

Max Weber as Social Theorist 'Class, Status, Party'

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Abstract

While Max Weber is commonly treated as a social theorist or a theorist of social stratification, relatively little attention has been paid to the theory of the social that is developed in his work. In view of this, this article turns to Weber's most explicit theorization of the social: the section of *Economy and Society* entitled 'Class, Status, Party'. In this work, Weber treats class as a *non-social* form, in contrast to status groups and parties, which are seen to emerge through communal or associative modes of socialization. Given this, it is argued that it is a mistake to reduce 'Class, Status, Party' to an argument about social stratification. Rather, this work is a general theorization of the social in relation to the spheres of economics and politics. Read in this way, Weber's work is presented as a possible resource for rejuvenating social theory that goes beyond study of class or 'societal' structures, and which privileges analysis of *social relationships* (including those that go beyond nation-state boundaries) in the competition for social and political power.

Key words

■ class ■ party ■ power ■ social relationships ■ status ■ stratification

While Max Weber is commonly treated as a social theorist or theorist of social stratification, relatively little attention has been paid to the theory of the social that is developed in his work.¹ In view of this, this article turns to one of the few places in which Weber explicitly theorizes the social: the chapter of *Economy and Society* entitled 'Class, Status, Party'. This small part of Weber's posthumously published *magnus opus* has been influential in debates about social class, class structure and social stratification since the 1950s (Bendix and Lipset, 1953; Archer and Giner, 1971; Goldthorpe, 1972; Giddens and Held, 1982; Lee and Turner, 1996), but through the course of these debates Weber's understanding of the term social has tended to be presupposed rather than explained. 'Class, Status, Party', however, is where Weber maps his theory of the social in relation to the orders of the economic and the political. This exercise is part of a wider analysis of what Weber calls 'The Distribution of Power Within the Political Community'

(1978: 926–39), something that is all too often forgotten in secondary accounts of this piece. This means that the basic focus of ‘Class, Status, Power’ is not social stratification (Brennan, 1997), but rather the ways in which economic (class), social (status) and political (party) powers (and the competition for these powers) not only tend to have quite different origins or bases but also take different structural forms, even if they share some basic interdependencies. In making this argument, Weber places the very idea of what is economic, political and *social* into question. What tends to be missed here is Weber’s radical demarcation between these spheres: class is treated as a non-social form, while status groups and parties are seen to be modes of associative or communal socialization that reach beyond state boundaries. Given the difficulty today of defining what we mean by the social (Gane, 2004: 1–16), it is argued that Weber’s ‘Class, Status, Party’ may be used as a resource for thinking about this concept in new ways, particularly as this text privileges analysis of dynamic, open and closed social relationships, rather than solely class or ‘societal’ structures, in the competition for social and political power.

Basic Concepts

The basic argument of the present article is that Weber develops a theory of *the social* through the course of his analysis of ‘Class, Status, Party’. The primary difficulty faced in extracting or developing this theory, however, lies in the complex structure of this text. Weber discusses the connection between class and status in two places in *Economy and Society*: in a section entitled ‘Status Groups and Classes’ (1978: 302–7) and in the ‘The Distribution of Power Within the Political Community’ (1978: 926–39). The relation between these two pieces is unclear, but what we know is that the latter of these sections was written first, some time between 1910 and 1914.² This section on ‘Class, Status, Party’ is Weber’s most complete statement on the subject and is to be found in Part Two of *Economy and Society*, which is entitled ‘The Economy and the Arena of Normative and De Facto Powers’. Meanwhile, the first of these sections, ‘Status Groups and Classes’, was written much later, some time between 1918 and 1920, and is published, strangely enough, in Part One of *Economy and Society*, which has the title ‘Conceptual Exposition’. This section is placed immediately after Weber’s famous outline of the three types of legitimate domination (legal-rational, traditional and charismatic) (1978: 212–301), which is the reverse order of Part Two, in which ‘Class, Status, Party’ comes before the sections on ‘Domination and Legitimacy’ (Weber, 1978: 941–55) and then ‘Bureaucracy’ (Weber, 1978: 956–1005). The structural context of these two pieces is thus complex, with the argument moving in opposite directions in each case. And to make things more difficult, both pieces are clearly not finished. ‘Class, Status, Party’ is the more complete of the two but nevertheless ends abruptly with a short section on political power or ‘party’, while ‘Status Groups and Classes’ consists of little more than a list of points that Weber failed to work into a complete text before his death in 1920.

