

**SOCIOLOGICAL ROMANTICISM: A CRITICISM MARKED BY RESIGNATION*****ROMANTISMO SOCIOLÓGICO: UMA CRÍTICA MARCADA PELA RESIGNAÇÃO******ROMANTICISMO SOCIOLÓGICO: UNA CRÍTICA MARCADA POR LA RENUNCIA***

Vinícius BERNARDES<sup>1</sup>  
e-mail: bernardessociais@gmail.com

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<sup>1</sup> São Paulo State University “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” (UNESP/FCLAR), Araraquara – São Paulo – Brazil. Graduate student in the Social Sciences Graduate Program.

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**ABSTRACT:** This article seeks to relate Weber's social theory, marked by resignation, with some features of the aspirations of the first thinkers of Romanticism, in the 19th century, in Germany. Like them, Max Weber perceives a fragmentation of spheres—in the Romantics, perception is expressed as a split in thought—that atomizes the individual, who sees his ethical and moral values confronted by an objectivity that is foreign to him. This approach is made based on his conclusions regarding the process of rationalization, to the extent that the Romantics, in their perceptions of the division of labor and the loss of the notion of totality, also criticize from a resigned point of view, which does not accept the disastrous effects of capitalism, but does not formulate a critique that proposes emancipation.

**KEYWORDS:** Sociology. Max Weber. Resignation. Romanticism. Capitalism.

**RESUMO:** Neste artigo, procura-se relacionar a teoria social weberiana, marcada pela resignação, com alguns traços das aspirações dos primeiros pensadores do romantismo, no século XIX, na Alemanha. Assim como estes, Max Weber percebe uma fragmentação das esferas — nos românticos, a percepção é expressa como uma cisão no pensamento — que atomiza o indivíduo, que vê seus valores ético-morais confrontados por uma objetividade que lhe é estranha. Tal aproximação é feita a partir de suas conclusões a respeito do processo de racionalização, na medida em que também os românticos, em suas percepções sobre a divisão do trabalho e a perda da noção de totalidade, tecem críticas a partir de um ponto de vista resignado, que não aceita os efeitos desastrosos do capitalismo, mas não formulam uma crítica que se propõe emancipatória.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Sociologia. Max Weber. Resignação. Romantismo. Capitalismo.

**RESUMEN:** En este artículo si estás buscando relacionar la teoría social weberiana, marcada por la resignación, con algunas huellas de las aspiraciones de los primeros pensadores del romanticismo, en el siglo XIX, en Alemania. Como éstos, Max Weber percibe una fragmentación de esferas — en los románticos, la percepción se expresa como una escisión en el pensamiento — que atomiza al individuo, que ve sus valores ético-morales confrontados por una objetividad que le es ajena. Este planteamiento se realiza a partir de sus conclusiones respecto del proceso de racionalización, en la medida en que los románticos, en sus percepciones sobre la división del trabajo y la pérdida de la noción de totalidad, critican desde un punto de vista resignado, que no acepta los efectos desastrosos del capitalismo, pero no formula una crítica que proponga la emancipación.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Sociología. Max Weber. Resignación. Romanticismo. Capitalismo.

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## Introduction

Herder's travels broadened the intellectual horizon of German thinkers from the mid-eighteenth century onward. A forerunner of anthropological thought, Herder (1984) sought to understand the cultural expressions of other countries in a democratic manner, insofar as his research was directly influenced by the revolutionary spirit ignited by the recent French Revolution. Accordingly, he viewed this event positively, understanding it as a creative principle present in these cultures and as a means of advancing the principles of freedom and fraternity then emerging in France. It is therefore possible to argue that, beyond being a precursor of an anthropological mode of inquiry, Herder marks the beginning of what would later become the first generation of major Romantic thinkers—Hölderlin (2012), Schelling (1985), the Schlegel brothers (1970), Tieck (2012), Novalis (1978–1987), and Schleiermacher (2000).

