individuals who are as virtuous as Caesar is corrupt. Such character juxtaposition—Caesar pitted against Cicero, Cato (the Younger and Elder), Brutus (the Younger and Elder), Scipio and Cincinnatus—is one of the great *topoi* of republican discussion (e.g. Machiavelli, 1970, 135, 474-5; Trenchard and Gordon, 1995 [1721], 367-388; Rousseau, 1993 [1755], p. 143; cf. *Pro Sestio* xxviii.60 = Cicero, 1958, p. 115).

The other way that Caesar's name operates within republican mythology is 'recursively'. What this means is that the term 'Caesar' functions as a symbol for political processes of which it becomes the archetype; and to such an extent that Caesar the name and the political processes that the name condenses become virtually interchangeable. So it is that while republican thinkers invoke Caesar as a usurper or demagogue, they also think of usurpation and demagogy primarily in Caesarian colours. This kind of linguistic bracketing or abridgement is important to appreciate when we are reading documents which may not mention Caesar by name but in which his presence can palpably be felt—as it can, for instance, in the *Federalist Papers* where Caesar is mentioned explicitly only once (in *Federalist* 21), but where allusions to him are plentiful and, especially for an eighteenth century audience, salient (as in *Federalist* 1, 48, 85).

Caesar and Caesarism

When one turns to the nineteenth-century reception of Julius Caesar, it becomes evident that the tyrant of republican demonology has experienced a radical reversal of fortunes. Particularly in the literary, artistic and historicist culture of the day, Caesar is now elevated by many interpreters to the heights of greatness. This reevaluation is widespread in the Victorian era (see Gundolf, 1928; Turner, 1986), but one finds it articulated with particular vigour by Theodor Mommsen (1911 [1854-6], p. 430) for whom Caesar now becomes the very incarnation of 'republican ideals' (!) and by Friedrich Nietzsche (1982 [1881], p. 221; 1968 [1889], 84, 93) for whom Caesar is the genius of 'self-control, self-outwitting'. At virtually the same time, Caesar's name comes to be invoked within the context of a new European political discussion around *Caesarism*, a term whose history can be divided very schematically into three overlapping phases (Baehr, 1998, 7-15, and *passim*).

In the first phase, lasting roughly from 1851-1871, Caesarism is overwhelmingly associated with the authoritarian populism of Napoleon III, and is deployed primarily as a polemical weapon either to defend his regime or condemn it. The second phase, spanning the period from 1871 to the end of the First World War, and in which Max Weber's own thought can be located, witnesses a marked extension of the word's compass. Though Napoleon III remains important as an historical avatar of Caesarism, the referents of the term become increasingly heterogeneous. One sign of this is that Caesarism now embraces the chief agent of Napoleon III's eclipse: Bismarck. But another sign, even more conceptually momentous, is that modern prime ministerial and presidential governance *in Anglophone countries* now attracts the Caesarist epithet. Far from being exceptions to Caesarism, as Britain and North America were so often claimed to be in Napoleon III's heyday, they now become confederates of it, though in the course of this shift the meaning of Caesarism changes in a decisive way. Once invoked as the antithesis to parliament, Caesarism now appears as its partner in governance—albeit as the dominant partner. Moreover, in this second phase, Caesarism undergoes another linguistic transformation. While its polemical associations are never entirely erased, the term becomes more didactic in tone as commentators start to envision it as a type of regime whose characteristics can be scientifically charted, classified, documented. Simultaneously, we begin to see the beginning of the decline of the term in the vernacular, a trend that is exacerbated in the third phase of Caesarism's life that spans the period from approximately 1920 to, at the latest, the 1950s. Now employed to cover a bewildering array of political formations—American presidentialism, fascism, parliamentary coalitions, classical dictatorships—Caesarism becomes ever more chaotic, esoteric and detached from the original debates that had nourished it.

