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Georg Simmel's political thought: Socialism and Nietzschean aristocratism

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Abstract

Georg Simmel's political position has rarely been discussed explicitly – perhaps because many scholars have assumed that Simmel was 'apolitical' before 1914. The present article shows that even before 1914 Simmel held a distinct political position, to wit a peculiar kind of liberal-Nietzschean aristocratic individualism. This individualism is the result of a passage through 'the hard school' of egalitarian socialism in order to reach true individuality. It is closely related to Simmel's central theorem of the so-called 'individual law'. After a socio-historical contextualisation of Simmel's political thought, the article follows this motif in detail through his diagnosis of the times, his theory of socio-cultural development, his engagement in cultural politics, his ideal of personality formation and his engagement in the bourgeois women's movement. Simmel's thought culminates in a conception of 'dialectic aristocratism'. In this respect, the normative core of Simmel's political standpoint is very close to Max Weber's position. The last section argues that Simmel's war writings do not mark a break in his political thinking, but rather apply the same theorem of the 'individual law' to the German state. Through its various stages, the article shows that Simmel's political orientation, linked to key theoretical concepts, is deeply rooted in the educated bourgeoisie's worldview and habitus.

Keywords

Dialectic aristocratism, socialism, educated bourgeoisie, Friedrich Nietzsche, Georg Simmel, individual law

> The probity of a scholar today, and above all of a philosopher today, can be measured by how he stands towards Nietzsche and Marx. Whoever does not admit that he could not conduct the most weighty part of his own work without the work these two have done, swindles himself and others. The world in which we ourselves exist spiritually is a world largely moulded by Marx and Nietzsche (Weber 1920, quoted in Baumgarten, 1964: 554f.).

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Undeniably, Georg Simmel was *the* early German sociologist who had a particularly keen sense for the massive and complex social transformations and antagonistic tensions in the German Reich (Frisby, 1986; Simmel, 1900/1989). Central features of these processes of social upheaval and modernisation were high industrialisation, ‘complete mechanisation’, the formation of large corporations and the associated ‘change in the form of industrial production’ (Osterhammel, 2009: 925), the rapid rise of the German Reich to become the second most powerful industrial nation in the world, the expansion of the money economy, an enormous military build-up, and an imperialist foreign policy (Mommsen, 1995; Ullrich, 2014; Wehler, 1977, 1995). Society was characterised by population growth, urbanisation, rural migration, increasing division of labour and social differentiation. Rapid urbanisation was accompanied by massive housing and poverty problems. The labour movement grew stronger, and the women’s movement also developed (Ullrich, 2014: 297ff., 335ff.). Processes of alienation from the church and tendencies towards secularisation called into question the once binding power of religious ideas, even though especially in the ‘dominant cultural milieu’ (Mommsen, 1990: 259) of the liberal, ‘culturally Protestant’ educated middle class (*kulturprotestantisches Bildungsbürgertum*) ‘the claim of religious “deepening” of modern culture’ (Graf, 1984: 227) was widespread and expressed itself politically in different ways (Hübinger, 1994).

Despite moments of unity brought about by the Franco-Prussian War (1870/71) and the long-awaited national unification (Wehler, 1977: 105ff.), there were numerous tensions between social groups, for example between workers and the capitalist bourgeoisie, between urban and rural populations or between Protestants and Catholics and ‘organised political anti-Semitism’ developed (Wehler, 1977: 110). Since 1849, Prussia had three-class suffrage, which massively disadvantaged the propertyless classes. In 1878, Bismarck enacted the ‘Socialist Laws’, which were valid until 1890, and at the same time introduced social insurance to soothe the explosive force of social antagonisms.

New scientific discoveries in chemistry and electrical engineering, inventions and technologies such as electricity, the expansion of railway networks, the automobile or the Zeppelin reinforced the impression of an accelerated, rapidly changing era and aroused optimism about progress among many contemporaries. Parts of the youth, on the other hand, organised in the (politically differentiated, radical left to German-nationalist) youth movement (Harms, 2021), did not share this optimism; they were also anti-urban and anti-individualist in their attitude. Urbanisation pushed ‘mass culture’, which spread through cinema, magazines, dime novels and the gramophone. The accompanying commercialisation, as an important part of ‘objective culture’ (Simmel), led not only to a growth of the advertising industry, but also to a focus on entertainment through cultural production. With the growing white-collar class, a new audience for this ‘mass culture’ emerged. However, large sections of the educated middle class, which was losing political power, did not follow the salvation songs of progress, but instead fell into a ‘cultural pessimism’ (Tyrell, 1992). They saw themselves further confirmed by the ‘mass culture’, which they dismissed as shallow. At the same time, they used ‘mass culture’ as a line of demarcation, a foil against which to elevate their educational knowledge and themselves as a cultural elite, as ‘mandarins’ (Ringer, 1969), vis-à-vis the masses, but also vis-à-vis the ‘merely’ economic and political rulers. In the process, a hybrid ‘bourgeois aristocratic tradition’ (Elias, 1989: 35) could be observed among many members of the educated bourgeois cultural elite – especially among those who followed Nietzsche's cultural critique. Although the educated bourgeoisie was a minority in relation to the population as a whole (Ullrich, 2014: 279; Wehler, 1995: 732), their ideas of lifestyle, education, personality and 'legitimate culture' (Bourdieu) determined most of the cultural and scientific discourse in Wilhelmine society.

On the whole, the 'increase in nervous life' triggered by the rapid transformations, which Simmel perceptively diagnosed as the 'age of nervousness' (Radkau, 1998; Ullrich, 2014) in 1903 in 'Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben' (Simmel, 1903/1995: 116), was perceived by educated bourgeois intellectuals and scholars as less a social crisis than a *cultural* 'decay' and profound '*cultural crisis*' (Drehsen and Sparn, 1996; Lichtblau, 1996: 13ff.; Merlio, 2010) – a view that was reinforced by the affirmative reception of Friedrich Nietzsche's cultural critique. In this respect, it is no wonder that 'culture' also became a buzzword in the academic field and a central category of interpretation and analysis (Bruch et al., 1989a: 12ff.). This was particularly reflected in the new designation of humanities subjects such as 'philosophy of culture', 'sociology of culture', 'cultural history' or 'cultural science' (Bollenbeck, 1994: 256ff.; Bruch et al., 1989b).

Simmel (1911/1987) also interpreted – prominently in his theorem of the 'tragedy of culture' – social tensions not primarily as economic, political or social tensions, but as cultural, especially aesthetic. Thus, the social question seemed to him not only to be politically or economically relevant; it was also a 'question of the nose' (Simmel, 1907/1993: 290), that is, a question of subtle aesthetic differences of taste. And, in a certain way, for him the 'tragedy of culture' was a metaphysical, life-philosophical, unchangeable and therefore all the more 'tragic' social phenomenon (cf. Lenk, 1964, pp. 261ff.).