In view of this, how should these two pieces be read? My suggestion is to focus analysis on the earlier section ('The Distribution of Power Within the Political Community'), as the later piece on 'Status Groups and Classes' is little more than a rough outline of work to be done. This is a departure from most mainstream texts on class and status, which tend to use both texts as reference points. The tendency of such an approach is to define class as intrinsically social (Scase, 1992: 1; Crompton, 1993: 45; Edgell, 1993: 13) through reference to 'Status Groups and Classes', before distinguishing Weber from Marx on the grounds that he prioritized the cultural over the economic (hence his interest in status groups). Such accounts, however, leave the concept of the social largely unquestioned, along with the Marxist presupposition that economic class is always *social* class. Weber does indeed talk of social class in his later work on 'Status Groups and Classes' (1978: 302–7), where he declares that 'a "social class" makes up the totality of those class situations within which individual and generational mobility is easy and typical' (1978: 303–4). Beyond this, he outlines four main class groupings: (1) the working class as a whole; (2) the petty bourgeoisie (3) the propertyless intelligentsia and technical specialists; and (4) those privileged through property and education. This typology is commonly referred to in texts that read Weber as a theorist of social class or social stratification (Edgell, 1993: 13), but in such cases little attention is paid to what is meant by the term social. To answer this question, analysis must shift to Weber's earlier writing on 'The Distribution of Power Within the Political Community' (1978: 926–39), in which it is argued that classes might develop into social groupings, but that this is by no means inevitable. This argument is bypassed in 'Status Groups and Classes' (1978: 302–7), which simply lists a number of basic class typologies and characterizations that are subsequently left unanalysed. A reading of Weber on 'social class' that is developed through this later text thus eclipses the radical moment of his earlier, more complete position: the argument that class is essentially a *non-social* form.³ One of the few commentators to recognize this is John Scott, who uses Weber to distinguish between 'class situations' and 'social classes' (1996). Scott observes that it is 'striking . . . that so little attention has been given to the difficulties that stand in the way of operationalising [this] distinction' (1996: 131). Equally striking, however, is that so little attention has been paid to what this distinction means for Weber's understanding of the concept of the social, which Scott himself does not touch upon.⁴ For if class is a 'situation' rather than an intrinsically social form, what alternative groupings or collectivities might count as being 'social'? It is with this contemporary question in mind that the present article attempts to read Weber's classic, but increasingly neglected, study of 'Class, Status, Party'.

To do this, however, it is first necessary to turn back briefly to the 'Basic Sociological Terms' of Chapter 1 of Weber's *Economy and Society*, which introduces the conceptual language of 'Class, Status, Party' and gives a methodological framework for dealing with the question of the social. What is important is that nowhere in this famous outline of sociological concepts does Weber talk of *Gesellschaft* or society (an irony, given the title of the book). Rather, he talks of

different types of *social action* (instrumental, value-rational, affectual and traditional), and then of two types of *social relationships*: ‘communal’ (*Vergemeinschaftung*) and ‘associative’ (*Vergesellschaftung*). This emphasis on social relationships is all but absent in Weber scholarship, which has tended to focus on the structure or meanings of social action. But for an understanding of ‘Class, Status, Party’, the concept of *relationship* is pivotal, for it extends the concept of social action to the analysis of collective or group phenomena. Weber declares that he uses the term social relationship ‘to denote the behaviour of a plurality of actors insofar as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms’ (1978: 26). A social relationship then is a collective or group encounter, one that involves orientation and adjustment to the ‘meaningful behaviour’ of others. Such a relationship can be categorized into one of two main types: communal or associative. In English translation, the dynamism of these conceptual forms is easily lost, for ‘communal’ (*Vergemeinschaftung*) and ‘associative’ (*Vergesellschaftung*) social relationships sound passive and dull. But in German the ‘ver-’ prefix and the ‘-ung’ suffix give each term a sense of process, and tie the concept of a social relationship to the idea of socialization.⁵ At the group level, such socialization gives rise to a powerful feeling of *belonging*:

A social relationship will be called ‘communal’ (*Vergemeinschaftung*) if and so far as the orientation of social action – whether in the individual case, on the average, or in the pure type – is based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together. (Weber, 1978: 40)