Goethe, however, for whom Herder had until then served as an intellectual mentor, reveals an anti-revolutionary stance, motivated by a certain fear—explicitly expressed by the novelist—of the authoritarian and violent consequences generated by the direct action of the Jacobins and by the entry of the masses into the revolution. In this sense, Goethe's fear of the masses stemmed from his belief that the non-literate and less affluent population had entered the revolution in a passive, manipulated manner, guided by bourgeois Enlightenment and revolutionary reason. Goethe (1994), described as a “friend of evolution, enemy of revolution” (Safranski, 2010, p. 38, our translation), shares with Burke (2017) a similar assessment of the role of the masses in the revolution, arguing that they “may have been swept into the Revolution without therefore possessing adequate knowledge of the political sphere” (Safranski, 2010, p. 38). This Romantic and anti-revolutionary critical stance found in Goethe may be seen as an early seed of the critique of devalued formal rationality later developed in twentieth-century German sociology. Regarding this relationship, Goethe (1994), in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, reflects on the limitation of the individual to a mechanical and restricted function:

Human beings are born for a limited condition; they are capable of perceiving certain simple and immediate ends and of becoming accustomed to using the means at hand. As soon as they reach a broader sphere, however, they no longer know what they want or what they should do, whether they are distracted by the multiplicity of objects or driven out of themselves by their loftiness and sovereignty. It is always to their detriment when they are led to desire something with which they cannot establish a bond through their own regular activity (Goethe, 1994, our translation).



In the wake of Goethe's thought, Schiller (2004), later on, through *Homo Ludens*<sup>2</sup> and his theory of play concerning the transition from nature to culture, develops a critique of the category of utility, which quintessentially defines the spirit of modern capitalism. He conceives it as a category that qualifies an entire system closed in upon itself, governed by its own logic and guided by bourgeois instrumental rationality. In Schiller (2004), one already finds the metaphor of the iron cage, which would become the leitmotif of Weberian sociology a century later and which reveals the ability—shared by the Romantics and later by Weber—to perceive the split in thought and the fragmentation of spheres of action. Schiller, in Safranski's words, expresses his dissatisfaction with the division of labor under capitalism by stating that:

Utility is the great idol of the age, to which all powers must render service and all talents must pay homage. On this scale, the spiritual gain of art carries no weight, and, stripped of all motivation, it disappears before the noisy market of the century (Safranski, 2010, p. 44, our translation).

Discontent with the effects of capitalism, therefore, is already present in the Romantic worldview. Schiller leaves a theoretical legacy to which Hölderlin, Hegel, and later Marx, Weber, and Simmel would turn in order to address the “specific deformation of bourgeois society: the system of job distribution” (Safranski, 2010, p. 45, our translation). Bourgeois society, in Schiller's view, “made progress in technology, science, and craftsmanship as a consequence of the division of labor and specialization” (Safranski, 2010, p. 45, our translation); however, he emphasizes that

In the same proportion in which it becomes more affluent and complex as a whole, it allows the individual to become impoverished with regard to the development of their talents and capacities. As the whole presents itself as a rich totality, the individual ceases to be what, according to an idealist assumption of Antiquity, they should be: a person as a small totality (Safranski, 2010, p. 45, our translation).

In two brief passages, one can observe the Romantic form of discontent with the objectivity of capitalism. In the first, the phlegmatic character assumed by the individual under capitalism is intensified:

Pleasure has been separated from labor, the end from the means, effort from reward. Eternally bound to a single small fragment of the whole, the human being develops only as a fragment. Eternally hearing the noise of the wheel

<sup>2</sup> Later, in the 19th century, Dutch cultural critic Johan Huizinga devoted an extensive study to the “instinct to play” in human culture, published under the title *Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture*, released in Brazil in a 2019 edition by Perspectiva publishing house.



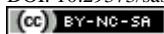
that drives him, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of imprinting humanity upon his nature, he becomes merely a copy of his occupation (Safranski, 2010, p. 45, our translation).

The second passage, by Hölderlin in *The Hermit in Greece (Hyperion)* (2012), conveys the pain of grasping the present condition of humanity:

You see workers, but no human beings; thinkers, but no human beings [...] this is not like a battlefield, where hands and arms and all limbs are mixed together while the vital blood flows into the sand [...] that would still be bearable, were it not that human beings must be insensitive to all the beauty of life (Hölderlin, 2012, our translation).