In the following, I will examine in more detail Georg Simmel's political orientation as being rooted in the educated bourgeoisie's worldview and habitus. Simmel's political standpoint has rarely been made the subject of discussion or 'debunked' – perhaps because it has often been assumed that Simmel was 'apolitical' before 1914 and had no normative political model at all. If Simmel's political thought and normative positions have been dealt with at all, then, apart from his ideas on Europe, the nationalist statements he made in connection with the First World War have been in the foreground (see among others Joas and Knöbl, 2008: 186ff.; Leck, 2000; Lichtblau, 1996: 392–419; Watier, 1991: 167–206). One of the few authors to have elaborated the core idea of Simmel's political thought is Köhnke (1996). In his ingenious study of the 'young Simmel' in the chapter on 'Social Philosophy' (Köhnke, 1996: 301–321), Köhnke used a few striking passages (see section 3 of this article) to illustrate that in normative-political terms, Simmel subscribed to an elitist, Nietzschean-aristocratic individualism. But according to Simmel's conception, this individualism first had to go through 'the hard school' of egalitarian socialism in order to reach true maturity. Köhnke (1996: 302) has emphasised in particular the 'theory of social development' and 'cultural enhancement' contained therein (see section 3.1).

Much of what follows draws on Köhnke's (1996) careful analysis, which in my opinion is still underappreciated in sociological discourse.[1] Without claiming to present an utterly new discovery within Simmel studies, it seems useful for a more precise description of Simmel's political thought to revisit Köhnke's interpretations, especially to expand and combine them with other textual passages and to systematically refer to other aspects that are closely related to Simmel's political thought. On this basis, Simmel's political standpoint can be worked out more clearly. These other aspects are Simmel's diagnosis of the times around 1900, the interpretation of social tensions as essentially aesthetic antagonisms and the exposition of a theory of cultural development, illustrated metaphorically in the 'Rose Parable' (Simmel, 1897/2005), to which Treiber (2018) recently drew attention in his article on 'Socialism, Social Democracy, Social Question' in the *Simmel Handbook*. However, the following contribution focuses on demonstrating how closely Simmel's political ideal of an 'aristocratic individualism' is linked to his sociological and cultural-philosophical theorem and normative guiding principle of the 'individual law', which increasingly became his main theorem from the turn of the century onwards and which was also advocated – not in this terminology, but quite similarly in terms of the normative position associated with it – by Max Weber. Köhnke (1996: 489ff.) has also convincingly demonstrated that the 'individual law' is *the* guiding principle of Simmel's work and even of his life, but he has related this primarily to the sociological, increasingly life-philosophical oeuvre, not systematically – as will be done in the present study – to Simmel's political-normative positions. In order to bring Simmel's political position of 'aristocratic individualism' together with the 'individual law' and the related Nietzsche reception, in addition to Köhnke's work, Lichtblau's (1984, 1996) research on Simmel and Nietzsche is particularly relevant. Based on this, I will show at the end of the article (section 4) that there is a considerable affinity between Simmel's and Weber's political and normative standpoints, due to the shared educated bourgeois ideal of personality, which – condensed in the theorem of the 'individual law' – is essentially shaped by the Nietzsche reception that was widespread among sociologists at the time (see Baier, 1982; Fleischmann, 1964: 201).[2] Finally, the basic figures of Simmel's political thought will also be explored in the war writings (section 5).

The 'individual law' as the normative centre of Simmel's thought

Simmel's political thought as it developed at the turn of the century is embedded in the social tensions of the *fin de siècle*. Simmel himself perceived and reflected on these tensions in great detail (see Treiber, 2018: 512; summarising: Lichtblau, 2019: 89–93). In 1902, the New York journal *The International Monthly* published the article 'Tendencies in German Life and Thought since 1870' (Simmel, 1902/2010), in which Simmel attempted to capture the tense zeitgeist of the Reich and focus on two basic contemporary tendencies. There he emphasised both the socialist tendency and the diametrically opposed tendency towards 'aristocratic individualism', which was essentially driven by enthusiasm for Nietzsche.[3] In doing so, he simultaneously provided a kind of sociological reflection and contextualisation of both his biography (Frisby, 1988: 208) and *the* normative guideline of his scientific, aesthetic and political thinking (see Köhnke, 1996: 489ff.): the 'individual law'.

The fundamental normative position of the 'individual law' had become clearly visible in Simmel's work since 1900 at the latest. In the publications of the following years, it was further elaborated. It represented the 'formula for the connection of his own work and life' (Köhnke, 1996: 489). 'Become what you are' is how one could sum up the 'individual law' in a single sentence (Köhnke, 1996; Simmel, 1915/2000: 512)[4]; what is meant is a 'form of life' (Köhnke, 1996: 503) in the sense of a 'unity of a purely personal way of life, free from all mere generalisation, with the dignity, breadth and definiteness of law' (Simmel, 1902/1976: 232). 'Become what you are' is what Simmel (1915/2000: 137) calls 'the formula of all morality'; to bring 'time and being' ('Sein und Zeit') together; to develop and at the same time remain the same, as in Simmel's eyes his hero Goethe exemplified, whom Nietzsche (1889/2004: 151) already celebrated as *the* representative of 'sovereign individualism'.

Simmel's 'individual law' was the result and an element of the educated bourgeois discourse on self-improvement, self-education, self-perfection, personality formation, the individual's conduct of life and self-realisation.[5] The 'individual law' translates into an 'aristocratic individualism', which Müller characterises as follows:

> Thanks to spiritual education and aesthetic experience, aristocratic individualism is able to shape its own path in life and create its own distinctive personal lifestyle. This *aristocratic individuality*, Simmel has no illusions about that, is reserved only for a minority and probably only for a small elite. (Müller, 2021: 284)

For, according to Simmel in 1908 in 'The Problem of Style' in connection with the 'individual style' of 'great' people: 'Here the individual is the case of an individual law; whoever is not strong enough for this must adhere to a general law [. . .]' (Simmel, 1908/1993: 383; see also Müller, 2021: 276). By 'general law' Simmel meant Kant's categorical imperative, to which he diametrically opposed the ideal of the 'individual law' he favoured.[6] The 'individual law', essentially inspired by Goethe, Rodin, George, Bergson and Nietzsche, is not only the core of Simmel's sociological and philosophical work, but also, as I will argue, the normative centre of his political thought.

Simmel's diagnosis of the times: The struggle and the dialectic of socialism and individualism

In *The International Monthly* contribution on the tendencies of intellectual history in Germany, Simmel gave numerous examples of what he later called the 'tragedy of culture': the prevalence of objective culture emanating from the subjects (material and immaterial condensations of spirit in technology, science, art, etc.), but which can no longer be subjectively appropriated and have a personality-forming effect. According to this tendency, one can increasingly observe a perfection of technology in the broadest sense as a 'a final value'; in the arts, too, the focus is more and more on the 'perfection of things rather than upon the perfection of men' (Simmel, 1902/2010: 170).[7]

According to Simmel (1902/2010: 168), the war of 1870/1871 and the *political* unity were a veritable 'turning point' for Germany, although 'the spiritual unity of the German states has not yet been greatly enhanced by their political unity' (Simmel, 1902/2010: 168). A substantial social tension arose from Germany's transformation from an agrarian to an industrial state, both economically and politically, since this social change was accompanied by the rise of the 'greatest popular movement', 'namely the rise of the

Social Democrats' (Simmel, 1902/2010: 171). For Simmel, the Social Democrats had made a significant contribution to the contemporary spread of the ideal of social justice as the highest goal. In contrast to this, however, at the same time there emerged, supported by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the ideal of individualism, 'the right of the strong and unusual character to be a law unto itself' (Simmel, 1902/2010: 180). As a result, an antagonism between socialism and individualism now prevailed in society as a whole, which became all the more acute as secularisation caused people to desperately search for new 'final objects' and possibilities of sacralisation (Simmel, 1902/2010: 174f.). So much for the diagnosis. The essential elements of Simmel's political thought – his 'dialectical aristocratism' and 'liberal Nietzschean individualism' – are not just an external, reflexive reaction to this diagnosis, but, as will be shown, are deeply embedded in the normative debates of his time as well as in specific perceptions of crisis that were widespread among the educated bourgeois in Germany. They are a response to the perceived growth of 'objective culture', which Simmel – like many contemporaries from the Bildungsbürgertum – considered the central problem of his time.

