



Oittinen, Vesa, ed. *Max Weber and Russia*. Aleksanteri Series 2/2010. Helsinki: Aleksanteri Institute, 2010. 198 pp. €20.00. ISBN 978-952-10-5154-8.

Max Weber had attracted attention in Russia before he engaged in sustained research on that part of the world. The first Russian translation of his work, an essay on the stock market, was published as early as 1897. Fragments from *The Protestant Ethics* and a few articles appeared in Russian translation in the 1920s, after which the official historiography chose to ignore Weber until Khrushchev's "Thaw" opened the door for a more balanced appropriation of the Western sociological heritage in the USSR. A full translation of *The Protestant Ethics* was published in 1972, but not until the heyday of perestroika did Weberian studies find a foothold in Russia, beginning with the pioneering work of Yuri Davydov and Piama Gaidenko.

Papers in the volume under review stem from an international symposium on Weber and Russia sponsored by the Aleksanteri Institute in Helsinki in 2007. Eleven essays assembled therein track the influence of Weber on Soviet Studies and the reception of his work in Russia, Weber's writings about this country and its historical destiny, the contribution that Weberian sociology has to offer to our understanding of the Communist and post-Soviet regimes, the interfaces between Weber's sociology of religion and Christian Orthodoxy, the historical vicissitudes of German and Russian neo-Kantianism, and the implications of Weber's perspective on rationality and bureaucracy for contemporary Russian business culture.

Throughout his life Weber was powerfully drawn to Russia, in whose culture and society he saw fertile ground for theorizing. His first engagement with this nation's history dates back to 1905 when he published two research papers on the Russian Revolution. The social upheavals of 1917 produced several more publications, mostly polemical in nature, in which Weber used the revolutionary stirrings in Russia as fodder for his critique of the radical Left in Germany. As Mikhail Maslovskiy points out in his review essay opening the volume, contemporary scholars tend to find fault with Weber's writings on Russia because he placed too much stock in the peasant commune as a revolutionary force and too little in the viability of the Bolshevik regime, which he judged unstable and transitional.

While Weber's own pronouncements about Germany's rival are suspect, it is easy to see why students of Russia would use his master concepts like patrimony, charisma, authority, bureaucracy, domination, and rationalization to decode this country's cultural identity. It is hard to miss the role that the charismatic intellectuals played during the Bolshevik Revolution, the patrimonial tendencies in Stalin's regime, or the deadening grip of bureaucracy in Brezhnev's Russia. But does the Soviet regime's obsessive emphasis on planning and calculation exemplify a Western-style modernization? Can the totalitarian institutions under Stalin be seen as comprising a patrimonial state? Does Brezhnev's regime qualify as an instance of legal-rational authority, bureaucratic rationalization, or a decaying form of charismatic authority that failed to routinize itself and eventually yielded to Gorbachev's charisma?

All such explanations have merit, as the volume contributors rightly point out, but none of these is dispositive, each can be challenged through counterexamples, and their capacity to predict the future is uncertain at best. But then, the Weberian method discourages sociologists from appealing to "reality," for the latter is to be judged by the extent to which the historical particulars approximate a theoretical construct, rather than the other way around. "Ideal type," as Weber conceived of it, is a caricature, a straw man set up to bring into sharper relief certain aspects of the modeled reality while downplaying its other potentially salient characteristics amenable to alternative conceptualization. If capitalism in Protestant Scotland came into its own well after it won the day in places where Protestantism had yet to secure the dominant position, it would not be difficult to rationalize the discrepancy by invoking the modest claims that the ideal-type method places on theoretical constructions. Just as it would be pointless to counter-argue that Benjamin Franklin,



whom Weber saw as a paragon of otherworldly ascetism (“time is money”), was very much a man of the world who knew how to waste time creatively in pursuit of early pleasures. It is hard to lose with this methodological strategy, for competing theoretical reconstructions offer modest proofs of their purchase on reality.

Looking at post-Soviet realities through Weberian optics presents additional problems. Those who perceive Soviet society as “pre-, anti- or pseudo-modern” cast a skeptical eye on “the communist project of modernity” as it unfolded in Marxist Russia (Johann Arnason, p. 15). They are apt to search for the distinctive pathways to modernity in countries hobbled by the Communist legacy. According to Rimma Tangalycheva, modern managerial culture is yet to secure a foothold in contemporary Russia, where “individual means-ends actions have not gained sufficient popularity” (p. 156; see also papers by Larissa Volodina and Gregory Sandstrom).

While some researchers see no alternative to a Western-style modernization in Russia, other stress, with various degrees of urgency, that Russian Orthodox spirituality offers its own blueprint for developing a culturally sensitive marketplace. Vladimir Kuznetsov draws attention to Sergei Bulgakov, an early twentieth-century intellectual who relied on Weber’s *Protestant Ethics* to make the case for “strengthening the religious (orthodox) basis of labour ethics” (p. 67). Gregory Sandstrom makes a similar point when he observes that the “need to re-connect students in higher education with religious/ideological ideas is deemed urgent in order to help stabilize Russian civil society” (p. 183).

The thesis about Russia’s spirituality and its special road to modernity has deep roots in the nation’s intellectual history. It found an eloquent spokesman in Yuri Davydov, a recently deceased intellectual historian, who derived his inspiration from Weber’s work on ethico-religious moorings of cultural dynamics. Sophisticated and inspired, this line of research has its blind spots insofar as it draws attention away from the Russian body and its historical deformities (see the chapter on emotionally intelligent democracy in my *Pragmatism & Democracy*). Joachim Radkau’s magisterial study of Max Weber’s life and work (2009) offers a much-needed corrective here, as it illuminates the inextricable link between Weber’s theoretical commitments and his psychosomatic disorders. Scholars given to speculations about Russian spirituality and historical destiny should study this treatise, which will force them to reexamine the historical link between Russia’s disturbed affectivity and the institutional distortions that plagued this nation throughout its history.

The articles in this volume will interest all who take Weber seriously and seek to apply his work to the Russian economy, culture, and society. Organizers of the Helsinki conference should be commended for bringing together scholars hailing from different parts of Europe who offered their keen observations on the encounter between Weberian scholarship and Russian studies.

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Kahla, Elina, ed. *The Unlimited Gaze: Essays in Honour of Professor Natalia Baschmakoff*. Aleksanteri Series 2/2009. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2009. 365 pp. €20.00 (paper). ISBN 978-952-10-4102-0.

The seventeen Russian and English essays by junior and senior scholars, which comprise the volume under review here, pay tribute to the career of Professor Natalia Baschmakoff. They are grouped into three sections—“Rhythms of Culture”; “Approaches to Modernism”; and “National and Imperial Dimensions”—and represent a thematic and disciplinary range reflecting the equally broad scholarly interests of the honoree, who has written or edited volumes on such topics as Velimir Khlebnikov, Russian life in Finland, province studies, interart relations, and Russian modernism. Given the allotted space, I can only touch upon some of them.

The volume’s first essay by the late Richard Stites effectively serves as an introduction to the volume, as well as a succinct summation of the concerns he elaborated in his magisterial histories. He calls for a “[a] truly historical examination of culture” reliant upon an approach he terms “digging