Defined in this way, communal social relationships involve social action that is primarily *affectual* (‘determined by the actor’s specific affects and feeling states’) or *traditional* (‘determined by ingrained habituation’ (1978: 25)). Examples might include ‘religious brotherhood, an erotic relationship, a relation of personal loyalty, a national community, the *esprit de corps* of a military unit’ (1978: 41). Associative social relationships, meanwhile, are more ‘rational’ or ‘modern’ in orientation:

A social relationship will be called ‘associative’ (*Vergesellschaftung*) if and insofar as the orientation of social action within it rests on a rationally motivated adjustment of interests or a similarly motivated agreement, whether the basis of rational judgement be absolute values or reasons of expediency. It is especially common, though by no means inevitable, for the associative type of relationship to rest on a rational agreement by mutual consent. In that case the corresponding action is, at the pole of rationality, oriented either to a value-rational belief in one’s own obligation, or to a rational (*zweckrationale*) expectation that the other party will live up to it. (1978: 40–1)

This gives rise to a key point of distinction: communal social relations are based upon affectual or traditional forms of social action, whereas associative relations are oriented towards either value-rational or instrumentally rational activity.

Further to this, communal *and* associative social relationships may be either ‘open’ or ‘closed’ in character (Turner, 1988: 24–5). This ties Weber’s conceptual

definition of a social relationship to his analysis of legitimacy, power and domination, for at stake here is the definition of group membership, and, by extension, control over the limits of social relationships themselves. On the one hand:

A social relationship, regardless of whether it is communal or associative in character, will be spoken of as 'open' to outsiders if and insofar as its system of order does not deny participation to anyone who wishes to join and is actually in a position to do so. (1978: 43)

While, on the other, 'A relationship will . . . best be called "closed" against outsiders so far as, according to its subjective meaning and its binding rules, participation of certain persons is excluded, limited, or subjected to conditions' (1978: 43). And because open and closed social relationships can be either communal or associative in form, the grounds and procedures for closure can be enormously varied, and may be 'determined' through any of Weber's four basic types of social action: traditional, affectual, and rational in terms either of 'values' (value-rationality) or of 'expediency' (instrumental rationality).

Class: The Non-social

This question of the underlying basis of collective social action or *social relationships* forms the basic focus of Part Two of *Economy and Society*, which ranges across the study of, among others, 'economic relationships of organized groups' (Weber, 1978: 339–55), 'household, neighbourhood and kin groups' (1978: 356–69), 'ethnic groups' (1978: 385–98) and various 'religious groups' (1978: 399–634). But of specific interest is the relatively short section on 'political communities' (1978: 901–39), during the course of which Weber analyses the distribution of powers through class, status and party. Weber starts his analysis with class, and his position is famously anti-Marxist: "Economically conditioned" power is not, of course, identical with "power" as such. On the contrary, the emergence of economic power may be the consequence of power existing on other grounds' (1978: 926). This position stresses the structural independence but relatedness of three different types of power: economic, political and social. Weber's argument is that, contra Marx, economic power is not same thing as political or social power, even if these types influence each other. This is because there are instances where social power (or status) is not derived from economic standing, where 'naked money power' demands the relinquishment of social honour, and, conversely, where 'social honour, or prestige, may even be the basis of economic power' (1978: 926). Moreover, political and economic powers are not the same thing, for in *theory* it should not be possible to buy a political position in a democratic state. This anti-economic reading of power ties into the basic concepts laid down by Weber in Chapter 1 of *Economy and Society*, in particular his fourfold typology of social action. Weber observes that the pursuit of power can be instrumental *and* value-rational in orientation: 'Man does not strive for power only in order to enrich himself

economically. Power, including economic power, may be valued for its own sake' (1978: 926). But, this said, *class* power, or rather 'social action flowing from class interest', is, for Weber, predominantly instrumental in orientation. This is because class is understood primarily in terms of economic interest, or what Weber terms 'those interests involved in the existence of a market' (1978: 928).