The essential elements of Simmel's political thought

It is the tension-laden opposition between socialism and individualism, first defined as an aesthetic one in 1896 in 'Sociological Aesthetics', as well as the powerful Nietzschean 'aristocratic individualism', that can be used to begin tracing Simmel's political thinking. He had already described the contrast in 1892 in the *Introduction to Moral Science* (Simmel, 1892/1989: 349ff.). In the choice between these two options, ultimately 'only the subjective will can give the decision, only the subjective power the realisation of the decision' (Simmel, 1892/1989: 349). Beyond this almost existentialist decisionism (see Großheim, 1991; Krockow, 1958/1990),[8] however, even before 1900 Simmel, with regard to social inequalities, had placed his faith in reconciliation in the sense of a 'theory of the middle class' (Köhnke, 1996: 320, fn. 234; Simmel, 1898b/1992: 361ff.), in the 'ideal of social-eudaemonistic continuity' (Simmel, 1892/1989: 352; cf. Lichtblau, 1996: 111, fn. 66; Köhnke, 1996: 319f.), by which he meant 'sufficient intermediate levels' for the middle classes, through which the 'gulf' of extreme contrasts would be softened by means of 'imperceptible' gradations (Simmel, 1892/1989: 351) and an 'elasticity' of positions (Simmel, 1898b/1992: 362).

In 'Sociological Aesthetics', Simmel described the present as permeated by that 'dualism' which runs through the soul of every human being: the 'socialist and individualist tendency' (Simmel, 1896b/1992: 198). But instead of approaching the antagonistic character of the relationship between these 'tendencies' with political or sociological categories, he understood them primarily as aesthetic forces that stood as irreconcilably against each other as day and night (Simmel, 1896b/1992: 200). They were 'ultimate directions of being', which were reflected not only in tastes, judgement schemes, scientific orientations and value perceptions, but also in political ideas. According to Simmel's 'aestheticisation of the political', socialist ideas and ideals stand for symmetry, harmony and equivalence in an aesthetic sense. The formation of symmetry was the first step in bringing 'the lower level of the aesthetic drive' (Simmel, 1896b/1992: 202), the chaos of the world, into a system. The next step was 'the refinement and deepening', the 'aesthetic appeal' of the 'irregular', the 'asymmetry', which altogether stood for the individualistic tendency (Simmel, 1896b/1992: 201).

Simmel goes so far as to concede that aesthetic stimuli are shaped by social forms, but at the same time emphasises the reverse case, the shaping of society and politics by aesthetics. According to Simmel (1896b/1992: 204),

> the influence of aesthetic forces on social facts becomes most clearly visible in the modern conflict between socialist and individualist tendencies. [. . .] That society as a whole should become a work of art [. . .], that instead of the energy-wasting competition and the struggle of individuals against each other, an absolute harmony of works should occur – these ideas of socialism undoubtedly address aesthetic interests [. . .] – they at any rate refute the popular opinion that socialism, springing exclusively from the needs of the stomach, also ultimately leads back to them; and the social question is not only an ethical but also an aesthetic one.[9]

The rationally organised society, in which everything interlocks harmoniously like the cogwheels of a machine, has a high aesthetic appeal. In contrast, for Simmel the aesthetic appeal of what is individual is expressed in the 'opposition to the masses', in the 'isolation of the individual against the general' – 'against that which applies to all, rests to a large extent the actual romantic beauty – even when we at the same time ethically condemn it' (Simmel, 1896b/1992: 207).[10] In expressing such a view, at least in this sentence, Simmel places the aesthetic above the moral.

Reading 'Sociological Aesthetics', for Simmel there seems to be a certain principle in the development of humanity according to which, after an initial chaos, orderly symmetry emerges, from which in turn asymmetry develops, 'the refinement and deepening', the individually beautiful (Simmel, 1896b/1992: 201f.), which for him only unfolds *in the passage through* the symmetrical. We are dealing here with a movement from symmetry to asymmetry, a figure of thought that represents a, if not *the*, key principle in Simmel's political thought.

The following passage makes this clear. Based on the work of Köhnke (1996: 301–321), it is intended to guide a more precise reconstruction of Simmel's political thinking. First of all, it is a sentence that can be found in slightly modified form several times and over a longer period of time in his work (Köhnke, 1996: 316). First, in 1898, in 'Die Rolle des Geldes in den Beziehungen der Geschlechter' ('The Role of Money in Gender Relations'), it reads:

> There are extreme individualists today who are nevertheless practical adherents of socialism, because they regard it as the indispensable preparation and school, no matter how hard, for a purified and just individualism. (Simmel, 1898a/1992: 247; literally the same: Simmel, 1900/1989: 506)

Here one might think that this was perhaps even a Marxist figure of thought, according to which the true individuality of a person can only properly reveal itself as the result of absolute equality. Simmel thinks similarly to some degree. However, unlike Marx's understanding of real individuality, Simmel, in the aforementioned English essay on the contemporary tendencies since 1870, characterises this qualitative individualism as aristocratism:

> There were, and there are now, among us a number of persons who are in every way individualists by conviction, who see in the freedom and development of the single personality, indeed in *the aristocratic rule of the strong over the weak*, the final meaning of all social government, and who at the same time belong to the social-democratic party, because they regard socialism as the necessary *transition stage* to a just and enlightened individualism. (Simmel, 1902/2010: 177; emphasis added)

It is not by chance that the passages in question and the 'figure of thought' they contain are reminiscent of Nietzsche. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, one can read the following in the eighth main section, 242, in the context of the 'democratic movement of Europe':

> The very same new conditions that will on the average lead to the leveling and mediocritisation of man – to a useful, industrious, handy, multi-purpose herd animal – are likely in the highest degree to give birth to exceptional human beings of the most dangerous and attractive quality. (Nietzsche, 1886/2019: 183)[11]

In the same year in which he reports on contemporary tendencies, Simmel writes in 'Weibliche Kultur' ('Female Culture') somewhat more clearly of a 'new aristocracy', a 'natural' 'hierarchisation' and the 'rule of the best' (Simmel, 1902/1995b). This takes Simmel's positive portrayal of individualism far away from both the idea of the 'just individualism' mentioned in the quotation (see also Köhnke, 1996: 317) as well as the Marx-Engelsian idea of a collectively mediated development of personality in an 'association' free of domination, which can only be achieved against the background of the self-realisation of *all* (Marx and Engels, 1848/1959: 482). Here is Simmel's 'figure of thought' in 'Female Culture':

> Thus, persons for whom, however, the whole value of the women's movement consists in this hoped-for differentiation, this working out of the specifically feminine, can at first agree with the brutal egalitarianism of the emancipation party, – just as today there are extreme individualists who are socialists because they expect only from the passage through a levelling socialism a truly natural ranking and a new aristocracy, which would really be the rule of the *best*. (Simmel, 1902/1995b: 81f., emphasis in original; abridged form in: Simmel, 1911/1918/1996: 456)

The passages contain several points that should be kept apart so as to better understand Simmel's political thought. The following presentation is largely based on Köhnke (1996: 301–321, 432–472), who has identified in these passages the '*self*-description' of Simmel's political position and social philosophy (Köhnke, 1996: 321). The following sections will clarify why the quoted passages can plausibly be read as a 'self-description' of Simmel's political thought. In addition, I shall enrich these passages and bring them together with other of Simmel's statements, theorems and values, in particular his normative model of the 'individual law'.

