When exploring the intellectual history of a discipline, one cannot help but wonder about the "real" person behind the scholarship. To what extent do personal life experiences influence a scholar’s theories, conceptualizations, and expectations? Max Weber, the German scholar whose intellectual curiosity was, at least partially, inspired by strong personal anxieties, became one of the most influential social scientists of the twentieth century. His own intellectual and personal obsessions, along with the efforts of his wife and colleagues to present his work to a larger audience, had much to do with who he was, as well as the body of scholarship that he created.


How much do we need to know about the agonies and ecstasies of the personal lives of influential scholars in order to fully understand their theories, methods, and concepts? It may not be sufficient to compile an intellectual biography that focuses on these only, but it could be illuminating to probe what prompted scholars’ intellectual journeys. What was the drive that kept scholars going? Was it only the grace of a childlike and insatiable curiosity, or were there other life experiences and relations that fueled and motivated them? Also, human beings cannot be but children of their time. Hence, to what extent is it necessary to understand the time in which the career and ideas of scholars unfolded? This question concerns the particular intellectual environment of scholars (i.e., the academy). But it is not enough to investigate and reconstruct their intellectual environment, as Rosenberg suggested (1979, 448). The social environment and life experiences should also be included. This is important because, as much as scholars like to claim some degree of detachment from their writing, none can claim to have risen beyond the time and context of which they are part. Also, the ability to understand scholars requires that we recognize in what way(s) their time and context are different from the one in which we live. Without attention to personal lives, and immediate intellectual and social environments, we cannot really contextualize scholarly contributions (Fry and Raadschelders 2008, 14, 344). It is the object of this essay to explore the link between one scholar’s work and life, using Joachim Radkau’s massive new biography of Max Weber as a stepping stone.

Perhaps it is not necessary that the intellectual and personal life of every scholar is reconstructed, as most will not have an influence beyond their time and their discipline. Also, one must afford some degree of privacy—that is, some life experiences are simply trivial, petty, or just plain personal, with little consequence for intellectual contribution and prowess. But then, how can we know whether or not personal life experiences influence a scholar’s theorizing unless we investigate it? Given the enormous influence that Max Weber has had in the social sciences, the luxury of privacy—apparently—cannot be afforded. Six years after his death on June 14, 1920, his wife Marianne published an intellectual biography that only hinted at some of the personal challenges that Weber faced throughout his life. Her reconstruction of Weber’s intellectual life still dominates, at least in the view of Hanke, who writes that “right up to the present day the Lebensbild is thought of as the standard biography of Max Weber” (2009, 356; see also Sharlin 1977, 110).1 Judging by the reaction to Radkau’s book, it seems that the revelations about Weber’s personal and sexual life in Mitzman’s study (1970, 276–77, 285, 291) and in Green’s book (1974, 55, 129–30, 166) had not really become widely known. Both Mitzman and Green met and interviewed Weber’s nephew, Eduard Baumgarten, who, as
early as 1963, showed hitherto unknown letters by Max Weber to the psychologist Karl Jaspers, a friend and admirer of Weber. Jaspers is said to have been shocked when he discovered how certain facts about Weber’s extramarital life had been covered up (Henrich 1987, 539). But, like Marianne Weber, Jaspers and Baumgarten both contributed to lionizing Weber by being quiet about anything that could tarnish Weber’s intellectual image.²

Radkau, a historian at the University of Bielefeld,³ focuses on Weber’s personal life, and was able to do so thanks to the fact that the personal correspondence of Max Weber and his wife (with, among others, Weber’s mother) has been briefly accessible to scholars.⁴ His study is mainly a biography of Weber’s personal life, and thus one in which the intellectual achievements play a secondary role. In this review of Radkau’s monumental biography, Weber’s intellectual contributions will be addressed briefly, followed by attention to the context in which that work came to fruition: his academic and social environment, and his personal life. Also, some earlier reviews of Radkau’s study will be briefly discussed, as there is disagreement about how far we should go in probing a scholar’s most private life. (Nota bene: in this review and in the endnotes, any references to Radkau’s study will only provide page numbers.)

Life, Career, and Contributions
Max Weber was born in Berlin in 1864 in a household frequented by liberal (i.e., left-leaning) politicians and professors. His father, Max Weber Sr., was a lawyer by training and served as a member of the Berlin city council and as a member of the imperial Reichstag and the Prussian parliament. At home, he was authoritarian and overbearing (Mitzman 1970, 32). Weber’s mother, Helene, came from a wealthy commercial family of French Huguenot descent, and spent much of her time doing voluntary work for the poor. Max Weber Jr. was the first of eight children (two of whom died at very young age). He studied law, economics, history, philosophy, and theology at the University of Heidelberg, where, in 1886, he did his bar exam. For several years, he worked as a junior lawyer (Referendar). He found this work quite tedious and sought refuge in intense study (Mitzman 1970, 48). As a consequence, in 1889, he defended his doctoral dissertation on medieval business organizations. Two years later, he defended his Habilitation on Roman agrarian history, with special attention to the methods of land surveys.

In the same year, 1891, he was asked—as a member of the Verein für Sozialpolitik (Social Policy Association)—to participate in a study of farm-labor relations in Germany. For that study, he developed a survey that was sent to 3,180 landowners, of whom 2,277 responded. A supplementary questionnaire was sent to another 562 landowners (291 responded) (Bendix 1960, 15; see the supplementary questionnaire in Baumgarten 1964, 376–84). He was among the first to advocate and use large-scale survey research in the social sciences (also advising his wife to use a survey for her research into the position of women in German society, 80), but he thoroughly disliked the “damned computation” (26) that it involved and felt that the “numbers stuff” should be left to women and assistants (83–84). In the course of 1893, he wrote a study on peasants and landlords east of the Elbe amounting to almost 900 pages. In the same year, he married his second cousin, Marianne Schnitker. He accepted a full professorship at the University of Freiburg in 1894. Two years later, he was called to the University of Heidelberg.