Hidden behind this rough-and-ready chronology lie a number of facts particularly interesting to the student of political thought. Notably, the first detailed exposition of what Caesarism meant—by Auguste Romieu—did not include Louis Bonaparte as its exemplar. Romieu's *L'ère des Césars* (1850), published over a year before the *coup d'État* of December 1851, instead envisaged Caesarism as the Age of Force (Romieu, 1850, p. 194), an era whose landscape would be dominated by military commanders and frenzied proletarian masses, that together would smash the bourgeoisie as a social class and bury the liberal ideas it had so ruinously propagated. To be sure, this relatively idiosyncratic usage was soon overtaken by the association of Caesarism with Bonapartism (see Bagehot, 1968a [1865] and 1968b [1870]). But it is worth reminding ourselves that, ever since Romieu's formulation, Caesarism has offered a flexibility to political commentators lacking to some degree by its cognate term. Bonapartism, with its Gallic inflection, tended to suggest a specifically French phenomenon. Caesarism, on the other hand, offered an omnibus that could accommodate passengers of the most diverse nationalities. It suggested that Caesarism, however defined, might be a global—or at least occidental—phenomenon, as distinct from a regional one. And this became important later—in what I am calling phases two and three—when the term was extrapolated to cover a striking array of non-Gallic regimes.

The strongly menacing connotations that typically, though not ubiquitously, attached to Caesar's name in this nineteenth-century debate about Caesarism might appear to signal some continuity with the earlier republican discourse I examined above. However, the connections are quite superficial. For the key problems addressed through the concept of Caesarism, its semantic field, are no longer a mixed constitution, political virtue, freedom as self-governance, and the like. Instead, they hinge on issues of 'imperialism', the 'legitimacy' and 'illegitimacy' of types of rule, the 'social question' and the 'masses'—how to discipline, mobilize, or restrain them. Napoleon III's and, to a lesser extent Bismarck's, 'Caesarist' regimes assumed significance because both appeared to have firm, though unorthodox, responses to this question: authoritarianism and 'democracy' (plebiscitarianism). But the more one emphasised the danger of the masses, *le spectre rouge*, the more the key republican motifs receded from the political horizon. A mass, almost by definition, is not an entity either disposed or able to rule. It is something to be shaped and controlled. And this desideratum took on particular urgency when the franchise was not simply extended as part of an incremental process but rather granted instantaneously and wholesale, as it was in 1848 and 1849 in France.

Most commentators in the second half of the nineteenth century were divided on the benefits and dangers of Caesarism, as Dieter Groh (1972) and Heinz Gollwitzer (1987 [1952]) have shown so vividly. What made Weber's usage peculiar, however, was his adaptation of the concept of Caesarism to encompass both negative *and* positive evaluations. Weber considered Cae-

sarism to be virtually inevitable under modern democratic conditions. With the extension of the suffrage, and the related entry of the masses onto the political stage, the days of politics by notables were over. Modern 'democratic' conditions required leaders able to woo, recruit and secure the confidence of the electorate, and a party machine ready to mobilize it. The mass that made its appearance under democratic conditions, Weber argued (1978a [1917-1918],1457-60), was essentially myopic, emotional, suggestible, unstable, just as the earlier theorists of Caesarism had claimed it to be. But 'mass' in Weber's rendition was not a synonym for a 'mob' or for members of the working class, though it could take on these connotations. Mass referred typically to members of all classes insofar as they remained an unorganized, atomized public, or an assembled body in a crowd-like situation (3). Yet unlike many analysts of mass psychology, and unlike many conservatives and liberals too, Weber went on to argue that the rise of the masses as an electoral force was not something to be dreaded. Indeed, he poured scorn on that attitude (Weber, 1980 [1895], 446-7). Instead, Weber insisted that mass democracy provided ample opportunity for the gifted politician to realize his ideals—provided he had the necessary rhetorical gifts and personal appeal to do so. The alternative Weber offered his readers was not Caesarism for or against. It was between various kinds of Caesarism: the autocratic, Bismarckian, enervating Caesarism that derived from conditions of parliamentary impotence and which, once bereft of its guiding light, degenerated into a negative politics of constitutional deadlock and ideological posturing; or the Caesarism, coupled to vibrant parliamentary institutions of selection and monitoring, that worked so well in Anglophone countries, and that had helped to make Great Britain and the United States outstanding global powers. Or to put this another way, Weber rejected the older and still dominant antithesis—Caesarism versus parliament (Rüstow, 1879, p. 3)—and replaced it with new antinomies of his own: positive *versus* negative Caesarism, leader-democracy *versus* leaderless democracy, charismatic rule or 'the rule of a clique' (Weber, 1970 [1919], p. 13) (4). Though Weber was well aware that, in many respects, parliament was a casualty of this new situation, he denied that it had become eviscerated or made redundant. Where institutional conditions were favourable, as in Britain, parliament was able to restrain an imperious leader while simultaneously encouraging the selection and enculturation of qualities vital for the vocation of politics.