Simmel's theory of socio-cultural development: Through socialism to individualism

According to Köhnke, a 'theory of social development and social progress' can be read in the passages presented above, which assumes an 'alternating sequence of stages in the development of individuality' (Köhnke, 1996: 302). In Simmel's words: 'The development of humanity repeatedly reaches stages where the suppression of individuality becomes the inevitable point of passage for its later freer development, where the mere externality of life's determinations becomes the school of inwardness [. . .]' (Simmel, 1898a/1992: 246). For him, socialism is the basis and the point of transition to individualism, for only when everyone is equal and has passed through the 'smelting-furnace of socialism' (Simmel, 1902/2010: 177f.) do the real individual differentiations and 'natural rankings' become apparent – in accordance with the 'nature of man as a being of difference' (Simmel, 1892/1989: 351) and the anthropological '*sensitivity to difference*' (Köhnke, 1996: 311; Lichtblau, 1984: 256). This is why 'the most extreme individualist' is a 'practical supporter of socialism' (Simmel, 1902/1995b: 81).

Yet, at first glance it is not easy to discern whether Simmel also links the 'theory of social development' (Köhnke) with a theory of the 'eternal return' (Simmel, 1907/1995: 393, 400),[12] meaning that while individuality emerges from socialism, it will then be fought against again in favour of social equality. When this balance has been re-established, it becomes apparent once again that social balance or socialism cannot be the end of history and that once again 'the best' emerge from the egalitarian state. This interpretation of Simmel's idea of the historical course, which is always repeated in a kind of Nietzschean 'eternal return of the same' (Simmel, 1907/1995: 393; Nietzsche 1881, 11 (141): 392; 1888/1889/2004: 335), is supported by the 'rose tale' of 1897 (see also on this Treiber, 2018: 525f.), printed in the journal *Jugend*.

In 'Rosen. Eine soziale Hypothese' ('Roses. A Social Hypothesis', Simmel, 1897/2005), Simmel reports how a division suddenly developed among citizens of a country between those who owned roses and those who did not. The desire for roses grew rapidly, and their value increased accordingly. A revolutionary party arose whose 'moral idea' had also 'sneaked into the camp of the owners', so that finally the 'egalitarian party' and the 'ideal of social justice' triumphed. After a short period of peace, however, envy set in again. The shares of roses could not be divided as exactly as in a 'mathematical equation', so some citizens had a lucky hand with their rose cultivation, while others' shares were lighter. Regardless of how minimal social inequalities were, in any kind of communism or symmetrical society, Simmel concluded, there would always be 'finer differences in the new level' (Simmel, 1897/2005: 360), which would ultimately again lead to comparisons and feelings of inequality among citizens.

With the parable, Simmel wants to show that subtle differences and the resulting practices of distinction and feelings of envy exist permanently (see also Simmel, 1900/1992: 555). In particular, processes of asymmetry and individuation are continuously re-established on the basis of symmetry and 'levelling' (see also Lichtblau, 1984: 256; Merlio, 2010: 37), so that an egalitarian society is ultimately illusory or only a *transitional stage*. Simmel underlines this with an internal/external dualism, according to which social balance is something external that cannot compete with the inner, natural force of the need for individuation:

> And again and again the illusion drives us into the Sisyphean effort of external equalisation until we reach the point where nature sets its limit and where we realise that the suffering we wanted to escape from outside is chasing us from within. Whether and when the citizens of our

> fairy-tale country realised this, how often the revolution – always around the still remaining residue of inequality – repeated itself, I do not know. But in comforting indifference to all these changes, the roses continued to live on in their self-sufficient beauty. (Simmel, 1897/2005: 360f.)

Simmel (1892/1989: 446) assumes that the individual's feeling of happiness is based on comparisons. Perhaps the middle class, as an 'intermediate level', could here somewhat mitigate the feelings of social division (see Köhnke, 1996: 319f.), 'so that the next person, whom everyone looks up to, does not instil in him too much exaltation' (Simmel, 1892/1989: 350) and so that here 'the upper and the lower situation can meet' (Simmel, 1908/1898b: 677). Through such social gradations and 'inner differentiations', the lower classes would perhaps not feel the 'fundamental inequality' as strongly, as Simmel (1892/1989: 350) plea for the middle class could be pointedly rephrased. Whether the middle class really means more social 'freedom of movement' (Simmel, 1908/1992: 677) for everyone remains unproven in Simmel's work. At any rate, he takes a positive view of the fact that in a more differentiated society with 'manifold, superior and inferior strata', it is not really possible for a 'problematic, subversive idea' to prevail, as there are too many 'inhibiting powers' (Simmel, 1908/1992: 677).

Where does Simmel's anthropological assumption of a sense of difference originate? From Nietzsche, among others. In particular, the 'pathos of distance' (Nietzsche, 1887/2019: 259, 371) as well as the ethical-aesthetic ideal of 'nobility' that Nietzsche propagated – which, according to Simmel, was ideally embodied in Nietzsche's person (Simmel, 1902/1995a: 63) – influenced the Berlin cultural sociologist and philosopher (Lichtblau, 1984: 246ff., 1996: 100–126, 2019: 69f.). 'The pathos of nobility and distance' was defined by Nietzsche (1887/2019) as a 'general and basic feeling' (p. 259).[13] According to Stegmaier's (1994: 101) interpretation, the formula 'pathos of distance' in Nietzsche's work refers to a feeling of 'self-sense'. Among other things, Simmel translates this anthropologically into a need for distinction and a '*sensitivity to difference*' that, according to him, occurs in all people (Lichtblau, 1984: 256). The resemblance between Nietzsche's formula and Simmel's 'individual law' becomes clear here as well.[14]

Simmel unambiguously assumed that there is a general human desire for distinction. In this respect, he (like Nietzsche and many others after him) generalised layer-specific, courtly and upper middle-class attitudes and practices of distinction within his own milieu into an anthropological constant.[15] Man is a 'being sensitive to distinctions' (Simmel, 1900/1992: 554) and everyone measures their happiness according to distinctions. Modern man is therefore not satisfied with the satisfaction of needs alone, but 'he needs to be conscious that he is happy. The path of culture is the path of increasing consciousness. We want not only to be happy, but also to know that we are happy: And this conscious feeling and judgement of the happiness value of life [. . .] rests on comparisons [. . .]' (Simmel, 1892/1989: 446, 1900/1992: 555).