In spite of this, however, class, for Weber, stands at the very threshold of being 'social'. Weber insists that classes are not communities, even if class (or market) interest might guide social action in some way. This is because communities, or communal social relationships (see above), are based on a subjective feeling of *belonging* together on either affectual or traditional grounds. For Weber, this feeling of belonging is simply not present in situations of economic interest, which nearly always involve action motivated by profit-making (i.e. instrumental action) rather than action oriented on traditional or affectual grounds. Class might thus exist in itself, but never actually for itself: it is ultimately an instance of economic rather than social or political stratification. Indeed, class barely counts as being 'social' at the level of an associative relationship. Hence, Weber talks less of class in itself than of a 'class situation'. By this, he means three things:

- (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life-chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labour markets. (1978: 927)

A class situation is a situation that is *determined* by the market. It refers simply to an array of different life-chances that arise from the uneven distribution of material property among 'a plurality of people': it is a situation in which 'pure market conditions prevail' (1978: 927). The main division in such a situation is between those with and those without property, and, further to this, between the ownership of property that is 'usable for returns' and the offering of 'services' in the market. In both cases, there is intensive differentiation between these competing market positions. Those who offer services in a market, for example, are differentiated 'just as much according to their kinds of services as according to the way in which they make use of these services, in a continuous or discontinuous relation to a recipient' (1978: 928). What this means is that a common *consciousness* is unlikely to be found at the root of class interest, and is in no way destined to develop from such interest. Rather, class action, for Weber, is action that tends to arise from a response to a common situation, and thus is likely to take the form of 'mass behaviour' that is not strictly meaningful and thus not strictly *social* in form. To put this bluntly, while people might experience a similar economic situation, this commonality in itself by no means forms the basis of a social relationship. Weber is firm on this point: 'a class does not in itself constitute a community [*Gemeinschaft*]' (1970: 184). Class, then, is barely social, even if social action may itself give rise to different market situations. And this disjuncture between class and meaningful group action, or between the economic and the political, holds not simply at the level of communal social relationships but

for associative social relationships too. For while class situation would seem to lend itself to social relationships that are more instrumental in orientation, Weber warns against presuming that this is the case: 'The emergence of an association or even of mere social action from a common class situation is by no means a universal phenomenon' (1978: 929). This is because what is at stake in a class situation is the 'power of property', not the meaningful reciprocity which, for Weber, is unique to *social* action and relationships.

Communal Social Relationships: Status

Weber summarizes the basic structural difference between class and status as follows: 'Whereas the genuine place of classes is within the economic order, the place of status groups is within the social order, that is, within the sphere of the distribution of honour' (1978: 938). Put simply, class is a form of economic stratification (or positioning within the market), whereas status refers instead to *social* stratification (or 'the distribution of honour'). The key distinction here is between classes, which are economic rather than social forms, on one hand, and status groups (*Stände*), which are social forms of *community* on the other. Weber states: 'Stände sind, im Gegensatz zu den Classen, normalerweise Gemeinschaften' [In contrast to classes, *status groups* are normally communities'] (Weber, 1970: 186). This emphasis on community is lost in the English version of *Economy and Society*, in which *Gemeinschaften* is translated, quite wrongly, as 'group' (see Weber, 1978: 932),⁶ but is vitally important for drawing a distinction between class and status. In these terms, class is a market situation and thus not a social relationship, while status is the outcome of *communal social relationships* that give a 'social estimation of honour' (1978: 932). In other words, status, unlike class, involves meaningful social action that is *communal* (*Vergemeinschaftung*), and thus predominantly traditional or affectual in orientation (see above). Classes, then, for Weber, are barely social, while status groups are, by contrast, fully social according to his definition of the term.

The term 'status group' (*Stände*), however, is a complex one (see Brennan, 1997: 162–5; Turner, 1988: 5–6), and is worth considering in detail. This is because the term *Stände* means not simply social standing or honour but also *estate*. In the famous section of *Economy and Society* entitled 'The Types of Legitimate Domination' (1978: 212–301), and more specifically the section on 'Traditional Authority' (1978: 226–41), Weber discusses 'estate-type domination' (*ständische Herrschaft*) at some length. This type of domination is treated as a form of patrimonialism, which is a form of authority that is traditional yet at the same time 'exercised by virtue of the ruler's personal authority' (1978: 232). What distinguishes patrimonialism from patriarchalism is that the former involves a personal staff, and in the case of 'estate-type domination', this staff appropriates 'particular powers and the corresponding economic assets' (1978: 232). What is interesting here is that the ruler or lord (unlike the sultan) has limited power over the selection of staff because this process is bound largely by tradition. Weber