These sentiments explain why the tone of Weber's chameleon arguments about Caesarism and parliament is quite different from those of commentators like Robert Michels (1959 [1911], 216-217) and Moisei Ostrogorski

(3) Weber emphasised that it was not democracy as such that produced an atomized mass, a view he attributed to misguided Romantics, but rather the bureaucratic and rational modes of organization that were democracy's modern corollary. See Weber,

1985 (1906), p. 10. Also, the pertinent discussion in Scaff, 1998, 63-65.

(4) On the importance of polar or counter concepts (*Gegenbegriffe*) in political discourse more generally, see Koselleck, 1985a (1979).

(1970 [1902] Vol. 1, 315-316), for whom Caesarism was deplorable in principle. Still, precisely because the language Weber inherited *was* so loaded with negative associations, it was not easy for him to reshape Caesarism for his own conceptual purposes, to transform it into something laudable or at least acceptable. Nor did he entirely want to do so: the strongly condemnatory baggage carried by the term had its uses, particularly in criticizing Bismarck's monocratic governance. Besides, one should never underestimate Weber's penchant for provoking his audience; his commendation of the British and American type of parliamentary Caesarism during the First World War was in part deliberately meant to shock his readers out of complacency or political xenophobia. Yet in order for Weber to be persuasive rather than simply perverse he was led, first, to couple Caesarism with a lexicon ('leader democracy', or 'plebiscitary leader democracy' or *'plebiszitäre Herrschaft'*) that at least underlined its leadership qualities—a more palatable emphasis, particularly in the German political culture of his day (Hilger, 1982, 94-98); and, second, to incorporate some aspects of Caesarism, while abandoning it as a term, in the new concept of 'charismatic domination'. With that latter redescription, Caesarism becomes not an *option* that was open to political debate, but a *datum* of sociological enquiry: in the transition from political to sociological discourse, and the associated modification of language this entails, Weber renders something previously contentious into something inescapable. An alertness to the history of concepts can help us see how this happened and the extent of Weber's rupture with classical republicanism.

Weber, the history of concepts, and the reshaping of Caesarism

By the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*), I refer primarily to a German post-1945 tradition of historiography whose jewel is the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland (= Basic Historical Concepts: A Historical Lexicon of Political and Social Language in Germany)*, the multi-authored, multi-volume compendia edited by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck. Spanning eight volumes and 115 concepts, the *GG* defies a brief description of its content; moreover, the volumes' common rubric cannot hide the fact that the *GG* was a fairly heterogeneous undertaking from the start, reflecting the idiosyncrasies, priorities and specialisms of its many distinguished contributors (5). What the authors share, however, is a commitment to bringing the study of language into a close relationship with social and political history (cf. Koselleck, 1985b [1979]). On such an account, shifts and discontinuities in conceptual formation are an index of wider social changes, but are also very much involved in shaping them since it is through language that agents define, make sense of and contest new situations. The

(5) The first volume was published in 1972, the last in 1996.

particular emphasis of the *GG* is on what Koselleck has called the *Sattelzeit* or *Schwellenzeit*: the transition period between c. 1750 and 1850 when political and social concepts in German-speaking Europe were subject to an accelerated transformation. This threshold era, which the research team of the *GG* has sought to document, is characterized by the coinage of a number of neologisms, the increasing democratization of political and social vocabularies (hitherto restricted to elite groups), the intensification of the ideological and political charge words now carry, and the teleological horizons of crisis and eschatology in which they come to be framed. Moreover, to investigate this period, the contributors to the *GG* have taken full advantage of the latest innovations in linguistic theory without making any of them a fetish: synchronics and diachronics, semasiology (the study of all the meanings of a particular word or concept) and onomasiology (the study of all the names a concept has assumed).