Simmel can certainly understand the desire for social equality. Simmel, who was by no means blind to social hardship and grievances (Simmel, 1892/1989: 447), said that social misery had reached such a level that 'the call for equality resounds throughout the world'. That is why, for example, he criticised members of the 'good' society who were morally outraged against prostitution,

> as if prostitution were not the inevitable consequence of conditions which precisely the 'good' society imposes on the whole of the people! As if it were completely the free will of the girls, as if it were a pleasure to prostitute oneself! [. . .] Or does one think it is a pleasure [. . .] to serve as a prey to some random man, perhaps an odious one, as a mechanism of ejaculation? (Simmel, 1892/2005: 261)[16]

Simmel suggests that the 'better-off' of the 'good society', who are concerned with the poor and their morality, find 'friction and stimulation in the differences between happiness and misery' in their care for the 'lower', where differentiation is not abolished but reproduced (Simmel, 1892/1989: 447). Almost in a psychoanalytical manner (one thinks of Jacques Lacan's concept of *jouissance*), Simmel traces the social engagement of 'ethical' citizens back to an inner enjoyment of misery. The commitment of those 'higher up' (Simmel, 1892/1989: 447) – here he has, among other things, a critical eye on the *Gesellschaft für ethische Kultur* – is based on certain 'increases in stimulus and sensations of difference and a need of their very own enjoyment' (Köhnke, 1996: 312). He therefore considers a solidarisation of the upper classes with the lower classes to be pure (self-)deception. For solidarisation would not usually be realised because of aesthetic-sensual asymmetries. The contact between the educated and the workers, so 'vividly advocated by some as an ethical ideal', often fails 'simply because of the insurmountability of olfactory impressions' (Simmel, 1907/1993: 290); one would rather refrain than physically touch the people 'to whom "the sweat of labour" clings', which, as mentioned, ultimately also points to an aesthetic-sensual component of the social question: 'The social question is not only an ethical question, but also a question of the nose' (Simmel, 1907/1993: 290).

Overall, Simmel appears to be highly ambivalent here. On the one hand, in several texts he describes the social problems and hardships of the time as well as their economic and political causes in a thoroughly sociocritical and sharply perceptive manner, combined with a critique of the hypocrisy of those 'higher up'; on the other hand, however, in accordance with his milieu-specific habitus, he propagates the value of qualitative individualism, denounces 'all-sameness' (Simmel, 1896b/1992: 199) and sharply criticises the indiscriminate, formless and insensitive 'primeval mash' of communism and socialism (Simmel, 1888/1989: 36, 1892/1989: 328), 'in which all specific differences are to disappear, which alone stimulate us to specific sensations in pleasure and suffering' (Simmel, 1892/1989: 328). The path and the solution to abolish one's own ambivalences is then described by Simmel, as mentioned, as going through the 'hard school' of a 'levelling socialism': he becomes 'a practical follower of socialism' in order to arrive at an aristocratic individualism, a 'new aristocracy' (Köhnke, 1996: 317).

The 'ultimate purpose': Cultural enhancement and personality formation

If one follows the theory of the social alternation of socialism and aristocracy and the inherent assumption of an anthropological 'sense and need of distinction', then socialism or the social image of social democracy represent not the ultimate goal, but rather a 'regulative principle' (Simmel, 1892/1989: 327); to put it more bluntly: 'a merely useful means to ends quite different from those advocated by socialism itself' (Köhnke, 1996:

303). Socialism, we could read in Simmel, is only the ‘passage’ or ‘transition stage’ to another end. Simmel sees the final goal in an ‘increase in culture’, which cannot come about through ‘all-sameness’, but only through individuation, when some individuals or ‘personalities’ are released for the ‘promotion of culture’. At least for the young Simmel, this referred to a ‘corporative social order’ (Simmel, 1892/1989: 401). In Köhnke’s (1996: 305) interpretation:

> A certain degree of luxury is interpreted as a precondition of culture and brought into the field against socialism. It is less important how appropriate such a concept of socialism was or is, for it shows as a negative foil, as it were, Simmel’s concepts of culture and progress, which throughout his life – and irrespective of his sometimes strong social commitment – will always also let him emphasise the value of individualism (as a political counterpart to socialism) or ‘aristocratism’ and the status of the aristocracy and the wealthy.[17]

As Müller (2015) has pointed out, Simmel’s central sociological question is: ‘How is individuality possible?’ This also applies to his political thought. After all, the Archimedean point of Simmel’s political thought is qualitative individualism – which, however, must not be confused with egoism, economic self-interest or propertied-bourgeois individualism (Leck, 2000: 77); Simmel sharply criticised these types of individualism. Rather, he propagated a qualitative individualism in the sense of the ‘individual law’. The ethical dimension of the individual law, the lawful ‘ought’, does not come from an ‘outside’; as Simmel (1913) describes in ‘The Individual Law’, it arises endogenously from life. He explains that

> this life itself, apart from being real, also proceeds as ideal, as ought, and that it does not need to receive the ethical demand from an outside being (and ‘reason’ has also shown itself, in relation to the totality of life, to be such an outside), but that it encloses it within itself as its own process of development, but indifferent to that which proceeds as reality. (Simmel, 1913/2001: 464)

In this respect, it is a ‘*moral* task’, indeed a ‘*calling*’, to cultivate the ‘distinctiveness’ of the self and thus ‘to realise its own archetype, which is unique to it’ (Simmel, 1917/1999: 146). The ‘individual law’ describes a kind of idealised form of existence, self-perfection and personality formation, a ‘longing’, as Simmel (1902/976: 232) writes in an essay on Rodin. There, in 1902, the ‘law’, which had already been hinted at in the philosophy of money and was now increasingly becoming the focus of his general (not only life-philosophical, but also time-diagnostic, sociological and cultural-theoretical) work, is mentioned for the first time (Köhnke, 1996: 503). It was to constitute Simmel’s ‘new position, turned 180 degrees’ (Köhnke, 1996: 505) and stand at the centre of his thinking.

According to Lichtblau, Simmel increasingly interpreted Nietzsche’s ‘ideal of nobility’ (Simmel, 1896a/1992, 1902/1995a: 63) and the ‘pathos of distance’ (Nietzsche, 1889/2004: 138) in the sense of an ‘emphatic understanding of personality’, of the ‘intrinsic value of personality’, the ‘realisability of which in turn says something about the nature and extent of the cultivation of an age and in which the question of a possible higher development of the type of human being finds an answer according to this new mode of valuation’ (Lichtblau, 2019: 70). Simmel’s science of culture was not value-neutral; his concept of culture also means ‘cultivation’ in a qualitative sense (Albrecht, 2015: 33).

In this respect, it is not surprising that Simmel's cultural-political endeavours and activities were also guided by the idea of a 'cultural increase' through a small number of 'personalities', so that, according to Nietzsche, the 'value of the whole is measured by the height of its highest specimens – a reversed theory of "marginal utility," as it were' (Simmel, 1896a/1992: 119). Here, Simmel's ideas go in the direction both of an education for qualitative individualism and of a targeted, institutionalised social form that promotes culture, namely when he planned a 'culture club'. Education requires a specific paedagogical cultural policy of the subjective mind. While objective culture is not a goal of cultural policy, because it results, so to speak, from a compulsive dynamic of cultural development, cultural policy must be directed at the 'subjective factor' or more precisely: at the *education of individuals*, such as cultivation and 'schooling' (Simmel, 1909/2005: 82). This cannot eliminate the 'tragic discrepancy' between objective and subjective culture, but it can reduce it to some extent (Simmel, 1909/2005: 83). Simmel did not have in mind a general education of the people, but rather an 'aristocratic' and educated bourgeois 'individualistic education' (Rodax, 1999: 21, fn. 9).[18]