Romanticism inaugurates—and in direct relation to what has been discussed so far—a new era for the German publishing market. Between 1790 and 1800, a radical transformation took place in German reading habits. In that single decade, “2,500 novels appeared on the market, as many as in the previous ninety years combined” (Safranski, 2010, p. 48, our translation). These novels fueled the German cultural imagination with themes of secret societies, intriguing plots, and mystical adventures, given that Germany’s geopolitical situation at the time was that of a territory lacking major cosmopolitan urban centers or overseas colonies that might offer a sense of distance and adventure. Everything appeared fragmented, disconnected, and extremely confined; cities lacked international relevance within the European context and therefore did not possess a strong communication network capable of shaping the German citizen as a modern citizen. Such novels transformed the general climate: “people began once again to enjoy the mysterious; belief in the transparency and predictability of the world diminished” (Safranski, 2010, p. 51, our translation), because there was a pervasive fear that a revolutionary reason—having produced tumultuous and terror-inducing consequences in France—could also generate an objectivity that escaped control and allowed “our dark nature to emerge more than our clear reason” (Safranski, 2010, p. 51, our translation).

This genre of novel, to which Schiller himself belonged, includes works such as Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* (1994), which portrays the secret society of the tower; Jean Paul’s *Titan* (2013); and Tieck’s *William Lovell* (2012). All these novels nurtured a stereotype marked by a longing for secrecy, the unintelligible, the abstract, and the mystical. Novalis, in defining the ideal type of the Romantic spirit, famously postulated: “By giving the commonplace a higher meaning, the ordinary a mysterious appearance, the familiar the dignity of the unfamiliar, and the finite the semblance of the infinite—this is how I romanticize” (Safranski, 2010, p. 54, our translation). In this generation of Romantics, the interest in the mysterious arises from a



critical stance toward the triumph of merely formal rationality, toward the mechanical action imposed by capitalism, and toward the atomization of the individual into partial functions. The Romantic critique values the elimination of the “separation between the logic of everyday life and work and any other free, creative activity of the spirit” (Safranski, 2010, p. 56, our translation). The nostalgia for a virtuous and paradisiacal reality—a defining trait of Romanticism—already appears in Schlegel, when he deepens his studies of Antiquity and publishes, in 1795, his essay *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, which secured his recognition as one of the leading scholars in the field among his contemporaries.

Schlegel was also the inventor of Romantic irony. Until then, irony had been a rhetorical device or literary method, “situated somewhere between humor, mockery, and satire” (Safranski, 2010, p. 59, our translation). Irony was already well known in the intellectual circles of Antiquity and Modernity; what Schlegel (1970) did was to romanticize it, endowing it with a relativistic meaning within a much broader perspective. Romantic irony, thus redefined, becomes a critical device consisting in the production of intelligible statements that refer to unintelligible contents, insofar as the Romantic notion of the unintelligible represents a living force which, if fully unveiled by reason, would lose its creative power. Once again, a critique of bourgeois revolutionary reason as expressed in the French Revolution emerges, since, in Romantic language, “irony is at work when life in community is not understood as an association directed toward a specific end, such as a work group or even a compulsory union” (Safranski, 2010, p. 61, our translation). In a brief note, Schlegel (1970) addresses his readers’ complaints about the unintelligibility of his irony-filled fragments:

But is unintelligibility really something so reprehensible and bad? It seems to me that the well-being of families and nations is founded upon it... Yes, the most delightful thing human beings possess, inner satisfaction itself, depends, as anyone can easily recognize, ultimately on some point that must remain unknown; yet it carries and sustains the whole, and this force would be lost at the very moment one attempted to clarify it by means of reason (Safranski, 2010, p. 60, our translation).

Finally, as we move toward the discussion of the hypothesis, it is important to emphasize that the critique developed by the early Romantics regarding the effects of capitalism—the Schlegel brothers (1970), Tieck (2012), Novalis (1978–1987), Schiller (2004), Schelling (1985), and later Schleiermacher (2000)—reveals a clear sense of discontent. This discontent, however, does not translate into a proposal to transcend capitalism. It must also be considered that Romantic criticism still emerged within a period of revolutionary and creative effervescence following the French Revolution, and that explicitly materialist forms of critique



would only appear half a century later, with Marx and other Left Hegelians. On the contrary, Romantic critique is consistently articulated by opposing the division of labor and the dominance of formal rationality to a context that precedes capitalism. This nostalgic trait present in Romanticism resonates within twentieth-century German sociology. The relationship established in this study is grounded in the conclusions of Weberian social theory, marked by a particular form of resignation—a discontent that limits itself to description and to the conclusion that formal rationality has tragically come to dominate the ways in which human beings relate to one another in modern capitalism.