Like all approaches to the understanding of social life, *Begriffsgeschichte* is best employed with caution (6). No amount of methodological reflection can guarantee that a particular inquiry is conducted competently; nor can it ever be a substitute for the hard work involved in reconstructing a rhetoric, an argument, a concept, or a semantic field, a process that is full of surprises for the undogmatic investigator. Where *Begriffsgeschichte* is particularly useful, however, is in the resources it offers to understanding what a great thinker like Max Weber was *doing* when he coined, adapted, stretched, juxtaposed or otherwise arranged the terms of his theoretical analyses. Consider the new light the history of concepts throws on *Herrschaft*. As Dietrich Hilger (1982, 98-102) and Melvin Richter (1995, 58-78) have argued, Weber's use of that concept, and particularly his strategic decision to pair it with the concept of legitimacy in the compound *legitime Herrschaft*, had a definite and provocative purpose: to show that *Herrschaft* (domination, rulership), of one kind or another, was the destiny of human associations. In such a way, Weber took sides 'on an issue long disputed by political thinkers'. To the questions, 'Is it possible for human beings to rule themselves in some significant institutional sense of that term? Or is it inevitable or necessary that some few persons exact unquestioning obedience by force or other means from the many?' (Richter, 1995, 70, 76), Weber answers no and yes respectively. Evidently, this was not a 'republican' answer.

Also pertinent was Weber's decision to extract *Herrschaft* from the shifting frameworks of meaning that had informed it unevenly for centuries, and to re-locate and fix it in another discourse entirely. That discourse was, of course, *sociology*, a science that in Weber's formulation was intended to be free from value-judgement and from the accompanying cacophony of political dispute. To the extent that science is seen in modern society as the preeminent mode of knowledge describing and explaining what *is,* a claim to provide a scientific articulation of *Herrschaft* was potentially of great moment. Weber's sociological definition of *Herrschaft* as a structure of

(6) For some reservations, see Baehr, 1997; Pocock, 1996.

symmetrical command *and consent* (e.g. Weber, 1978b [1922], p. 946) pro-mised to sanitize that concept, to free it from partisanship, to subject it to new norms of empirical utility, and hence to uncouple it from the passionate contention that had shadowed the term in a number of its manifestations at least since the Enlightenment. More than this, *Herrschaft* in Weber's schema becomes universal not contingent: it is the key organizing device through which to classify the multiple forms of traditional, charismatic and rational-legal relationships, underlining even further its inescapableness.

Weber's attempt to refashion *Herrschaft* was only partially successful, for, despite his preferences, the concept has remained important in German-speaking political discourse to depict relations of the most injurious kind (7). But we are concerned here with intention and design, and with the suggestion that Weber's heuristic redescription of *Herrschaft* was an attempt to naturalize and stabilize the concept within a sociological idiom. Moreover, while this would be merely of passing interest were we considering a mediocre thinker, it has much more significance when we are studying a creator of a discipline, concerned with establishing the theoretical tools, protocols and parameters of scientific practice (8). Weber himself, of course, disclaimed novelty for his method. But in seeking to 'formulate what all empirical sociology really means when it deals with the same problems' (1978b [1922], p. 3) he was, in effect, constructing a framework of intelli-gibility he hoped would guide the practice of other scholars.

What, then, was Weber doing with the concept of Caesarism? Again, we need to be aware of the history of the concept with which he was working. Just as Weber sought to strip off the blinders of those benighted enough to believe that republican self-governing freedom was still a latent possibility under conditions of modern 'mass democracy,' so he sought, in a related move, to compel his readers to face the hard facts about the inevitability of Caesarism. But, as I hinted earlier, Weber faced a major linguistic problem in making such a strategic move. Unlike the concept of *Herrschaft* which by the end of the nineteenth century had largely fallen into desuetude both in the vernacular and in scholarly writing (Hilger, 1982, 94-98), Caesarism remained linguistically turbulent. It was therefore not a shell Weber could

(7) It appears prominently, for instance, in Hannah Arendt's German translation of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) = *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1955).