The idea of 'increasing culture' by means of cultural policy through 'personalities' predestined to do so was expressed in a very concrete project. At the beginning of 1903, Simmel was intent on taking cultural policy into his own hands and founding a 'cultural club' 'in continuation and expansion of the Berlin Secession of 1898/1899' (Köhnke, 2013: 2), to organise the 'few cultural people who lived among the barbarians' throughout Germany, 'above all against official art, against the Siegesallee', according to Harry Graf Kessler (quoted in Köhnke, 2013: 3; Simmel, 1903/2005: 448), who was instrumental. The project joined a general dynamic of 'rebellion' against Wilhelm II's 'official cultural policy' (Mommsen, 1993a: 737–754, 1994: 41–58). In a letter to Stefan George, to whose spiritual-aristocratic (*geistesaristokratischen*) embodiment of 'aesthetic culture' Simmel had been increasingly attracted since the mid-1890s (see Landmann, 1984) and whom he wanted to win for the cause, Simmel (1903/2005) wrote in much the same way as Kessler: 'for every day it becomes clearer that we live among barbarians' (p. 446).[19]

Simmel's position of a 'club-like association of cultivated personalities' (Köhnke, 2013: 5) was not an entirely new one in his life. As early as 1886, in a review of Heymann Steinthal's *Allgemeiner Ethik*, he had explicitly formulated his 'aristocratic' view as distinct from 'socialist optimism':

> For it seems to me that all culture can only come about in such a way that a certain minority is able from the outset to devote itself to the production of culture without any compulsion and without any responsibility for its success. The socialist state abolishes this possibility; by providing everyone with what is necessary for his livelihood, it must demand that everyone engage in useful activities for it [. . .]. A social state would probably have forbidden Professor Galvani to indulge in such childish things as twitching frogs' legs, just as well as it would forbid someone today to work on perpetuum mobile at society's expense. (Simmel, 1886/1999: 202)[20]

The emancipatory 'equalisation' of the women's movement and Simmel's 'theory of difference'

The aforementioned core points of Simmel's political thought also find expression in the context of his growing interest in the 'new social movements' of his time in the mid-1890s (see Köhnke, 1996: 459–473; Leck, 2000). The ‘new’ here, by analogy with the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, refers to social movements which were not primarily aimed at economic inequality but were predominantly ‘post-materialist’ in orientation (Köhnke, 1996: 461), such as ‘realist, naturalist and literary-artistic movements’, ‘life reform and women’s movements, anti-duel and university extension movements’, ‘finch societies/freelance student societies’ as well as ‘Ethical Culture’ (Köhnke, 1996: 298, 462). As Köhnke (1996) has established, Simmel participated in these movements at different times and to different degrees: First in the 1880s in the naturalist circles (see also Leck, 2000: 51ff.), then

> after the abolition of the socialist laws [. . .] taking a side on the social question also temporarily became important to him around 1890 [. . .]. But then – after a period of barely five to six years – a personal reorientation and a transition from the older to the new social movement can be detected – this reorientation was just as evident from his smaller publications as from the lecture topics in the ‘Sozialwissenschaftliche Studentenvereinigung’ [Social Science Students’ Association]. It can even be dated more closely and established quite well on the basis of his essay ‘Der Frauenkongreß und die Sozialdemokratie’ [The Women’s Congress and the Social Democracy], in which for the first time the difference between *socialism* and these other *‘social movements*’ is clearly stated, with Simmel clearly siding with the *latter*, with the *reformist* movements. (Köhnke, 1996: 462)

Simmel’s lecture topics at the *Sozialwissenschaftlichen Studentenvereinigung* [Social Science Students’ Association] (see Köhnke, 1988, 1996: 432–458) changed from ‘Psychology of Socialism’ (1894), ‘Historical Materialism’ (1895), to ‘Sociology of the Religious Being’ (1897), ‘The Psychological Basis of Pessimism’ (1898) and finally ‘On Female Culture’ (1901) (see Köhnke, 1996: 455f.). What did Simmel’s shift from the social to the ‘women’s question’ look like and what did he say about the women’s congress? How did this relate to the basic pattern of his political thought elaborated above? As will be shown in detail later, Simmel’s proposal to arrive at a new solution of the ‘women’s question’ and a new order of gender relations is based on the same pattern of his political thinking, namely that only a passage through ‘egalitarianism’ brings to light the real differences and peculiarities (here then of the sexes and no longer generally related to the development of culture). The ‘women’s question’ is thus another important area where this pattern can be encountered. In fact, reading Simmel’s statements on the ‘women’s question’ through the lens of the concept of ‘individual law’ sheds new light on Simmel’s often-misconceived position on this subject.

From 21 to 27 September 1896, the international congress on ‘Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen’ (Women’s Work and Women’s Aspirations) was held in Berlin. It took place in the context of a general ‘rise of the women’s movement around 1890 in Germany’, which was due to, among other things, ‘the dismissal of Bismarck, the abolition of the Socialist Laws, a new socio-political awareness’ (Gerhard, 2012: 62ff., 67). In the process, according to Gerhard (2012: 62), ‘two different concepts of emancipation’ crystallised along the antagonisms of society as a whole, leading to the split between a bourgeois and a proletarian women’s movement (Gerhard, 1990: 169–213; cf. Marx Ferre, 2021: 60ff.). The variety of associations and initiatives that existed from then on – of which the oldest member association was the *Allgemeine Deutsche*

Frauenverein (ADF) [General German Women's Association], founded in 1865 (Karl, 2011: 78ff.) – was bundled into the umbrella organisation *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (BDF) [Federation of German Women's Associations] from 1894. However, according to Gerhard (2012: 659), this had the 'constructional flaw' that the 'social-democratically oriented women workers' associations were excluded or not even invited to cooperate'. Active political activity by women in associations was still prohibited. Women workers' associations were considered 'political' and therefore banned until the Reichsvereinsgesetz 1908 (Frevert, 1986: 135). Women workers replaced them with informal, so-called 'women agitation committees' (Frevert, 1986: 135; Gerhard, 2012: 66). The congress of 1896 perhaps also received such widespread attention because here was the chance for both movements to meet 'in front of a large audience'. However, this was to remain the 'only time' that they could do so (Gerhard, 2012: 67).[21] The congress was not organised by the BDF, but by well-known representatives of the radical, left-liberal wing of the bourgeois women's movement, Lina Morgenstern, Minna Cauer and Hedwig Dohm.[22] The invited social democrats withdrew from participating.

In his report of the congress, Simmel vehemently criticised how social-democratic or proletarian women dealt with the bourgeois women's movement. The Social-Democratic women workers' organisation's refusal to participate in the congress appeared to Simmel 'an expression of blind hatred which rejects *a limine* every social reform originating in bourgeois circles, so that the agitation at no point bridges the class divide, the elimination of which is, after all, the whole aim of Social Democracy itself' (Simmel, 1896c/2005: 42).