With this brief introduction, it is possible to identify traces of Romantic political-philosophical principles in twentieth-century German sociology—Tönnies (1991), Sombart (1986), Simmel (2013), and, most importantly, Weber (1965), who is the central author of this study. A line of influence can be traced beginning with Herder (1984) and *Sturm und Drang*<sup>3</sup>, extending throughout nineteenth-century German Idealism, and culminating in the major sociological thought on rationalization, the institutionalization of capitalism through the Protestant ethic, and the fragmentation of spheres of action. It is important to stress, however, that Weber cannot be placed in a Romantic position *per se*. The position proposed here is that of a disenchanted Romantic. This classification stems from the understanding that Weber is not a reactionary thinker whose critique is directed at the effects of the French Revolution—a stance more coherently represented by Novalis, for whom, according to Löwy, “the goal is not to preserve the status quo, but to move backward, to the Catholic Middle Ages prior to the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the development of bourgeois society” (Löwy, 2008, p. 16, our translation). Weber’s conclusions regarding the process of rationalization are neither reactionary nor conservative, as will be demonstrated throughout this essay.

Weber (1965) also cannot be classified as a conservative thinker, reinforcing the argument above, insofar as the German sociologist does not advocate the preservation of what he himself deems disastrous in the concluding remarks of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2004)—namely, the effects of the rationalization process, reification, and the mechanization of action. Weber is not an anti-Enlightenment critic of the French Revolution, nor a proponent of maintaining a social order untouched by it. Perhaps Burke (2017), in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, more explicitly expresses this conservative position,

<sup>3</sup> It was a literary movement in Germany between 1760 and 1780—the height of German Romanticism—which had Johann Gottfried Herder as one of its main influences, but also Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. It is estimated (Safranski, 2010) that Romanticism in Germany lasted from 1750 to the first decade of the 19th century, having great relevance for German Idealism, with Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.

arguing that his opposition to the French Revolution rested on the claim that its methods violated individual freedoms.

Lastly, Weber is not a revolutionary author, as he does not adopt a genuinely critical (emancipatory) stance regarding the fate of humanity. Revolutionary Romanticism—a current associated with authors such as Ernst Bloch, the early Lukács (2009; 2017) prior to his adherence to Hegelian-Marxist thought and the dialectical method, particularly in *Soul and Form* (originally published in 1909 [2017]) and *The Theory of the Novel* (originally published in 1916 [2009])—can also be traced back, perhaps most prominently, to Rousseau (2011). In Rousseau's work, “one finds no sympathy for feudalism” (Löwy, 2008, p. 13); on the contrary, Rousseau was one of the foremost representatives of a bourgeoisie that conceived itself as revolutionary, oriented toward a transformation aimed at dismantling the old forms of human exploitation.

### Disenchanted Romantic Sociology: Max Weber and Resigned Social Theory

Weber is generally regarded as one of the foremost sociologists of his time, having devoted a substantial portion of his work to understanding religious manifestations and the symbiosis between their ethical systems and the socio-political-economic spirit of capitalism. In the social sciences, it is primarily to Weber (1965)—but also to Simmel (2013), Tönnies (1991), and Sombart (1986)—that scholars turn when seeking to explain the process of rationalization that transformed pre-capitalist feudal communities into civil societies and the modern state. This explanation is consistently grounded in studies of religion, particularly Protestantism, which provide the basis for understanding the emergence of a capitalist spirit that came to dominate the fully rationalized West or, as Weber (1965) terms it, the disenchanted West. This rationalized Western context is described as disenchanted insofar as Weber associates it with the establishment of a way of life dominated by science and technology, which in turn engenders a mode of existence guided by the methodical calculation of appropriate means toward intended ends. Weber (1965) understands rationalization as the institutionalization of this methodical, highly predictable, and calculable way of life, while simultaneously associating the mechanization of so-called rational actions—the reduction of the possibility of fully free action—with the category of disenchantment, which carries, to some extent, a positive meaning within Weber's sociology.