(8) I am aware that this is an increasingly unpopular view to take of Weber's intentions. My claim, however, is not that Weber's chief goal, or central task, was the creation of a sociology. It is only that Weber did have strong views about how sociology should be pursued; that he went to great efforts to define the methodological and conceptual tools appro-priate to it; and that such efforts, refracted

through the complex reception of his work, have had a fundamental impact on the disci-pline as it is practised. To that extent, it is not implausible—or anachronistic—to describe Weber as a creator of sociology. (The problems with describing Weber as a *'founder'* of sociol-ogy, however, are somewhat different. For a general discussion of these problems, and for a distinction between discursive, institutional, deliberative and appropriated 'founders', see Baehr and O'Brien, 1994, chap. 2).

For the most impressive and rigorous attempt to detach Weber from sociology, see Hennis 1988 (1987); 1996.

easily occupy for his creative, definitional purposes. Not only was Caesarism still widely and polemically canvassed in public discussion. It was also by the end of the nineteenth century a staple of scholarly classification of regime types, as the work of Albert Schäffle (1896 [1875-76], Vol. 2, 486-87) and Wilhelm Roscher (1892, 588-608) attests. Moreover, those writers like Ostrogorski, Michels, James Bryce, Sidney Lowe, Ferdinand Tönnies and others who employed the term Caesarism in their analyses of modern party politics, did so in a highly critical, ethically-charged manner.

To make matters even more difficult for Weber was the obstructive association of Caesarism with the idea of illegitimacy. Previous and current thinkers who had considered the Caesarism of Napoleon I and III had emphasised its illegitimate nature (e.g. Roscher, 1892, 590-560; Proudhon, 1883, Vol. 1, p. 40; Treitschke, 1916 [1897-1898], Vol. 2, 222-223; Richter, 1982) meaning not only that such regimes were brutal, treacherous and bellicose, but that they lacked a durable, dynastic foundation and were plagued by problems of succession (9). Upstart Caesarism and venerable monarchy thus faced each other as polar opposites. Weber accepted this opposition, which is why 'Caesarist' fails to appear among the many epithets he hurled in his frustration at Wilhelm II. What Weber did not accept, however, was that legitimacy is essentially tied to monarchy or to any substantive set of moral-juridical claims. Instead Weber redefines legitimacy *sociologically* to mean either a report on the nature of people's beliefs about a power relationship—any power relationship—or a series of 'legitimations' projected by those in power (Beetham, 1991, 6-14, 23-25). In both cases, the older strains of legitimacy become *sociologically* irrelevant. On the one hand, belief in the rightness of an authority claim now becomes sufficient grounds for its legitimacy *irrespective of its content*. On the other, legitimacy itself appears to dissolve into claims that the powerful make about themselves and their ability to persuade others of their right to rule.

I want to suggest that one of the most important reasons why Weber developed the concept of charismatic legitimacy, particularly in *Economy and Society*, was to sidestep, to elude, the polemics of the Caesarism debate, while retaining what he deemed to be its rational kernel: the decisive political importance of personal leadership; the passivity and irresponsibility of mass behaviour; the inescapableness of man's domination over man (10). On this

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(9) In evoking problems of legitimation, particularly with respect to the Napoleonic order, 'Caesarism' shows striking parallels with the earlier concept of 'usurpation'. See, notably, the analysis by Benjamin Constant (1988 [1814], 85-94, 147, 158-9, 167).

(10) One might say that 'Caesarism' is one of the fundamental 'background concepts' of charisma. I take the expression from Charles Camic who advises historians of sociology to look carefully at 'the themes, concepts' and 'ramifying ideas in the background' of the

classic authors' work. For by concentrating on 'issues that are in the *foreground* of their writings—the very issues that made these writings, not those of others, stand out to the present in the first place', it is easy to overlook developmental changes taking place in the work when considered as a totality. See Camic, 1986, 1042-1043, drawing on Polanyi, 1958, 55-57.