hence talks of ‘patrimonial recruitment’, which applies to the hiring of administrative staff from ‘kinsmen, slaves, dependents who are officers of the household, especially *ministeriales*, clients, *coloni*, freedmen’ (1978: 228). This means that the hands of the ruler are effectively tied in the process of selection because ‘positions or seigniorial powers’ are limited to particular ‘organized’ or *status* groups. This situation becomes increasingly complicated, however, with the division of powers [*Gewaltenteilung*] within estate-type domination. This happens when ‘organized groups of persons privileged by appropriated seigniorial powers conclude *compromises* with their ruler . . . At times the members of such groups may participate directly on their own authority and with their own staffs’ (Weber, 1978: 237). In other words, the seigniorial powers of the ruler are reproduced with the complex internal divisions of the estate. What is important here is that, first, patrimonial domination is different from what Weber calls ‘occidental feudalism’, which is either based on the oaths of fealty of vassals, or a prebendal system of benefices (see 1978: 255–62). And second, patrimonial authority remains both personal and traditional: it is quite different, on the one hand, from charismatic domination, which can only be patrimonial once routinized (and takes on an ‘economic character’) (1978: 251), and on the other, to bureaucratic domination, which proceeds through impersonal, legal-rational procedures (1978: 1085–7). In regards this latter distinction, Weber states:

The patrimonial office lacks above all the bureaucratic separation of the ‘private’ and the ‘official’ sphere. For the political administration, too, is treated as a purely personal affair of the ruler, and political power is considered part of his personal property, which can be exploited by means of contributions and fees. (1978: 1028–9)

This theory of the estate connects to Weber’s broader argument about status groups in important ways. First, status groups, like estates, tend to be based on communal social relationships that tend towards closure. The ‘status’ or social circle is one example of this:

status honour is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific *style of life* is expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle. Linked with this expectation are restrictions on social intercourse (that is, intercourse which is not subservient to economic or any other purposes). These restrictions may confine normal marriages to within the status circle and may lead to complete endogamous closure. Whenever this is not a mere individual and socially irrelevant imitation of another style of life, but consensual action of this closing character, the status development is under way. (1978: 932)

This logic of closure is realized to its ‘full extent’ with ethnic segregation and the formation of social castes. When this happens, a status structure develops in which ‘ethnic communities’ close off from each other by prohibiting exogamous marriage and by defining legitimate social relationships on the grounds of blood ties. But, this said, Weber is careful not to conflate the categories of ethnicity and caste, for he argues that when a status segregation develops into a class a new structure of exclusion is born, which is by no means always the case: ‘the caste structure transforms the horizontal and unconnected coexistences of ethnically

segregated groups into a vertical social system of super- and subordination' (1978: 934).

Second, estates and status groups are comparable not simply because they are predominantly closed social structures, but because the social relationships forged within these structures are predominantly traditional or *communal* in orientation. The reason for this is that relationships within estates or status groups are personal ties based, for the most part, on religious or historical precedent, and as such are quite different from the relations or 'situations' found in the instrumental, 'rational' world of the market economy. In fact, status groups, with their traditional outlook and tendency towards closure, are likely to *hinder* the development of impersonal market forces. Weber spells out this clash between class (market situation) and status (traditional social action) with great force:

As to the general *effect* of the status order, only one consequence can be stated, but it is a very important one: the hindrance of the free development of the market. This occurs first for those goods that status groups directly withhold from free exchange by monopolization, which may be effected either legally or conventionally. (1978: 937)

What is at stake here is a basic conflict between social honour and the 'functional' interests of the market (which 'knows nothing of honour' (1978: 936)). Weber observes that, for the most part, social honour is completely incompatible with 'hard bargaining' in the capitalist market, to the extent that status groups tend to *abhor* such a practice. He states:

Honour abhors hard bargaining among peers and occasionally it taboos it for the members of a status group in general. Therefore, everywhere some status groups, and usually the most influential, consider almost any kind of overt participation in economic acquisition as absolutely stigmatizing. (1978: 937)

This means, in effect, that social relationships of status are quite incompatible with the market situations, or what might be called situations of *class*, for social standing is not simply determined by economic power or interest. Weber illustrates this by means of a dramatic, if abrupt, contrast: classes are stratified according to 'relations to the production and acquisition of goods' (1978: 937), while status groups are marked out by different practices and modes of consumption. In these terms, production is characterized by economic situations or relationships, while consumption, by contrast, plays out through social relationships of a traditional or communal kind. And, with this, Weber could not be further from Marx, for whom the social was ultimately the outcome of the *productive* co-operation of individuals (Marx, 1983: 173).