Weber’s interests ranged far and wide, including, among other things, farm-labor relations, agricultural law, the modern stock exchange, the comparative history of urban institutions, the political development of Western Europe, the history and sociology of Western music, comparative (Western and Eastern) religions, the social and psychological conditions of productivity in West German textile mills, and social science methodology. As the voracious reader that he was, he did not think he initiated new lines of research, and thus merely responded to and expanded on existing knowledge (99). It helped that he could read competently in at least seven, possibly eight, languages, to which he added Russian so that he could follow the events of the Russian Revolution in 1905 (Bendix 1960, 469). In fact, he read so much that he found it difficult to frame his thoughts in writing. In a letter to Else Jaffé, née Von Richthofen, on April 30, 1919,⁵ he wrote, “that you put on paper only a tiny fraction of everything that shapes up inside you . . . For, when I ‘receive’ ideas or contemplatively allow them to form inside me, everything flows—no matter whether it is a lot or a little, valuable or valueless—it flows in abundance—and then the struggle begins to capture it for the paper . . . and for me that is the true, almost unbearable ‘torture,’ which may well be noticeable in my style” (98). Weber was very much aware, and afraid, of the fact that Nietzsche’s “ebullient intellectual activity can be the final stage before a madness from which there was no return” (167).

Bendix argued that Weber never developed a key idea, as did, for instance, Karl Marx (on the organization of production), Sigmund Freud (on the role of the subconscious), or Emile Durkheim (on alienation in industrial society) (1960, 470), but he is clearly associated with the ideal types of authority, bureaucracy, social action, and rationality, as with his theory about the relation between Protestantism and capitalism. The complexity of his thoughts, though, is not helped by his writing style, of which the historian Friedrich Meinecke observed in 1922, “His disharmonious
style—which often massed ideas together with dazzling force but then overloaded them with justifications and digressions wriggling shapelessly out of the first abstract conception—betrayed the increased restlessness and energy of his time, but also a quite singular, titanic temperament” (101).

Weber's labored (yet precise and subtle) writing style, combined with the enormous amount of historical detail, may have contributed to the fact that Weber's ideas are stereotyped more often than not. Many scholars have not bothered to read Weber's extensive historical analyses and simply focus their discussions on, for instance, the inadequacy of the ideal type as a methodological instrument and as an interpretation of reality. Weber himself was very clear that an ideal type was not a goal to pursue but a means to analyses (261, 349; cf. “Nicht als Ziel, sondern als MITTEL . . . ,” Weber 1985, 193). Most attention has been focused on his ideal type of bureaucracy. A good example of how this ideal type has been stereotyped when disconnected from Weber's concrete historical analysis is Rudolph and Rudolph's (1979, 202) agreement with Geertz's comment that the ideal type is a model of and for reality (for a critique of how Weber's ideas are distorted, see Badie and Birnbaum 1983, 23; Mayntz 1965). Also, he never suggested, as is often charged, that bureaucracy was efficient as such, merely that it was more efficient in comparison to other types of rulership, “red tape” notwithstanding (Weber 2009, 343 n. 30).

So, how original was Weber? On the one hand, the concept of ideal type was first used by his Heidelberg colleague, constitutional law scholar Georg Jellinek (in his Allgemeine Staatslehre, 1900) (Weber 1975, 314), but Weber explored it and gave it wide currency. His concern about the possibility that bureaucracy would overpower democracy was influenced by his younger brother Alfred (a professor of economics, also in Heidelberg from 1907), who described bureaucracy as a cold and soulless machine to Franz Kafka, a friend of one of his students (323), but Weber analyzed this at length. His book about the relation between Protestantism and capitalism (1902) expanded on Jellinek's The Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizens (1895) (Honigsheim 1968, 11), and strongly opposed Werner Sombart's Der Moderne Kapitalismus (1902), which suggested that Protestantism followed capitalism rather than the other way around, as Weber argued (204; see also Hodgson 2001, 127).

On the other hand, his idea that a small number of leading groups always dominate political action was original (prompting his friend and colleague Robert Michels to formulate the “iron law of oligarchy”) (422), as was his idea that coastal culture and irrigated agriculture were vital in the development of bureaucracy (which influenced Karl Wittfogel’s hydraulic society theory) (95, 479). Also original are the three ideal types of authority (traditional, charismatic, legal); the four ideal types of social action (affectual action as driven by emotional state; traditional action as driven by custom; purposively rational action as driven by desire to achieve a goal; value-rational action as grounded in normative considerations); the four ideal types of rationality (formal rationality, substantive or value rationality, practical or means-ends rationality, theoretical or cognitive rationality); and the metaphor of capitalism as an “iron cage,” referring to the situation that “the world’s material goods have acquired an increasing and, in the end, an inescapable power over people” (Weber 2009, 158). In Weber’s view, the individual had no choice but to accept the constraints of modern society and to internalize the asceticism that had been a choice for seventeenth-century Puritans. That is, what was choice back then, was now, also, an “iron cage.”

Weber's use of ideal types as yardsticks for comparison to reality was motivated by his position in the lively discussions at the time about the character of the natural and the social sciences. While his brother Alfred was convinced that natural science methods were useful in the social sciences (Weber 1975, 330), Max Weber held that the researcher could not approach his topic in an unmediated manner, but that objectivity could be achieved by restraining personal opinion (Mouzelis 2008, 176, 189). Value judgments should be excluded from science (338), a view also held by Simons (1957, 47). Just as the natural scientist developed and worked with simplified models of reality, Weber believed that his ideal typical method could do the same for the social sciences (349). He felt that, unlike Simons, a mix of facts and interpretation (cf. Verstehen10) would serve the social sciences best (358), and he warned strongly (in 1913) against the “methodological pestilence” that had “struck” the social sciences. In a lecture in Munich during the 1919–20 academic year, he observed that “[m]ethod is the most sterile thing imaginable . . . Nothing has ever been created with method alone” (97). In his view, the analysis of statistical data could only be useful when meaningfully interpreted in a concrete context (Käsler 1988, 179). This emphasis on interpretation was no doubt established during his secondary school years in Berlin, when students were required to study history, philosophy, literature, various languages, and then assigned to write extensive interpretative essays about the material and their own ideas about it (Weber 2009, ix). Social science should focus on the individual as
the basic social unit and not on such abstract, diffuse, and organic concepts as society, tradition, progress, evolution, and so on (54; see also Weber 2009, 37). Yet Weber is not a methodological individualist, for he was convinced that the only way to understand human beings was to analyze the social structures in which they were embedded (112), while at the same time holding to the idea that individuals are never merely a function of the structures that surround them (396). However, he was not interested in the “visible” structures—and that makes him original—but rather in what sustains them: domination and authority, legitimacy, asceticism, and so on (422). His method of research can best be described as that of universal history, not in the sense of world history, but as an attempt at synthesizing what is known about an entire historical epoch or area or culture through multicausal, comparative, and configurational analyses (Weber 2009, xv, 205, 346). As a consequence, a final feature of his method is an interdisciplinarity that is grounded in broad-ranging pre-university education. Today, at least as far as the study of public administration is concerned, the vistas that Weber presented are missing.