The complex relationship between charisma and Caesarism in Weber's work has been widely overlooked. This is because students of Weber have tended not to take Caesarism

account, 'charisma' can be understood not simply as an extrapolation from the New Testament, or from the gloss provided on it by Rudolf Sohm, but as a linguistic means to escape the unruly associations bound up with its partner term, associations that impeded Weber's attempt to develop a sociology free of political partisanship. To help see this, let us observe a curious, but revealing, textual asymmetry in Weber's handling of the two concepts. With only one exception, to which I shall return presently, 'charisma' never appears as a specific term in Weber's political writings (his political journalism, primarily for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and his political speeches). On the other hand, it is very prominent in his sociological work from around 1913 onwards, notably, in the treatises on religion and in *Economy and Society*. Conversely, 'Caesarism' is rarely used in Weber's sociological texts, and where it does appear it is fairly marginal. Moreover, 'Caesarism', in the sociological texts, is subject to a double eclipse. First, although the term appears in the 1913 draft of the typology of legitimate domination, it is absent from the 1918 and 1919 versions (for fuller documentation, see Baehr, 1998, chapter four); in those cases, 'Caesarism' has been replaced by such cognate expressions as *Führer-Demokratie, plebiszitäre Führerdemokratie*, and *plebiszitäre Herrschaft*. Second, 'Caesarism' and its cognates are in any event now reduced to mere expressions, ciphers or subtypes of the master concept 'charisma'.

The distinction that I have drawn here between Weber's 'sociological' and 'political' works, however intrinsically problematic (11), is not an arbitrary one: it follows Weber's own methodological prescriptions. That he often breached these prescriptions is well known. Even so, few will want to deny the difference between a work like 'Parliament and Government in a Reconstructed Germany' (1917-1918), with its pugnacious tone and trenchant critique of Bismarck's legacy (and in which 'Caesarism' appears as a salient foil), and the radically austere casuistry that characterises part I of *Economy and Society* (written between 1918-1920) from which 'Caesarism' is absent (12). Nor can students of Weber avoid reading his tirelessly repeated commitment to *Werturteilsfreiheit* (freedom from value-judgement)

seriously as a concept in its own right, but have instead treated it as simply one of the many *synonyms* Weber employed to describe 'leader-democracy'.

(11) Particularly if one subscribes to Sheldon Wolin's view that Weber's 'methodological' writings had a 'political' purpose (Wolin, 1981).

(12) This is not to suggest, of course, that there is no relationship between the 'scientific-academic' and political writings. More usual than strict separation was Weber's habit of textual reconstitution, in which observations first registered in a political context are later reshaped and expanded into the more clinical, abstract formulae of the 'ideal-types'. Conversely, Weber's sociological investigations often informed his political analysis. (For examples of this practice of textual reconstitution, see the editors' introduction to Weber, 1995b, 20-21.) The point remains, however, that Weber saw politics and science as radically different life-orders that required commensurately different narrative articulations. Those in doubt about how far Weber was prepared to go in respecting such narrative discrimination need only revisit his treatment of bureaucracy in *Economy and Society* (1978b, 217-226, 956-1003) and contrast it with the analysis of bureaucracy provided in 'Parliament and Government in a Reconstructed Germany' (1978a).

wherever he believed that science was being confused with *parti pris* (13). The fact remains, however, that there is a notable exception to the rule just adumbrated, and one that is particularly germane to the present discussion: 'Politics as a Vocation' (1919). In that essay, which started life as a speech delivered in Munich on January 29, 1919, Weber combines sociological analysis and political advocacy to a degree, and in a manner, unmatched in any other of his major contributions. A sketch of three pure types of legitimate domination and a summary of Ostrogorski, for instance, sits side by side with Weber's passionate partisanship for a plebiscitarian Reich President and his prophetic warning of the 'polar night' that was likely to follow Germany's wartime defeat. However, precisely because 'Politics as a Vocation' mixed scientific analysis with political advocacy, it is understandable why the concepts charisma and Caesarism appear in it, concepts that elsewhere in Weber's *œuvre* are rigorously separated.