The term appears in several of Weber's works, with its primary meaning linked to demagification—the removal of magical significance from causality. His thesis of the loss of meaning complements this notion, insofar as the loss of meaning to which Weber refers is in fact a shift in the legitimacy of how meaning is attributed to the world. Whereas in pre-capitalist communal contexts causality was strictly mystical-religious, associated with the determinations of prophets and charismatic magico-religious leaders, in the rationalized Western context causality comes to be understood through the refinement of techniques for manipulating nature—that is, science proper—and through the application of these techniques to a new way of life. If the scientific method can predict and control everything, and if it is transposed into the manner in which individuals conduct their actions, all actions become predictable and calculable. If there is, therefore, an association between disenchantment and a more predictable and calculable mode of life—albeit one that is mechanized and reified, as Weber himself acknowledges—then Weber's sociology (1965) contains a critical dimension that approaches a form of disenchanted Romanticism. From this perspective, as Löwy argues, “a return to the past is impossible, regardless of the social and cultural qualities of pre-capitalist societies” (Löwy, 2008, p. 16, our translation); industrial capitalism thus appears as an irreversible phenomenon and, irrespective of its effects, resignation remains the only viable stance.

The critical dimension of Weber's work is fully tied to a position of the conscious observer of capitalist reality and its catastrophic effects—a position that Weber presents as that of the professional scientist, who remains at the margins of social phenomena and therefore should not attempt to theorize reality normatively. Weber's critique of capitalism, far from proposing an alternative capable of overcoming it, tends instead toward an exposition of reification—an aspect that carries a negative meaning in Weber's thought—as something that, precisely because it did not exist in communities prior to the process of rationalization, suggests a certain nostalgia for the social ethics of communal relations. Within this Romantic worldview present in German sociology, “this pre-capitalist past is adorned with a series of virtues (real, partially real, or imagined), such as the predominance of qualitative values (use values or ethical, aesthetic, and religious values)” (Löwy, 2008, p. 13, our translation), as well as genuine affective relations among human beings and lived emotions, in direct opposition to forms of organization based on calculation, money, price, commodity-mediated relations, and individuals atomized by the growing dominance of exchange value.

The critique of disenchantment can thus be understood as Weber's discontent with industrial capitalism, which replaced ethical communal values (qualitatively superior) with



cold, rational calculation. Is there, in Weber's work, an attempt to restore within our cultural universe the enchantment "expelled by machines and accounting ledgers?" (Löwy, 2008, p. 55, our translation). It would be difficult to argue, based on Weber's conclusions regarding the process of rationalization, that his sociology aims to restore a past ethical-cultural context in order to replace the reified reality of capitalism. It is, however, accurate to state that Weberian sociology presents itself as a resigned form of critique—discontent with capitalism, yet lacking any prospect of human emancipation from the reality that surrounds us. By way of example, although Marx (2017) and Weber share a common concern—namely, "the central position attributed to the problems of capitalist society in the work of both" (Cohn, 2023, p. 118, our translation)—they pursue their critiques along different paths. Whereas Marx directs his discontent toward an attempt to overcome capitalism, grounding his critique in political economy and its own internal terms, Weber advances a critique marked by resignation which, despite identifying capitalism's flaws, confines itself to a merely descriptive mode of theorization.

What is relevant for bringing Weber closer to a form of disenchanted Romanticism is not only his conclusions regarding the process of rationalization, but also his methodological choice—indeed, a deliberate choice, since he was well aware of dialectics—for ordering segments of reality and constructing his analytical categories. Cohn, in one of the chapters of *Critique and Resignation: Max Weber and Social Theory*, highlights Weber's conception of domination as an ever-present phenomenon in social life, yet one "without any prospect of being overcome" (Cohn, 2023, p. 184). Weber consistently operates with rigid dichotomies, "between which there is no reconciliation nor any mediating third element" (Cohn, 2023, p. 185), as can be contrasted with Hegel's dialectic of master and slave, in which the categories of domination and servitude—or rather, "the movement domination/servitude—can be interpreted as mediation within the unity of these opposing moments, inside the process of the constitution of self-consciousness" (Cohn, 2023, p. 184, our translation). In Weber, by contrast, mediations function merely as methodological devices to explain how dominant groups legitimize their domination over the dominated across time. The category of the administrative staff, discussed by Cohn, is an analytical construct that operates as an external instrument to the terms it seeks to explain. Cohn describes the mediating function of the administrative staff as follows:

The fact is that there is a mediator between dominators and dominated in the Weberian scheme, and one with very peculiar characteristics. This mediator

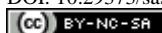


is the “administrative staff,” identified by Weber as a component of any type of domination that remains effective over time. The peculiarity of the administrative staff is that, if we consider the analysis cited above by Jameson, it is a non-evanescent mediator. On the contrary, the more Weber emphasizes the effectiveness of rational-legal domination, whose administrative staff is bureaucratic in nature, the more the internal consistency and durability of this privileged mediator—the administrative staff interposed between dominators and dominated—are reinforced (Cohn, 2023, p. 185, our translation).