The Academic and Social Environment

Weber was a scholar who, like his colleagues, picked up the big topics and questions prompted by the rapid changes in society and economy at the time (348). Heidelberg provided a lively academic environment in which professors would host gatherings at their homes for colleagues and students with the object of discussing recent research findings and ideas. In one sense, Weber fit in just fine, but in another sense, not very well. He shared with his colleagues a background in German classical education that gave him access to literature in a variety of languages. Indeed, the German professor was not bound to the knowledge published in one language only. Also, like his colleagues, he was curious without end. This could not have been clearer than during his visit to the United States in the summer of 1904. He asked Americans how they could tolerate the corruption generated by the spoils system. Twice he wrote about their response:

That doesn't matter, there's enough money to be stolen . . . We spit on these “professionals,” these officials. We despise them. But if the offices are filled by a trained, qualified class, such as you have in your country, it will be officials who will spit on us. (232; from Political Writings 1994, 277)

We rather have people as officials upon whom we can spit, than an official caste that spits upon us. (Weber 1980, 848)

When visiting the United States, Weber took every opportunity to advance his understanding of the country and its people. He visited New York, and unlike his German colleagues and co-travelers (sociologist Werner Sombart and theologian Ernst Troeltschke), he delighted in Manhattan’s busyness (Weber 1975, 281; Weber 2009, 164; for other German scholars on the same trip, see Scaff 1998, 69). With his wife, he visited Chicago and mentioned in a letter that he had visited Jane Addams’s settlement in a worker’s district (Scaff 1998, 74; Weber 1975, 287; Weber 2009, 165). The purpose of their visit was an international conference in St. Louis, attended by hundreds of scholars (among whom were John Dewey, Woodrow Wilson, and Frederick J. Turner; see Green 1974, 322). Working on a comparative study of religion, and having completed about one-half of his study on The Protestant Ethic, he declined an invitation to the White House so that he could visit “America’s wilderness” in Oklahoma in order to observe firsthand the so-called Mother Earth religions among Native American tribes.12 His interest in this had been fanned by religious historian Albrecht Dieterich, who had been appointed to Heidelberg in 1903 (230, 287) (Dieterich quoted Shawnee chief Tecumseh: “The earth is my mother; I want to rest in her bosom,” 287). He also visited a conference in Atlanta organized by W. E. B. Du Bois, who had attended some of Weber’s lectures in the 1890s (Weber 2009, 166 n. 12). Subsequently, Du Bois would publish an article (1906) in the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft, which Weber had coedited since 1903 with Werner Sombart and Edgar Jaffé (Hodgson 2001, 128). His visit to the United States helped him complete his Protestant Ethic because “he had been able to observe everywhere the living traces of the origins of the modern capitalistic spirit and this spirit itself in ‘ideal-typical’ purity” (Weber 1975, 326).

Travel was expected to soothe his restless mind. Like so many of his colleagues, Weber was quite neurotic, suffering from frequent depression. Because of this situation, his colleagues were accepting of his condition—that is, of his being in and out of sanatoria for most of the time between 1898 and 1903 (49).14 Yet his association with the university constantly reminded him of his inability to fulfill his academic duties (Bendix 1960, 51). Several times, he handed in his resignation, and this was finally accepted in 1903.

There was another side to Heidelberg (and German academe in general) in which Weber did not quite fit in. He thoroughly disliked the anti-Semitism that denied Georg Simmel a full professorship in Heidelberg (Ringer 2004, 56). He also hated that scholars who embraced social democracy would not get the
proliferation they deserved. This policy forced Robert Michels to leave Germany (in 1907) and to accept a position at the University of Turin, Italy (216–17, 431; Scaff 1981, 1271; Weber 1975, 358). When attending a conference on the freedom of teaching and learning in 1908, Weber wrote in a liberal newspaper that this freedom only existed “within the limits of political and confessional acceptability” (Ringer 2004, 55–56).

He was also sharply against racism, observing the hypocrisy of slave owners taking pleasure in sexual relations with female slaves (340). He agreed with Du Bois’s observation that race and immigration would become America’s big challenges in the twentieth century (Scaff 1998, 72). He also corresponded with Booker T. Washington (see Scaff 1998, 69). Finally, Weber was a feminist who focused on freeing women from male subjugation (Mitzman 1970, 279), who supported the creation of the Bund für Mutterschutz (League for the Protection of Motherhood) in 1905 (together with Sombart) in order to protect women’s rights (Schwentker 1987, 486), who supported his wife’s pursuit of a PhD (which she never received15), and who supported his wife’s involvement in the women’s movement. In fact, Marianne Weber reported her impressions of the American women’s movement in a public gathering in Heidelberg in January 1905 (Scaff 1998, 62). According to his wife, “Weber viewed women and even girls primarily as human beings and only secondarily as members of the opposite sex” (Weber 1975, 110). He helped edit her study Ehefrau und Mutter in der Rechtsentwicklung, which was published in 1907 (Weber 1975, 366). He was livid when a young lecturer wrote an article in a local paper arguing that the women’s movement consisted only of unmarried women, widows, Jews,esses, sterile women, and those who were not mothers or did not want to perform the duties of mothers.16

He and Marianne responded with a coauthored article (Weber 1975, 430). In 1919, she succeeded Gertrud Bäumer as chair of the League of German Women’s Associations (298, 514).17