However, two representatives of the women workers' movement did come to the congress: Clara Zetkin and Lily Braun, who had just converted from the 'left wing' of the BDF to the SPD (Gerhard, 2012: 66) – although, according to their own statements, they were not present as participants but, as they said themselves, as 'listeners and opponents' (Zetkin, quoted in Gerhard, 2012: 67). According to Simmel's report, both affirmed that the existing social order did not allow proletarian women to obtain any improvement and that, in this respect, a 'ladies' movement' allied with this social order was not compatible with the aims of women workers either (Simmel, 1896c/2005: 39). The whole thing finally culminated in tumults among the audience (see Gerhard, 2012: 68), especially when Lily Braun pointedly remarked that there was still a greater misery than the joblessness of daughters lamented by bourgeois women, than the 'struggles for the doctor's hat' (Braun in her memoirs, quoted in Köhnke, 1996: 464) – Simmel, who was clearly on the side of the bourgeois women's movement, shouted to her afterwards: '*You have squirted poison*' (Simmel, quoted in Köhnke, 1996: 465).[23]

In his congress report, Simmel, far from the otherwise praised 'freedom of value judgement', cautioned against revolutionary agitation and instead called for gradual reforms. With Käsler (1984a: 35), one could place him in that 'tendency towards a "socialism of the educated"' that was typical of early German sociology, which distinguished itself in a reformist manner 'from all varieties of Marxism' as well as the SPD, and which understood itself as non-partisan, objective, value-free, 'free-floating' (Alfred Weber; Karl Mannheim) and 'distant from practice' (Ringer, 1969: 133; see also Käsler, 1984b: 269f., 276).[24] Simmel propagated the improvement of the 'parts' so that 'from the sum of the individuals the whole would grow together' (Simmel, 1896c/2005: 41), which would actually fit in quite well with ‘socialist aspirations’ and the ‘aim of abolishing class differences’ (Simmel, 1896c/2005: 40), since

> the misery of the proletariat can be felt in all its depth and its alleviation can be imagined as the first and noblest task of the time, while one can have as little faith in the radical remedy of a revolutionary change in the overall social state as in a sudden miracle from heaven. It is one of the most malicious insinuations of the Social-Democratic Party – of course of any party – that it accuses those who deviate from it in the choice of means of not feeling the full magnitude of the sufferings which must be remedied. [. . .] An incessant extension of workers’ protection and workers’ insurance, generalisation and free higher education, gradual working towards a standard working day and a minimum wage: is all this not a ‘socialisation of the means of production’, a gradual levelling of social differences? (Simmel, 1896c/2005: 41)

Finally, Simmel emphasised the common ground between proletarian and bourgeois women. Both were suffering from the ‘industrial mode of production’, the proletarian woman was ‘torn away from domestic activity’, the bourgeois woman, on the other hand, would languish in it and would like to get out of the house a bit more. ‘It is the same disintegration between the personal-human disposition and its social possibility of satisfaction that is responsible for the misery of the proletarian woman and the atrophy of so many bourgeois women: only that in both cases it affects different sides of those vital proportions’ (Simmel, 1896c/2005: 44f.).

Leaving aside whether it was really the political aim and desire of proletarian women to enjoy more of the ‘blessing’ of ‘domestic activity’, Simmel now saw in any case that something had to be done about the ‘women’s question’; indeed, he even considered the ‘women’s question’ to be increasingly more relevant than the ‘workers’ question’ (Simmel, 1896c/2005, 1902/2010: 184–191; Köhnke, 1996: 456, 460).[25]

Simmel’s solution to the ‘women’s question’ was also based on the basic pattern of his political thinking described above, namely that it would first take a passage through economic, political and legal ‘egalitarianism’ for the real differences and natures of the sexes to emerge and come to the fore. In the process, Simmel assumed, in the sense of the difference-theoretical ‘two spheres theory of the eighteenth and nineteenth century’ (Klinger, 2018b: 829), that there were fundamental, essential differences between men and women, with in particular the ‘lack of ability to differentiate’ and the ‘predominance of feelings’ of women running as a *basso continuo* through his writings (see Klinger, 2018a: 241ff.). However, the ‘lack of ability to differentiate’ identified in women was not meant in a pejorative way, as Lothar Peter (1996/2016: 107f.) has shown. According to Simmel, in the course of modern socialisation, men are increasingly forced to specialise, to alienate themselves in ‘the division of labour’ and to differentiate their ‘total personality’ (Simmel, 1902/1995b: 67). In contrast to this was the ‘female culture’, its ‘uniformity’ and ‘indivisibility of the ego’, which still had an ‘unbroken’ relationship to nature and life (Simmel, 1902/1995b: 68). ‘For Simmel, female culture fulfilled both a complementary and an alternative function in relation to the hegemony of male culture with its preponderance of purposive rationality, objectivism and psychic direction from outside’ (Peter, 1996/2016: 108).

While in earlier texts women were often characterised as being close to animals (Klinger, 2018a: 244), in later writings they advanced to an absolute ‘alterity [. . .] to which fantastic hopes of redemption are addressed' (Klinger, 2018b: 831). Nevertheless, in Simmel's eyes, 'female culture' serves primarily as an enrichment and necessary *supplement* to the objective culture of man. However, according to Simmel, this requires first a certain 'equalisation'. Expressed in Simmel's basic political pattern of passing through symmetry to asymmetry, and returning to the passage above (now in expanded form):

> In any case, however, it will have to be admitted for the moment that the education and rights of women, after having persisted for so long in exaggerated inequality vis-à-vis men, must pass through the stage of a certain external equality before a synthesis can arise beyond it: the ideal of an objective culture enriched with the nuance of female productivity. Thus, persons for whom, however, the whole value of the women's movement consists in this hoped-for differentiation, this working out of the specifically feminine, can at first agree with the brutal egalitarianism of the emancipation party – just as today there are extreme individualists who are socialists because they expect only from the passage through a levelling socialism a truly natural ranking and a new aristocracy, which would really be the rule of the *best*. (Simmel, 1902/1995b: 81f.)

Dialectic aristocratism

Simmel was not a *public intellectual* or 'scholar-intellectual' (Hübinger, 2006: 132–160) to the same extent as his colleague Max Weber (Mommsen, 1959/2004, 1993b). Instead of plunging into day-to-day political struggles like Weber, Simmel tended to keep a rather 'distinguished' distance and elevated the fundamental social and political antagonisms he sharply observed to a dehistoricised life-philosophical cultural dynamic (objective culture/form vs subjective culture/life). When it came to concrete criticism of capitalism, it was less with a view to the processes of social impoverishment, and more of an educated bourgeois sense of crisis, with a focus on *décadence*, on capitalism as the 'cause of decay and destruction of culture' and personality development (Kim, 2002: 52). Nevertheless, despite an 'aestheticisation of politics' detached from social reality (socialist symmetry vs individualist asymmetry) and a normative position disguised by abstraction, Simmel remained an astute sociological observer and interpreter of contemporary social tensions and processes, who arrived at novel views of society perhaps precisely because of his characteristic abstraction, because he knew how to reinterpret society from the 'Wartturm position'[26] and to 'relativise' its positive and negative aspects. But this 'Wartturm position' was also built on a class-specific normative foundation: the bourgeois ideal of the 'individual law'.

The passage of socialism as a necessary path to a Nietzschean aristocratic individualism was not intended to lead to a feudal form of society, but, as with Weber, aimed at 'the bourgeoisie as the leading stratum of modern politics' (Kim, 2002: 411). A comparison with Weber may delineate Simmel's position even more clearly: in Weber too, personal greatness, the 'nobility of our nature' (Weber, 1895/1993: 559),[27] must also be effective out of itself. But unlike Simmel, for Weber the individual has to heroically fight for and assert his or her 'individual law' that guides the individual conduct of life (Weber's basic theme) (see Hennis, 1987; Mommsen, 1993b: 40), not *with* others (even if this is only a 'passage' through the 'hard school of socialism' for Simmel), but *against* society, rationalisation, bureaucratisation and ‘disenchantment’.[28] ‘True’ and ‘actual’ greatness of the individual, for Weber, does not require ‘levelling socialism’, never the Other; it does not even result from a mere demarcation of the ‘Man’ of the common people, since it stands above them, it is the absolute sovereignty of the individual. According to Mommsen, Weber disapproved of ‘the view that the greatness of the great individual must find expression in a sharp contrast to the masses [. . .] and that the aristocratic sense of self of the great individual requires, as it were, domination over the “herd” [. . .]’ (Mommsen, 1965/2015: 261, fn. 125).