We are thus faced with a situation in which the theorist adopts an apathetic stance when confronted with a reality that presents individuals who are juridically (formally) equal, yet occupy different positions of action—positions of action legitimized insofar as domination, according to Weber, is a typical manifestation of a form of organization understood as insurmountable. This is because Weber’s own analytical categories function solely as descriptive categories marked by extreme impassivity. By differences in status, I do not mean the fact that individuals hold different functions in a hypothetical society beyond capitalism—it is evident that differentiated functions for different individuals would remain necessary even after the emancipation of capitalist relations, as society would still require physicians, firefighters, public administrators, and public school teachers. What underlies this argument is that, in Weber, the category of domination is theorized only with the intention of superficially understanding the power dynamics between the class (status group) that dominates and the class that is dominated, employing an analytical category to ground sociological analysis. As Sell observes,

Weber is, above all, a theorist of the collision of values [Wertkollision]. He does not envisage on the horizon any possible strategy of reconciliation [Versöhnung] and emphatically criticizes attempts in this direction (Sell, 2013, p. 254, our translation).

Weber can be associated with a form of disenchanted Romanticism insofar as the anti-capitalist tendency in his work adopts—sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly—a “nostalgic (but not apologetic) attitude toward the pre-capitalist *Gemeinschaft*, toward the more organic forms of communal life of the past” (Löwy, 2008, p. 70, our translation), in which human beings were still free from what Weber himself perceived in rationalized modernity. Löwy further notes, praising German sociology as an advance over French positivist sociology and Anglo-Saxon sociology, that “the critical dimension of Romantic origin remains active in their works and gives them that particular quality which distinguishes them from superficial apologetas” (Löwy, 2008, p. 71, our translation), precisely those found in the two traditions mentioned above. This may well represent the apex of German sociology: the ability to



apprehend social phenomena without filling their content with dogmatic apologetics of capitalist contradictions. Weber's work revolves around providing "a sociological substrate to Neo-Kantian theses" (Sell, 2013, p. 250, our translation) and demonstrating "the erosion of a unified reason" (Sell, 2013, p. 250, our translation), that is, showing how the formal reason of science follows its own logic and operates, according to Sell (2013, p. 250, our translation), "solely within the domain of description and causal understanding of phenomena." Here again, in the formulation of analytical sociological categories, there is a perception of the fragmentation of the logic of spheres of action, just as the Romantics perceived a cleavage in thought and opposed it—romantically, of course, yet without resorting to simplistic apologetics.

Weber himself, to whom the greatest credit is attributed for contributions to the "science of society" in Germany, acknowledges that the extreme impersonality of bureaucracy transformed the administrator into a mere executor of predetermined tasks without consent, and that the fulfillment of such tasks, regardless of the bureaucrat's personal ethical values, entails a reification that renders formal rational action the only possible form of action. Any action whose intention goes beyond mere rational (predictable) calculation is deemed irrational—an action that leads to ruin. In the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, Weber states that what remains for the individual is a choice between "economic annihilation or obedience to very specific maxims of economic conduct" (Weber, 1965, p. 132, our translation). As Weber further argues in the same text,

Economic laws are schemes of rational action derived not from psychological analysis of individuals, but from the ideal-typical reconstruction of the mechanism of price struggle based on the objectively constructed theoretical situation. When expressed in a pure form, these laws leave the individual involved in the market only the option between teleological adaptation to the market or economic ruin (Weber, 1965, p. 140, our translation).

Accordingly, the association in Weber's work between disenchantment and rational action implies that rational action capable of calculation in the most minute details—and of symmetrically aligning means and ends—is, by definition, an intelligible action. Cohn draws attention to this association, emphasizing that "perfectly rational action is fully predictable (and disenchanted, Weber would say). It offers the maximum probability of correctly predicting its occurrence" (Cohn, 2023, p. 137, our translation). Therefore,

Rational action, the most predictable form of action, is also the privileged case of intelligible action: it suffices for the observer to know the intended end, the available means, and to take into account that there exists one and only one



way of maximizing results under given conditions (Cohn, 2023, p. 137, our translation).