Weber’s social environment was as complex as the university. He believed that German society lacked the spontaneity so characteristic of Americans and was wary of the “boorish-vegetative Gemütlichkeit” of the Germans (318). Many of his countrymen felt oppressed by the rapidly industrializing and urbanizing society, and it became quite normal that professional and personal problems and anxieties were medicalized (Hau 2003, 3). People of all classes complained of suffering from “neurasthenia,” a condition referring to a combination of fatigue, anxiety, headaches, impotence, and “nocturnal emissions” that was brought about by industrialization, urbanization, and increased competitiveness.18 Some contemporary scholars believe that there was indeed such a thing as “male hysteria” because of industrialization and, later, the atrocities of World War I (Lerner 2000, 14), during which Weber served for about a year as director of a military hospital. Radkau’s (1998) study of records of neurasthenic patients, though, shows little evidence that new technology and industry damaged people’s mental balance (Oosterhuis 2006, 362). As for Weber, it seems that he was exhilarated rather than tormented by the changes in his social and economic environment (cf. his “reception” of New York), but he had serious problems in dealing with his personal anxieties.

Whether or not Germans felt that the social-economic changes influenced their mental balance is not really important, as it is clear that during Weber’s life, the “life and health reform movement” emerged as a response to the perceived stresses of the industrial age that had created factory-produced food and city pollution (377). This movement sought to reconnect people with their natural selves. In journals and conferences, a healthy lifestyle was recommended that included shorter workdays, air baths (preferably in the nude—sunbathing appears to date back to that time), and vacation, all providing refuge from the alienating world of office and factory (Hau 2003, 17, 175, 191). Weber started to take nude sunbaths regularly from 1906 on, between noon and 1:00 p.m., while smoking his pipe. His frequent visits to Italy (beginning in 1900) served to renew that sense of nature (377; Weber 1975, 360). In fact, many Germans selected Italy as their destination of choice, going on nude hiking trips, believing that the southern climate would stimulate their repressed sexuality (213).

Weber lived with one foot in the past and one in the present. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a period when the Victorian repression of any public display of sexuality was replaced by a fascination with it. Physical love was slowly redefined: “Victorian eroticism involved social relationships, sexuality involves personal identity. Eroticism meant that sexual expression transpired through actions—of choice, repression, interaction. Sexuality is not an action but a state of being, in which the physical act of love follows almost as a passive consequence, a natural result, of people feeling intimate with each other” (Sennett 1978, 7). This change introduced a narcissistic element into sexuality, where one no longer thought about the...
consequences of extramarital affairs for spouse and children. Instead, the focus was on the personal need for, and perhaps obsession with, “fulfillment” (Sen- nett 178, 334–35). As Weber cynically (?) wrote in the Zwischenbetrachtung, which is part of his sociology of religion, “Pretending to be the most humane devotion, [sexual activity] is a sophisticated enjoyment of oneself in the other” (Gerth and Mills 1946, 348).

From Intellectual and Sexual Anxiety to Ecstasy
As did many of his countrymen, Weber suffered from two types of anxiety that appeared to reinforce one another. Professionally, he held himself to a rigorous routine from the mid-1880s on and, not surprisingly, became a workaholic, haunted by overflowing intellectual thoughts. In the 1890s, he started to suffer from insomnia, an affliction he initially sought to overcome through the use of alcohol, and later through various soporifics, cocaine, opium, heroin, and other drugs, including bromide (154, 527). The intake of drugs enhanced his sexual anxieties—that is, his involuntary wet dreams (back then referred to as “pollutions”) and his general aversion to sexuality. As for the first, Rad- kau informs us that the combination of sleeplessness and wet dreams was not uncommon, for Goethe, St. Augustine, Kaiser Wilhelm, and William James—Weber met James during his American trip—suffered from this as well (146, 158, 174, 183, 333). Weber’s general aversion to sexuality was influenced by experiences in his youth and his time.

With regard to his own experiences, Karl Jaspers recalls how Weber told him that his first sexual arousal occurred when he was beaten as a child (171, 525). Marianne reports how Weber’s mother was sexually assaulted at age 16 by a family friend: “From that moment on she regarded sexual passion as guilt-laden and subhuman,” and planted a strong dislike of sexual activity in her son (1975, 21, 91; see also Mitzman 1970, 19). She was also a devout woman, very taken with the American Unitarians and transcendental-ists William Ellery Channing and Theodore Parker (15–17; see also Green 1974, 108; Mitzman 1970, 29). This, too, she impressed on her son, and it nurtured his idea that moral and intellectual freedom came from rational control of instinctual, hedonistic behavior. As a young adult, Weber regarded marriage as an animal institution that nauseated him (43). He and his wife agreed to an asexual concept of mar- riage (47), befitting a Victorian attitude to eroticism. According to Mitzman, their marriage was never consummated (1970, 276). More than a decade later, he changed his position and came to believe that repressing his sexual nature was the main cause of his illness (266).

Marianne was ambiguous toward sex. On the one hand, she referred to herself in letters, for example, in 1902, as a “starving horse” (163), and in 1912, she observed “earthly desires” within herself (47). But she also expressed an appreciation for how the Puritans had removed sexuality, as seems evident in the follow- ing remark in her 1907 study: “it was precisely to this disciplining of the male instinctual life that the British and Americans ultimately owe the refinement of spiritual relations between the sexes. . . . Only with the fading importance of purely sexual tension . . . could the inwardness of the sociable and spiri- tual community between the spouses—the growing together of their souls—appear as the central meaning of marriage” (183–84).