'Associative' Social Relationships: Party

In contrast to classes and status communities, parties are neither non-social nor communal in basis. They are rather organizations founded upon associative social relationships, and, in contrast to the closed character of status groups, proceed

through 'formally free recruitment' (1978: 284). Weber, in fact, tells us little about parties, possibly because this section of 'Political Communities' is unfinished. Elsewhere, Weber (1978: 285–6) states that parties might arise from 'disagreement over the charismatic quality of the leader or over the question of who, in charismatic terms, is to be recognized as the correct leader' (1978: 285–6). It is also observed that 'traditionalistic' parties might arise from 'controversy over the way in which the chief exercises his traditional authority in the sphere of his arbitrary will and grace' (1978: 286). The basic thrust of Weber's argument in 'Class, Status, Party', however, is that parties are political bodies that reside in 'the sphere of power', and as such are bodies that influence *social* activity in a meaningful way: 'Their action is oriented toward the acquisition of social power, that is to say, toward influencing social action no matter what its content might be' (1978: 938). The words 'whatever its content might be' are important, for at a structural level, modern parties are organizations that acquire or influence social power not on the basis of value-rational action, but through instrumentally rational means. Weber's primary concern then is with 'formally organized legal parties in a polity'. What counts in this environment is not the intrinsic value-rationality of power, but rather the instrumental struggle for 'political control'. This might come as something as a surprise to those who see politics as the pursuit of values for their own worth, but, for Weber, modern politics is highly rationalized: it involves the pursuit of power within a highly formalized legal framework, and rests on the deployment of rational means in the pursuit of clearly defined ends (even if this process is not always straightforward, see Gane, 1997). This means that *modern* parties are not communities, which are organized around traditional or affectual action, but rather *associations*, which are legal-rational in outlook.⁷ Weber states: '... against the actions of classes and status groups, for which this is not necessarily the case, party-oriented social action always involves association. For it is always directed toward a goal which is striven for in a planned manner' (1978: 938). To take this a step further: modern parties are founded upon *associative social relationships*, and seek power on the basis of instrumental (means–ends) courses of social action. Such action, which in the modern world is highly formalized, gives parties a bureaucratic leaning. Indeed, Weber observes that this development is possible only 'within groups that have an associational character, that is, some rational order and a staff of persons available who are ready to enforce it' (1978: 938). In this perspective, political striving for social influence or power takes a highly rationalized form: parties work within the legal context of a polity, and are regulated (internally and externally) by 'rational' rules and regulations. It is no accident that modern political parties assume this form, for Weber observes that 'the sociological structure of parties differs in a basic way according to the kind of social action they struggle to influence' (1978: 938–9). In other words, the more rationalized modern social action and social relationships are in general, the more instrumentally rational party actions, associations and structures are likely to be as a consequence.

The Social in Question

Weber's 'Class, Status, Party' then is not simply an argument about social stratification, as most secondary commentators have insisted (in particular, Brennan, 1997), but rather an analysis of the structural interdependencies of, and distribution of powers between, the economic, social and political spheres.⁸ This analysis, above all, questions what is meant by the basic concept of *the social*, and beyond this what is social rather than economic or political about stratification. The primary methodological move Weber makes here is to analyse status groups and parties in terms of different types of *social relationships*. This emphasis on relationship indicates that, for Weber, the social is not a bounded totality (as in the form of 'society' or the 'nation-state') but rather a process of socialization that involves reciprocal and meaningful exchanges between groups and individuals. This, in turn, allows Weber to demarcate the concept of class (as non-social) from that of status (communally social) and party (instrumentally social), for the former is said to refer to an economic situation rather than a relationship, and while class relations might emerge from such a situation this 'is by no means a universal phenomenon' (Weber, 1978: 929).

In view of this, the recent tendency to dismiss Weber from contemporary debates because of his conflation of the social and society, or what Beck (2000) calls his 'methodological nationalism', is unfounded. This criticism rests on the argument that Weber not only has a 'territorial definition of modern society' but also sees the nation-state to be the 'container of society' (Beck, 2000: 24). In his lecture 'Politics as a Vocation', Weber indeed declares that 'a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory. Note that "territory" is one of the characteristics of the state' (1970: 78). This assertion of the connection between state power and 'territory', however, is quite a different thing from saying that the social is contained within society, which, in turn, is contained within the territorial limits of the nation-state. Instead, what is different and invigorating about Weber's approach is that while a general process of rationalization is seen to place traditional political communities increasingly under the control of a legal-rational (bureaucratic) state, at the same time it is argued that the powers of political community are not simply contained within the limits of a nation or state. Weber says, for example, of the three main divisions of power within a political community – class, status and party – that

the fact that they presuppose a larger association, especially the framework of a polity, does not mean that they are confined to it. On the contrary, at all times it has been the order of the day that such association (even when it aims at the use of military force in common) reaches beyond state boundaries. (1978: 939)