But if, generally, Weber chose to downgrade 'Caesarism' within his sociological writings, why did he retain it in his political essays? And why, if charisma was Weber's preferential term in *Economy and Society* to express a quintessentially personal mode of rule, did he largely segregate it from his political interventions and advocacy? We have already seen that 'Caesarism' was a politically volatile term; it follows that it was not easily convertible into the stipulative currency that Weber required in his sociological works. A word that was historically combustible, rich in evocative power, and still conspicuous in current polemical discussion, was not one amenable to the kind of technical terminology that Weber required to create a sociology. Where he needed something like 'Caesarism', Weber's tendency was to reach for related expressions like 'leader-democracy' or plebiscitary *Herrschaft*. Conversely, charisma, a little-used term in the vernacular, and for that reason an inappropriate and ineffective one to employ in political discussions, afforded Weber ample scope to develop his sociological formulations. Part of this scope, to be sure, was the numinousness of the concept he appropriated. While Caesarism related exclusively to the secular, political realm (14), charisma gave Weber room to theorize about religious phenomena. More than this, charisma could be made to traverse a vast territory of devotional relationships, from state leadership over a 'mass' of people at one extreme, to the artistic leadership exercised over an aesthetic coterie at the other; it thus possessed the versatility lacking in Caesarism to bestride universal forms and local situations. Note, however, that in this process Weber was compelled to reshape not only Caesarism, but charisma as well (on this, see Beetham, 1989, p. 321). When Weber referred to charisma in *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism* (1930 [1904-5], p. 178), he employed the term in a manner similar to St. Paul (e.g. in 1 *Corinthians* 1:

(13) For documentation, see the many references provided in Käsler, 1988 [1979], 184-196.

(14) In this it was different from 'Caesaropapism' in which the secular ruler assumes paramount leadership of the Church. On the Russian case, see Weber, 1995a (1906), 63-64, and Weber, 1978b (1922), 1161, 1173-1174.

4-9): as the gift, dispensed by God, but possessed by the believers or, mini-mally, by the disciples. However, when Weber came to adapt charisma for his sociological purposes (15), its previous meaning was reversed; charisma is no longer primarily the property of the disciples, but of the person to whom they are drawn; or as Weber puts it, charisma is 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities' (Weber, 1978b, 241).

In sum: Weber wanted to emphasise the inevitability of leader-democracy under modern conditions. He wanted also to underline the vital importance of individual leadership more generally. Sociology was the dis-course within which he could accomplish both tasks, and charisma was the fundamental tool to help him do so. Charisma could borrow liberally from characteristics usually attributed to Caesarism: dynamic leadership ('the rule of a genius'); emotional acclamation by the masses; and relative freedom from tradition. These are all ideas that Weber appropriates from the older concept. At the same time, the coinage of charisma meant that Weber was not tied down to the arguments and prejudices that infested the Caesarism debate, particularly its associations with *il*legitimacy.

'An ancient sense of politics'?

I began this essay by querying statements that seek to link Weber to classical and republican traditions. I went on to show that the Caesarism debate to which Weber contributed had little connection with the critique of Caesar—as symbol, more than as man—that pervades republican argument, and I alluded to Weber's recasting of republican arguments in his theory of modern democracy. To conclude, let me be more specific in contrasting Weber's theory of Caesarism with the republican tradition he helped to dismantle. The parliamentary Caesarist leader was Weber's political answer not simply to Germany's travails, but to a crisis of liberalism more generally. The major manifestation of that crisis, absent from the republican ex-perience, was the rise of massive private and public bureaucracies that threatened to engulf and imprison individual initiative. Responsible Caesa-rism or leader-democracy of the Anglophone variety, offered the best bet for a world that was becoming increasing rigid, conformist, and philistine. If Caesarism involved 'demagogy', then so be it; that was a price well worth paying to stave off bureaucratic stultification.

In contrast, wherever republicans had invoked 'demagogy' they had normally done so either as an insult or as a warning. Classical and other

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(15) Originally, Weber wrote 'The Protest-ant Ethic' from the standpoint of economic and ecclesiastical history. It was only in 1920 that he inserted an amended version of it into a volume of essays on the 'sociology of religion'.

republicans may not have been radical democrats, but nor did they envisage politics as a largely acclamatory process in which a passive and incredulous mass endorsed a charismatic figure. The 'devotion' or 'sacrifice' (*Hingabe*) inspired in the followers of the Caesarist leader, Weber argued, is for the *person* of that leader as he seeks singularly to project and realize his values. Republicans, on the other hand, were more likely to see service and duty owed first and foremost to the polity itself. Leaders were glorious and entitled to respect to the degree that they exemplified, and sacrificed themselves to, the greater interest of the commonwealth.

It might be objected that since the classical, republican tradition does not exhaust the legacy of ancient politics, Weber's distance from the former does not mean that his roots in other ancient traditions were any less deep. That may be so, but then we still need an historical reconstruction of the traditions in question, not a broad generalization that conceals more than it divulges.

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