The Webers may have appreciated the asceticism of the British and the Americans, but at the same time, they were reported to support premarital sex so that boys did not have to go to the brothel and “female blossoms will not have to wither unfruit- fully. Marriage with all its obligations is the proper end of the free period of development” (Weber 1975, 373). The British, in turn, regarded the “free love” in Wilhelmine Germany as an Eldorado. This is perhaps best expressed in Lady Chatterley’s Lover, the central character of which is said to have been D. H. Lawrence’s wife, Frieda von Richthofen, a sister of Else (311, 318).20 The latter not only attended Max Weber’s lectures in the late 1890s (and became a very close friend of Marianne, who may even have fallen in love with her, 307), but was also his doctoral student (one of the first in Germany, she defended in 1900, 308), and became his lover briefly in 1909 and again in 1919 (while also having a relationship with Max Weber’s brother Alfred that lasted until the latter’s death in 1958). As Else’s relationship with Alfred became more serious, she distanced herself from Max, who—in 1912—found refuge in the arms of pianist Mina Tobler,21 a relationship that lasted until April 1919, when Max renewed his sexual engagement with Else. Marianne was aware of Weber’s extramarital escapades, but she seemed in her 1935 Die Frauen und die Liebe to have come to terms with her sexual frustration in exchange for having been “touched by the rays of a genius.”22

The affairs with Else and Mina invigorated Max Weber and gave him confidence in his sexual capabili- ties. He was perhaps happiest in the last years of his life. There were still some fears, though. In his letters to Else, he expressed concern about the “masks” he had worn throughout his life, writing that “my mortal fear is . . . always: She must think that, if he has them against others, why not also against me?” (528; see also 482). With her, he could finally take off his “masks” and overcome his own “iron cage” of sexual repression. Else was his “earth-goddess” (522). He did feel guilty toward his wife, but rationalized his escapades by writing that she was not worthy of him and that extramarital sex was allowed to relieve
him from anxiety (266, 525). One can only speculate what might have happened had Weber lived. Marianne made clear that she would not leave his side of her own accord (see letter by Marianne to Max Weber, April 30, 1920, in Baumgarten 1964, 634–35; Green 1974, 165). But, on his deathbed, “In moments of delirium he would call for Else, and if the nurse brought Marianne instead, he would send her away angrily” (Green 1974, 165). He died with Marianne and Else at his bedside (528).

**Popularity in the United States**

Of all his massive writings, most references to Weber in the American public administration literature are limited to his ideal type of bureaucracy and his ideal types of authority, while in the social sciences in general, *The Protestant Ethic* has attracted much attention. What explains Weber’s popularity in the United States?

First, American scholars and students came to Germany and learned about Weber. One example is Talcott Parsons, who moved to Heidelberg in 1925 and defended his doctoral thesis in economics there two years later (Hodgson 2001, 183; he received his degree in 1929, courtesy of Lawrence Scaff). In his thesis, he compared the capitalistic theories of Sombart and Weber, concluding that the latter was, in Hodgson’s words, “less abrasive for orthodox economists, thus making Parsons’ academic life easier. Weber’s social theory, with its individualistic elements, did not threaten orthodox economics as much as that of Sombart” (Hodgson 2001, 185) and so, in Parsons’s view, Weber was closest to an American-style liberal.

At the same time, Parsons downplayed Weber’s sensitivity to historical specificity (i.e., had little patience for Weber’s extensive historical illustrations) and underlined Weber’s idea that universal concepts are indispensable to any theoretical system (Hodgson 2001, 194). Contrary to common belief, Talcott Parsons was not the first American to translate part of Weber’s work into English (he translated *The Protestant Ethic* in 1930). That honor must go to Frank Knight, the Cornell and Chicago economist who translated Weber’s *General Economic History* (1927); Hodgson 2001, 157), who also commissioned the translation of several parts of *Economy and Society* for use in his classes (Scaff 2004, 129). And who would be a large influence on the thought of Charles Lindblom (Fry and Raadschelders 2008, 360). Knight, like Parsons, read German. They corresponded with each other and with German scholars in the United States as well as with Karl Jaspers and Alfred Weber (Scaff 2004, 123). These initial translations did not quite boost Weber to the stratospheric levels of appreciation that he came to occupy after World War II. That must be attributed to the introduction of Weber’s thought by two generations of German scholars (e.g., Reinhard Bendix, Paul Honigsheim, Wolfgang Mommsen, Fritz Morstein Marx) who had emigrated to the United States (especially at the New School for Social Research).

Weber’s popularity since then is the combined effect of the translations of parts of his *Economy and Society* by Gerth and Mills (1946) and Henderson and Parsons (1947), a complete translation of it by Roth and Wittich (1968), the translation of the biography by his wife Marianne (1975), and the intellectual portrait by Bendix (1960). It can also be attributed to his substantive appreciation of the United States. For instance, he wanted the German president to be elected not by the legislature but by the people, as in America (Ringer 2004, 74). His critique of bureaucracy (including that of Prussia) resonated with Americans, and he became known for having anticipated “Parkinson’s law” (325) and—by extension—the theories of Downs (1967) and Niskanen (1971) on sources of bureaucratic growth. He also deplored the welfare state and anything resembling a socialist planned economy, as it represented nothing but the paternal supervision of the father over the children (321, 508). Weber was very appreciative of American associational life, which he regarded as vital to any democracy (Scaff 1998, 64).

Radkau writes that Weber’s theories on the impact of asceticism on the capitalist spirit corroborated America’s self-image as a nation whose “prosperity was based on old and established virtues and not, for example, on robbery of the native Indians, slavery and plunder of natural resources” (194). In *The Protestant Ethic*, Benjamin Franklin is frequently mentioned as an example of someone who embraced the spirit of capitalism (i.e., self-reliance, material success, upward mobility, frugality, and asceticism), but who represented a new stage in the development of capitalism in which the “other-worldly” orientation of Puritan ascetics had given way to one that focused on utilitarian, “this-world” activity (Weber 2009, 71–73). And Franklin is just the beginning, for as Benjamin Nelson observes, “He who would write the history of the ‘Protestant Ethic’ in the United States would be obliged to devote many sections to such notable figures as John D. Rockefeller, Sr., Henry Ford, Frederick Taylor” (1973, 107–8). To this list we can add public servants (Stillman 1998).