It would thus be wrong to equate the social or even the political in Weber simply with 'society' or the nation-state, for, in fact, quite the reverse is true: both exceed, rather than are defined by, their supposed 'containers'. As a consequence, what we find in the work of Weber is an array of communal and associative social

relationships or forms of *socialization* that cannot be subsumed under the term 'society', and which reach *beyond* state boundaries. And while it is quite possible for a social relationship to be closed on the basis of national interest or identity, Weber never starts out from this position. Rather, his outline of open and closed social relationships proceeds in terms that are never reducible to a more general concept of 'society', and, as such, can quite easily be applied to the analysis of transnational or global social actions or relationships that cross state boundaries today.

In line with this, a basic typology of *social change* might also be drawn from 'Class, Status, Party' and connected to Weber's wider arguments regarding the contemporary rationalization and disenchantment of the world. 'Class, Status, Party', for example, can be seen to address the rationalization and disenchantment of the world in terms of a general shift from traditional and value-rational social action to instrumentally rational forms of social activity and organization, and, by extension, a shift from communal to associative social relationships. Bryan Turner (1988: 17–41), one of the few commentators to have recognized this, addresses this developmental history in terms of a shift from 'status to contract'. The basic feature of this transition is the strengthening of associative social forms, along with the predominance of instrumental rationality in all spheres of life. The clearest illustration of this comes in Weber's writings on monocratic bureaucracy, in which social relationships are predominantly both associative and instrumentally rational in orientation and structure. But, as Weber himself advises, care must be taken in applying this linear logic to the study of the social relationships of status groups and parties as a whole. This is because parties, while becoming increasingly instrumental in value-orientation, do not simply replace status groups in the competition for power. Rather, status groups continue to exist as the fragile but enchanted other of associative structures. This might even be seen to be the case in social relationships that arise through practices of consumption, which, for Weber, are predominantly communal in form. George Ritzer (1999), for example, suggests that 'the means of consumption' can only survive if they continue to possess magical or enchanting qualities. The basic argument here is that consumption can never be transformed into a fully 'rational' practice or sphere, and, by extension, communal social relationships are never fully displaced by instrumental associative forms. In other words, the rationalization process, while making a violent assault on tradition, is unable to reach a point of completion, and as a consequence the tension between communal (status) and associative (party) social relationships and structures is, for Weber, likely to remain unresolved.

Conclusion

In light of the above, there would appear to be good reasons for re-reading Weber as a *social* theorist, and for looking closely at his conceptualization of the social, rather than starting with an idea of social stratification which presupposes rather

than explains what is meant by the term 'social'. In the face of the continued decline of Marxist theory (which tends to treat the social as emerging through relations of production, thus tying the social to class), it would seem a timely moment to reconsider the basic argument of 'Class, Status, Party', as this text defines both class and the social in radically non-Marxist and non-societal terms.⁹ Strangely, however, within Weber circles and mainstream sociology there has been little recognition or development of Weber's definition of class as non-social, or his idea that communal socialization takes place through consumption. More generally, while there have been isolated attempts at developing alternative definitions of the social from the work of Durkheim (for example, Maffesoli, 1996), few, if any, have turned to Weber on the basic question of *the social* (despite viewing him as a social theorist). In response to this lacuna, sections of Weber's *Economy and Society*, and perhaps other of his texts too, might be used to open avenues for social theory that have yet to be fully explored. Any attempt at rethinking the social today, especially in the light of contemporary globalization processes, no doubt requires the invention of new approaches, methods and concepts. But at the same time, old theoretical resources that lie neglected may also be utilized. It is the argument of the present article that the writings of Max Weber, in particular those addressing class, status and party and social relationships more generally, are one such resource.