The intelligible action referred to here does not carry a critical-emancipatory meaning; it merely denotes an analytical instrument deemed advisable because the historical-social universe surrounding individuals requires the constant calculation of the equation between necessary means and intended ends. This entails a narrowing of the “margin of options available to agents” (Cohn, 2023, p. 128, our translation), that is, action oriented toward ends—which is intelligible action par excellence—implies that “we can act on the basis of weighing the various possibilities of a future course of events in the case of the realization of each action (or omission) conceived as possible” (Cohn, 2023, p. 125, our translation). From Weber’s conclusions and from the meaning attributed to analytical categories in his work—disenchantment, for instance, understood as the expulsion of magical means of salvation and the replacement of magic by mathematical causal mechanisms—it becomes clear that Weber associates the establishment of a methodical, calculable, and predictable way of life with a stance of understanding, grounded in what he terms intelligible action as rational action, as Sell emphasizes.

The technical-scientific worldview reshapes the understanding of these powers, which thereby lose their extraordinary character and become fully immanent. Reality comes to be oriented by the idea of causality as a blind mechanism, guided by a logic that can be decoded and controlled (Sell, 2013, p. 243, our translation).

The rapprochement between Weber and a form of disenchanted romanticism proposed in this essay is grounded in the author’s critiques of the causal mechanism of capitalism—rationalized and therefore reified—without, however, his critical stance toward this mechanism seeking a solution that lies beyond capitalism itself. Should not the loss of the extraordinary mystical character of a context once enchanted by the dominance of religion, the replacement of this mysticism by a form of causality that is par excellence comprehensible, and the establishment of purely technical and scientific means free us from the catastrophic effects of capitalism?

The hypothesis advanced here is that Weber is fully willing—regarding his choice to operate with fictional constructions—to pay the price of opposing the dialectical method, because the central concern of his work is to create “conditions to render certain segments of empirical reality cognizable and controllable” (Cohn, 2023, p. 192, our translation), insofar as the German sociologist believes this to be the sole destiny of anyone devoted to science. In this

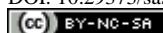


sense, the individual who devotes himself exclusively to science, in Weber's view, must by definition have his theoretical-categorical instrument clearly defined in order to debate and question what pertains strictly to the scientific realm, that is, what manifests itself in a given objectivity—in this case, capitalism—that is foreign to the subjectivity (consciousness) of human beings in general, but which can be ordered into causal nexuses. This ordering is achieved by analyzing the objective possibility of the occurrence of a given event, given that the agents under analysis can be typified, endowed with certain social characteristics—through an exercise of hyperbolizing traits in order to identify supposed rules—and, consequently, psychological characteristics that impel them toward one action or another.

The modern individual's perception of disenchantment, of the inexorability of operating with defined scientific categories, and of the domination of reality through technical means leads us to conclude that an approximation between German sociology and a romantic worldview is possible. As Safranski observes, although Romanticism is a historically delimited period, "the romantic is an attitude of the spirit that is not confined to a specific time. It found its purest expression in Romanticism, but the romantic persists to this day" (Safranski, 2010, p. 16, our translation).

In this sense, sociological romanticism should be understood as the expression of a theory that presents itself as scientific—by operating with objective analytical categories—and that therefore contents itself with mere dissatisfaction in the face of what this very theory deems catastrophic, limiting itself to the description of events. By critique marked by resignation, one should understand that Weber's perception of the reification of consciousness and the mechanization of labor is characterized by a stance that does not aspire to the emancipation from the effects engendered by the objectivity of capitalism. The conclusions regarding the process of rationalization lead us to infer not only a certain apathy on Weber's part, but also that his thesis of the loss of meaning represents an attempt to counterpose the mechanized objectivity produced by capitalism with a context that, although enchanted and permeated by magic, according to Weber, was marked by human relations oriented by specific ethical values and by a certain notion of totality that bound individuals together through ties of fraternity and love.

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- Authors' contributions:** As the sole author, the ideas developed in this work emerged during the writing process of my master's dissertation entitled *Disenchantment and Reification: A Study on History and Class Consciousness*, in which I present Lukács's critique of Max Weber's sociological ideal of knowledge as articulated in the referenced Hegelian-Marxist essay of 1923. The arguments advanced in this article constitute a focused excerpt from the broader dissertation. Here, I limit the analysis to describing a possible influence of German Romanticism (1750–1810) on early twentieth-century German sociological thought, with particular emphasis on the work of Max Weber as the leading German sociologist of the period.

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