Weber also expected an Americanization of academic life in which detailed probing by specialists would substitute broad-ranging analyses (487–88; see also his remark to that effect in “Science as a Vocation,” in Gerth and Mills 1946, 131). Ideal to him was the mix of the “material specialist” who has the attention for empirical and factual detail and the intellectual “gourmandise” of the “interpretative specialist” who paints a wide panorama of a particular area, time, and/or people that is synthesized from many different scholarly and experiential sources (258).
Concluding Remarks: Masked Alive and Posthumously

We can now return to the question raised at the beginning of this essay: how much do we need to know about a scholar’s personal life in order to understand his theories, methods, and concepts? Opinions vary. In his review of Radkau’s 2005 German edition, Robert Leicht, former editor in chief of Die Zeit, questions “whether this monumental, overwhelming, in end effect tiring study not only extends but also deepens our knowledge of Max Weber. To put it bluntly: we may learn more about Max Weber’s person, but only a limited amount about his work and influence.” Should “we really have our noses dragged through [the] evidence” of Weber’s neurasthenia? Leicht scathingly concludes that Radkau’s “revelations are not aimed at satisfying our thirst for knowledge, but our idle curiosity” (2005, 2, 4).

Another lengthy review of the German edition was written by political scientist Peter Thomas, who called it “eccentric,” deplored the lack of a subject index (which is available in the English translation), and the “chronological switchbacks” (often fast-forwarding several decades and then going back to an earlier time) and, most importantly, the fact that Radkau missed the link between Weber’s life and work—his sense that science was a form of politics conducted by other means (2006, 3, 6).

A third reviewer of the German edition, historian Keith Tribe, also observes that Radkau does not really provide new insights into how Weber’s “life” influenced his “work” (2006, 894). In her review of the English translation, sociologist Leslie Gofton laments that it is considerably shorter than the German original, but that it gave her a more substantial impression of Weber as “a much more complex and fragile figure, more human and fallible” (2009, 1).

It seems to this reviewer that knowledge of Weber’s life helps one understand some of the extra-academic sources of his theories, especially the influence of his mother on his ideas about the influence of Protestant asceticism. Radkau’s book does not elucidate these theories, but that was not his intention, and he cannot be faulted for that. However, he could have provided a more systematic analysis of the intellectual and social environment in which Weber grew up and lived. Evidence of this can be gathered throughout the book, but it would have been more informative if the author would have organized his material thematically and then explored more systematically the link between Weber’s personal life experiences and his theories. In this volume, though, every chapter has tidbits—or more—on Weber’s anxieties, his theories, his environment, and his travels, but it is left to the reader to make sense of these. Quite frankly, understanding Weber’s work intellectually is better served by the thoughtful type of analysis that Mitzman (1970) and Kalberg (1996; see also Kalberg’s introduction to Weber 2009) provide.

While the book provides for fascinating reading, the almost constant psychologizing of Weber’s personal feelings and experiences becomes a bit much. Radkau is an eminent historian who is very familiar with the Zeitgeist of the turn of the twentieth century, but he has no training in psychology and/or psychiatry, and thus really lacks the theoretical framework to carefully interpret the correspondence between the three main actors—Max, Marianne, and Helene. As a consequence, there are many sweeping statements, unsubstantiated observations, unanswered questions, and suggestive remarks. Then again, perhaps we should not leave an analysis of the Weber correspondence only to psychologists and psychiatrists.

Radkau’s study does provide an excellent impression of the issues that several German scholars dared to explore. They truly tackled the “big questions” of their time about, for example, the impact of secularization, industrialization, and bureaucratization on society, economy, democracy, family life, and the human psyche. This is important to remember, because early American scholars of public administration were greatly influenced by the substance and breadth of this scholarship. How significant that influence was remains to be seen, but it has been the subject of some attention with regard to nineteenth-century German scholarship (Miewald 1984). Wouldn’t it be fascinating to explore the intellectual linkages between Max Weber, Frank Knight, and Charles Lindblom? Also, German scholars without hesitation tapped into scholarship published in languages other than their own, and their American colleagues profited from this, as some were conversant in German (e.g., Parsons, Knight). Today, American public administration seems very much turned into itself, and into the type of specialist exploration that Weber saw emerge in Germany and that he predicted would dominate the social sciences in the future (Ringer 2004, 17). This prompted one Weberian scholar to observe that European theoretical and historical knowledge is necessary to temper the “four dangers to social science in the United States: optimism about changing the world for the better, empiricism for its own sake, the scholar reduced to a functionary for mere data collection, and the intellectual’s independent and critical function jeopardized by political and corporate largesse and the high cost of large-scale research” (Scaff 2004, 129). Public administration scholarship in general, and perhaps even more so in the United States, would benefit from the grand vistas and interdisciplinarity that seemed so standard for scholars like Weber in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. How sad would be the day when the “certainty” of statistics and methods is substituted.
for the uncomfortable passions that may be awakened by probing thoughts and feelings about the challenges of one’s own time.

Overall, the book is a good read because of the enormous amount of detail and little tidbits of unknown facts. But in the end, it left this reviewer with a sense of sadness. First, about the extent to which Weber for many years felt the need to mask his private thoughts and feelings (his own iron cage of asceticism), to the point that he even feared—once having opened up—he would still be seen as holding back. Outwardly, he appeared a strong man, a powerful debater, and a towering intellect. Inwardly, he was a late son of the Romantic era, full of inner turmoil, and unable (or unwilling?) to open up emotionally to people outside the family (Green 1974, 114, 145).

Second, about the extent to which his wife masked (a) the wild intellectual and sexual anxieties that tormented her husband, and (b) the two extramarital affairs that seemed to have given her husband the sexual fulfillment that marriage had not. Third, about the extent to which Marianne felt it necessary to downplay her extensive exploration of the American women’s movement and her own intellectual achievements in order to promote Weber’s intellectual legacy. In her memoirs, she wrote, “Other women have their children as their dearest legacy; for me there awaits an intellectual legacy which will demand my dedication for years” (quoted in Hanke 2009, 351). One can only guess at the emotion that prompted this remark, but not about the reverence she felt for Weber’s work: “Max Weber’s desk is now my altar” (Green 1974, 216; Hanke 2009, 350). Fourth, about the row in June 1897 with his father, who, Weber thought, was too sexually demanding of his mother, only recognizing years later “that he had scorned and condemned the natural side of his father, and done violence to his own nature” (66). By then, it was too late to make amends, as his father died less than two months after the row.