Notes

- 1 There have, of course, been many attempts to utilize the concept of social action outlined by Weber in Chapter 1 of *Economy and Society*, while at the same time heated debates and exchanges have raged over his declaration that action is only social if it is in some way meaningful. But there have been few, if any, attempts to move beyond Weber's basic methodological principles to show how the concept of the social is operationalized through the later chapters of *Economy and Society*. More specifically, little attention has been paid to the way in which Weber demarcates the social order from the orders of the political and economic. This, in my view, is the main purpose of his text 'Class, Status, Party'.
- 2 Brennan believes that 'Class, Status, Party' is later in origin: 'The exact dating of this essay is uncertain. But it undoubtedly derives from the period between 1915 and 1919, that is, up to five years before Weber's death in 1920' (Brennan, 1997: 2). Roth, in his introduction to *Economy and Society*, however, offers a different view, and argues that Part Two of this work (which includes the section 'Class, Status, Party') was drafted (if only in outline form) between 1910 and 1914, while Part One was written 'years later' (see Roth, 1978: lxxv). Elsewhere, Roth (1978: c) states that the only section of Part Two Weber revised after 1918 was the one on bureaucracy. For an overview of the structure of *Economy and Society*, see Baier et al.(2000), but even here the working relationship between 'Status Groups and Classes' (1978: 302–7) and 'The Distribution of Power Within the Political Community' (1978: 926–39) is far from clear.
- 3 For this reason I would argue that Brennan (1997: 2) is mistaken in her observation that this piece simply restates and extends the earlier arguments of 'Class, Status, Party'. What is of interest here is the shift in these two pieces from the analysis of class

to that of *social* class. As stated, Weber defines social class as ‘the totality of those class situations within which individual and generational mobility is easy and typical’ (1978: 302). In this sense, social class could be read as the *totality* of situations that are not truly social in themselves (i.e. they are not *social relationships*), but this is mere guesswork as the text of this section of *Economy and Society* is so far from completion.

- 4 Bryan Turner is an exception to the rule. In his book on *Status*, he rightly observes that:

By comparison with economic classes, status groups are characteristically social collectivities of a communal nature which require the reproduction of a typical lifestyle and cultural inheritance. By contrast, economic classes are merely aggregates of individuals linked together by exchange or other economic relations. (1988: 7)

Turner, however, only briefly considers ‘Class, Status, Party’ in the course of his general introduction to classical theories of social stratification, and fails to pursue this distinction between the social (status) and the non-social (class) in any detail. This leads him, in turn, to neglect the meaning of the term social in Weber’s account of *social* stratification (Turner, 1988: 26–9), which is said to deal with ‘three separate dimensions, namely class, status and power’ (1988: 27). As a consequence, Turner reverses his previous position (along with the one taken by Weber) for he treats class subsequently as a form of social rather than economic stratification.

- 5 I would like to thank Sam Whimster for his advice on the translation of these two terms.
- 6 This situation is confused further when the term *Verband* is translated as group rather than association (see, for example, Aron, 1964: 101). Care is needed here as the term ‘group’ means ‘community’ in some translations while in others it means association, with the contrast between these concepts lost in both cases.
- 7 This can be understood as part of Weber’s argument about the routinization of charismatic authority. On the subject of party control by charismatic leadership Weber states:

Almost all parties originate as a charismatic following of legitimate or caesarist pretenders, of demagogues in the style of Pericles, Cleon or Lassalle. If parties develop at all into routinized permanent organizations, they generally are transformed into structures controlled by *honoratiors*. (1978: 1130)

But in modern politics, particularly following the French Revolution, Weber observes that parties take on an increasingly bureaucratic form, so that ‘in the last decades of the 19th Century . . . bureaucratic organization gains the upper hand everywhere’ (1978: 1131). Weber summarizes the outcome of this process as follows:

The oscillation between subordination to charisma and obedience to *honoratiors* was succeeded by the struggle of the bureaucratic organization with charismatic leadership. The more bureaucratization advances and the more substantial the interests in benefices and other opportunities become, the more surely does the party organization fall into the hands of experts, whether these appear immediately as party officials or at first as independent entrepreneurs. (1978: 1131)

This is not to say that charismatic leadership vanishes without trace with the development of modern parties, as Weber himself warns against placing charismatic, traditional and legal-rational forms of domination into ‘a simple evolutionary line’

(1978: 1133), but that parties become increasingly legal-rational (or bureaucratic) in value-orientation and structure (and hence become characterized by associational rather than communal social relationships).

- 8 Interestingly, there is no explicit reference to 'the cultural' here. It would make sense to see status groups as social forms that coalesce through affiliation to specific sets of cultural values rather than as the result of market situation. This interdependence and the interplay between the social, cultural and economic spheres, however, are complex, and cannot be discussed at any length here.
- 9 This key point is absent from the Marx–Weber literature, including Löwith (1993), Sayer (1991), and Dahms (1997).

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