Fifth, and more in general, about how people back then felt they had lost their bearings in a rapidly changing social and economic environment. Have the technological changes of the past 40 years been absorbed easier? We have our own life and health movement, people “working out,” buying food at health stores, and so on. Also, as in Weber’s time, we struggle with sexuality, especially the youth who grow up with contradictory messages. For instance, how can abstinence education and the notion of purity be squared with the sexually charged sit-coms that target teenagers, and in which partners constantly change, with suggestive prints on clothes (e.g., “cutie,” “porn star,” “yummie,” “juicy”), and with “fashions” (if one can call it that) that are revealing (showing underwear, low décolletage). What is perhaps different from Weber’s time is that people may be more detached from their communities and engage less and less in the intensive and passionate type of intellectual exchanges that were so normal in Weber’s time. He and many of his colleagues invited, often every week, colleagues and students to their homes to discuss trends and challenges in their fields of study, in the university, and in society, and what they could do to confront and resolve these. Also, these were interdisciplinary gatherings, with theologians, sociologists, public administration scholars, historians, psychologists, and so on. What a rich and lively intellectual environment! And what a great opportunity for students and young scholars to interact with the Webers, the Sombarts, the Jellineks, the Rickerts, and the Simmels of their day.

Perhaps Weber inadvertently contributed to being stereotyped rather than explored in depth. The masks he wore and that his wife, Jaspers, and Baumgarten helped to keep in place gave “us” a Weber that was larger than life. If anything, Radkau’s biography forcefully brings Weber back to human proportions. Indeed, Radkau’s biography does what Henrich hoped for: “As soon as a biography of Max Weber that is free of childish curiosity or embarrassment details those circumstances in full, then it will become apparent that on the part of all those who were directly involved, and not least on the part of Marianne Weber, who was not completely ignorant of what was going on, there will be a far greater degree of delicacy and magnanimity than Jaspers can ever have appreciated” (1987, 540).

Also, Radkau’s work should encourage scholars to go beyond the stereotypical—and often obligatory—presentation of Weber’s concepts and theories, and explore how Weber’s work and thoughts disseminated through the social sciences in the twentieth century. Efforts to this effect have started in sociology (e.g., Kalberg 1996; see also Kalberg’s introduction to Weber 2009), and it is time that American public administration scholars pursue more systematically Weber’s contextual and historical analyses and consider how this could serve as an example of the ways in which today’s features of and challenges in government can be studied.33

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Notes

1. In footnote 88 of her article, Hanke mentions Bendix (1960) as the pure biography of Weber's work and Radkau's study as a "physical" biography. Hanke's assessment of the importance of Marianne's biography and her characterization of Radkau's book may be influenced by the fact that she is affiliated with the editorial office in Munich that is responsible for the official publication of the complete works (Gesamtausgabe) of Max Weber (see note 4), which would include the letters suppressed by Baumgarten. In Hanke's view, Marianne's biography is the only one that tries to connect Weber's intellectual and personal life. Curiously, she does not reference Mitzman's (1970) excellent attempt at doing so.


3. The Old Town Church of Bielefeld had a portrait on the font of Weber as the apostle Luke that was sculpted by the son of Heinrich Rickert, a philosopher and colleague of Max Weber's in Heidelberg who influenced Weber's ideas about the nature of the natural versus the social sciences. The font was destroyed during an air raid in 1944 (255; see also Weber 2009, 611).

4. The private correspondence between Max Weber and his mother and between Marianne Weber and her mother-in-law had been held in the state archives of the German Democratic Republic. After 1989, this correspondence was accessible to scholars for a few months, but it has since been blocked by the editors (see note 1) of the ongoing Gesamtausgabe of Weber's work and correspondence (see Tribe 2006, 893).

5. In 1902, Else married Weber's colleague, economist Edgar Jaffé, and would have two children with him.

6. In the same article, Mayntz also criticizes Blau and Scott (1962) for suggesting that Weber had no eye for the informal aspects of organizations; Parsons (1947) for suggesting that various elements of the ideal type do not correlate empirically; Stinchcombe (1959) for his suggestion that general rational and specific bureaucratic characteristics should be separated; and Simon (1947) for suggesting that organizational objectives and implementation could be analyzed and understood separately from the political context.

7. For a strong critique of this theory, see O'Leary (1989, chap. 6).

8. For a solid discussion of the ideal types of authority and social action and how they are related, see Kalberg (1980, 1145–79, esp. the table at 1161). Value-rational action is motivated by substantive rationality; purposive rational action is driven by formal or practical rationality. Traditional and affectual action are considered nonrational.


10. In Radkau, Verstehen is translated by Patrick Camiller as "empathetic understanding" (109), but empathetic understanding is closer to Wilhelm Dilthey's Einfühlen, which refers to intuitive comprehension of inner feeling. Instead, Verstehen is an act of rational interpretation (see Fry and Raadschelders 2008, 25).

11. In an e-mail on November 5, 2009, Lawrence Scaff wrote this author that neither Dewey nor the other pragmatists attended the St. Louis conference. He also mentioned that Weber met Du Bois in St. Louis but did not attend the latter's conference in Atlanta.

12. Not accompanied by his wife, with whom he would reconnect in Memphis, from which both proceeded to New Orleans, Weber visited, among other places, Tulsa, Guthrie, and Oklahoma City; at some point, he stayed with a half-breed Indian (225, 231). See also Scaff (2005, 59), who mentions that Weber met several times with Robert L. Owen, a member of the Cherokee Tribe and a former Indian agent who was destined to become one of the first U.S. senators from Oklahoma. Scaff does not mention Weber's interest in Mother Earth religions, but discusses Weber's curiosity about tribal issues, immigration problems, the Jacksonian era removal and resettlement policies, land speculation, and the rapid change from "wilderness" (Wildheit) to civilization.

13. In the 1920s, Joseph Schumpeter would join as coeditor. He, too, was influenced by Weber. Compare Weber's "Die Bürokratisierung gehört die Zukunft . . ." (Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft 1980, 834) to Schumpeter's "Its [bureaucracy's] expansion is the one thing certain about the future . . ." (1950, 294).

14. His mother was less accepting, for she believed that a grown man who had not sinned should be able to overcome psychological problems. She thought that Weber merely lacked the will to fulfill his professional responsibilities (see Mitzman 1970, 155).

15. Scaff (1998, 73) indicates that Marianne received her PhD for a dissertation on Fichte's moral and social philosophy. However, this author learned from Margaret Reid at the University of Arkansas that Max Weber wanted her to turn her study of Fichte's and Marx's socialism into a doctoral dissertation. Upon inquiry, Professor Scaff kindly informed this author (by e-mail on November 3, 2009) that Professor Reid was correct, but that Marianne was allowed to audit classes in Freiburg because of her status as "Frau Professor." Her work on Fichte (Weber 1900), though, was her first book, and—according to correspondence between Max and Marianne—it was written under the direction of Weber's colleague, Heinrich Rickert (see note 3 herein) (on this book, see James 2009, n. 3). In 1922, she was the first woman at the University of Heidelberg to receive an honorary doctorate in law. This was confirmed by Professor Werner Moritz, director of the archives of the University of Heidelberg, in an e-mail to this author on November 5, 2009. She received this degree on January 18 for her own work as well as in recognition of her work to get Max Weber's books and letters published, as is testified in the following consideration of the University of Heidelberg: "ausgezeichnet durch . . . umfassende Studien, vor allem durch das breit angelegte Werk Ehefrau und Mutter in der Rechtentwicklung; ausgezeichnet ferner durch eine Reihe kleinerer, wertvoller einzelarbeiten auf historischen wie dogmatischem Gebiete; nicht zum wenigsten
16. This is also mentioned in Meurer (2004, 1).

17. Nota bene: on p. 570, Radkau mentions her as the first chairwoman.

18. The term “neurasthenia” was coined by the American neurologist George Miller Beard in 1861.

19. The Zwischenbetrachtung (i.e., intermediate reflection) was written in 1911 and rewritten in 1916 and again in 1920. It is during these years that Weber discovered sexuality as a joyous activity, and this is reflected in the more extensive and more sympathetic discussion of sexuality and aesthetics in the rewrites of this text (see Green 1974, 171).

20. Frieda and Else both had brief sexual relationships with Otto Gross, a Freudian psychoanalyst, who was the main advocate of free love and group sex and who established a community in Monte Verità, Ascona, Italy. Out of the relationship with Else, a son was born. Frieda married Gross, but would leave him for D. H. Lawrence in 1913 (310–311; see also Green 1974, 366; Strong 1987, 470).

21. It is the relationship with Mina Töbler that raised Weber’s interest in the sociology of music (360–70; see also Baumgarten 1964, 482; Käsler 1988, 16). Professor Scaff informed this author that Weber’s interest in music actually may have led him to Töbler (see Braun 1992).

22. She writes this when describing the fate of Richard Wagner’s first wife, Minna Planer, who had to tolerate her husband living with Cosima, the illegitimate daughter of Franz Liszt.

23. This is a collection of notes for a lecture series on economic history that Weber delivered at the University of Munich, 1918–19; see Knight’s translator’s preface in Weber (1927, xv–xvi).

24. These translations are only available in mimeographed form in the Frank H. Knight Papers at the University of Chicago.

25. On a side note, Weber’s academic reputation may have grown since World War II, but he was known among American representatives at the peace negotiations in Paris in 1919. In fact, they asked him early in that year to counter admissions of guilt made by, among others, Bavarian prime minister Kurt Eisner, for contributing to the war. The Americans hoped thus “not to give ammunition to those on the Allied side who were advocating stiff peace terms” (502). Germany’s Foreign Office, though, was not particularly interested in Weber’s views (503–4).

26. See also Weber’s remark to that effect in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (1980, 652).

27. In his introduction to the English translation, Radkau informs the reader that accounts of Weber’s ancestry, the reception history of his work, sections on the stock exchange, his disagreements with Karl Marx’s theories, and his relations with colleagues Rickert, Simmel, and others were excised. He also mentions that the recently deceased Lord Ralf Dahrendorf advised him that the German subtitle (“Die Leidenschaft des Denkens, or “The Passion of Thinking”) would sound alien to English ears and ought to be removed (xvii). The text, though, contains plenty of evidence of how passionate Weber was about scholarship.

28. In an e-mail of July 9, 2009, Professor Lindblom told this author that Professor Knight had chaired his dissertation committee. He also wrote that Knight rarely mentioned any relation to Weber’s thought when lecturing about rational social organization and when commenting about irrationality and religion. It would be very interesting to delve into the Frank H. Knight Papers at the University of Chicago and into the Talcott Parsons Papers at the Harvard University Archives to get a sense of how Knight was influenced by Weber.

29. The Romantic era in German music, literature, and visual arts (1750s–1850s) is regarded as a reaction to the Enlightenment’s scientific rationalization of nature. It started with the Storm und Drang (i.e., storm and urge) decades (1760s–1780s), when artists and scholars emphasized individual subjectivity and free expression of emotions, believing that the Enlightenment had tried to kill anything that was living in human beings. Isaiah Berlin called this period the third great turning point in Western political thought (next to the century following Aristotle’s death and the Renaissance) (see Berlin 1996, 169; 1999, 40, 43). A major consequence of the Romantic era was that more attention was given to the influence and power of values, motives, and inner states of mind (see Berlin 1996, 185). Clearly, Weber made extensive efforts to probe these values, motives, and inner states of mind, as is captured in his concept of Verstehen and in the various ideal types he developed.

30. Marianne frequently wrote to her mother-in-law about these sexual problems, and—at one point—even asked her, with Weber’s knowledge, whether castration might be a solution (165).

31. It seems that she knew of the relationship with Mina Töbler (360–61), but was not quite sure of the nature of Weber’s knowledge, whether castration might be a solution (165).

32. By way of example, consider the last paragraph in Marianne Weber’s biography: “On Monday, June 14, the world outside became quite still; only a thrush sang incessantly its song of yearning. Time stopped. Toward evening Weber breathed his last. As he lay dying, there was a thunderstorm and lightning flashed over his paling head. He became the picture of a departed knight. His face bespoke gentleness and exalted renunciation. He had moved to some distant, inaccessible place. The earth had changed” (1975, 698).

33. One example that comes to mind is Rosenbloom’s (1971) historical and contextual analysis of the development of the public employment relationship from 1776 to the 1960s.

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