In this, both sociologists emphasised – as can be traced not least from Weber’s marginal notes in his copy of Simmel’s (1907/1995) *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche* (Mommsen, 1965/2015: 261, fn. 125; Scaff, 1987: 260ff.; Lichtblau 1999/2011: 228, fn. 18; Marty, 2019a, 2019b, 2020: 190–195) – a personality ideal[29] inspired by Goethe and Nietzsche. This ideal measures personality (including that of the politician and the scientist) not by its effects, but by its ‘sovereign soul’ and ‘individual law’, that is, by what the individual ‘is’ (Mommsen, 1965/2015: 261, fn. 125) and how, in accordance with its ‘individual law’, it finds and obeys the ‘demon that holds the threads of *his* life’ (Weber, 1917/1919/1994: 23).[30] For as Goethe already said – whom Nietzsche revered (Borchmeyer, 2004)[31] and about whom Simmel (1912/2003) wrote a much-noted monograph dedicated to Marianne Weber[32]:

> ΔΑΙΜΩΝ, Dämon
>
> Wie an dem Tag, der dich der Welt verliehen,
>
> Die Sonne stand zum Gruße der Planeten,
>
> Bist alsobald und fort und fort gediehen
>
> Nach dem Gesetz, wonach du angetreten.
>
> So mußt du sein, dir kannst du nicht entfliehen,
>
> So sagten schon Sibyllen, so Propheten;
>
> Und keine Zeit und keine Macht zerstückelt
>
> Geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt.
>
> (Goethe, 1817/2000: 359)[33]

In English translation[34]:

> As on the day you were granted to the world,
>
> The sun stood to greet the planets,
>
> You likewise began to thrive, forth and forth,

> Following the law that governed your accession.
>
> You must be so, you cannot flee yourself,
>
> Thus sibyls long ago pronounced, thus prophets,
>
> And neither time nor any power can dismember
>
> Characteristic form, living, self-developing.

Simmel's vivid description of the problem of social tensions at the turn of the century in *The International Monthly* is a reflection in terms of social history and the sociology of knowledge on how it was possible for *his own* individualistic perspective to come about. However, he was not able to reflexively detach himself from his educated bourgeois normative ideal of the 'individual law'. This was evident from 1900 onwards in his writings on cultural philosophy and sociology, as well as in his political thought. As has become clear, despite differences in their approaches to, for example, the concept of the nation, political ideas and analyses, Simmel and Weber – the latter of which combined in his habitus and even in his theory (Rehberg, 1979) the economic bourgeoisie, political bourgeoisie, service bourgeoisie and educated bourgeoisie (see Lepsius, 1992/1993: 19ff.; Kaube, 2014; Kaesler, 2014: 39–137) – shared the basic ideal of 'ethical personalism' (Hennis, 1987: 173), the 'individual law' (see Müller, 2020: 410) and the political ideal of *liberal Nietzschean* '*aristocratic individualism*' (Mommsen, 1971/2015: 42).[35]

> An aristocratic individualism, derived both from liberal roots and from Nietzsche, led Weber to trace all social phenomena back to a fundamental relation, namely the relation of the value-setting personality to empirical reality, which serves it as the material of probation and self-realisation. Max Weber correctly diagnosed the overwhelming trend towards the formation of purely purpose-rational social relations. If he was unable to find any other means against this development, which he was convinced threatened Western culture in a life-threatening way, than that of appealing to the individual qualities of great personalities, it was because he was deeply attached to the bourgeois-capitalist social order of his time and even more so to the ideals of European liberalism. (Mommsen, 1971/2015: 42)

Nietzsche (1874/1988: 340) described the call for self-improvement and self-perfection contained in the demand 'Become who you are!' as the 'fundamental law of your actual self'. The ideal of personality formation, developed in literature in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, was so widespread as a normative model beyond the educated middle classes (see Koselleck, 1990/2010) that it represented an attractive 'dispositif' (Foucault) of subjectivation (comparable to the 'creativity dispositif' diagnosed today, Reckwitz, 2012: 49ff.) – a 'personality formation dispositif' (Budde and Weuster, 2018) with which people wished to identify and to which hardly any alternatives could be imagined.[36] As an effect of 'symbolic domination' (Bourdieu), the ideal was so internalised and recognised, especially within the higher classes but also beyond them, that it was perceived as non-partisan and no longer referred back to its original social carrier, the educated middle classes and their 'bourgeois canopy of values' (Hettling, 2000;

Koselleck, 1990/2010). Despite all individual differences, the ideal was therefore not only recognisable among most sociologists in the German Reich (and among sociologists far beyond this period), but it also shaped Nietzsche's thinking, whence it spread further in a sharpened form. Notwithstanding the misogynistic passages in Nietzsche's work, an emancipatory sentiment could also be found among social-democratic feminists. Lily Braun, for example, emphasised that she had found Nietzsche's philosophy to be a humanistic liberation from patriarchal norms and the 'highest possible development of the personality':

> My heart beat to bursting like that of a prisoner whose chains are loosened from his foot and the gates open to free wandering [. . .]. I was half a child when I heard the first call of personal liberation from Nietzsche's Gay Science: 'Life says: Don't follow me; but follow you! But follow you!' – Did not the same call apply to humanity today? (Braun, quoted in Aschheim, 2000: 89)

The steps necessary to realise the ideal of the 'individual law' were assessed and described differently. For example, although Simmel and Weber shared the basic ideal of a *liberal Nietzschean aristocratic individualism*, they imagined its concrete realisation in lifestyle, society and politics differently, as a brief look at their party preferences, among other things, shows.[37] As his son Hans reports, Simmel voted '"liberal," that is, Freisinnige Volkspartei [German Free-minded People's Party] or, if their candidate seemed to have no chance at all, probably also Social Democratic. On the whole, he was quite sceptical towards all parties' (Simmel, 1941–1943/1976: 260). Unlike Simmel, Weber expected nothing politically from the left-liberal Free-minded (Mommsen, 1959/2004: 15).[38]

Simmel's 'scepticism' towards partisan affiliations and the will to be non-partisan was shared with his colleagues Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber, despite their divergences in detail (Wierzock, 2014: 19; Mommsen, 1959/2004). Tönnies, who decided courageously to join the SPD only in the 1930s in the face of National Socialism, placed his political hopes during the German Reich in mature 'personalities', 'thinking statesmen' and, beyond that, 'an alliance between noble party leaders and free science' (Wierzock, 2014: 114f.). Weber was 'more strongly oriented towards the individualistic-aristocratic element of European liberalism' (Mommsen, 1963/2015: 46), but also advocated 'great personalities' who should determine politics within the framework of a 'plebiscitary leader democracy' (Mommsen, 1963/2015; Weber, 1918/1988).[39] He only briefly became involved in the German Democratic Party with his brother Alfred at the beginning of the Weimar Republic. However, in the decades prior to that, he did not want to commit himself to a party either (despite some wavering; see, for example, Weber's brief deliberation in 1909 to join the 'politically certainly most unfruitful' Social-Democratic Party, in Mommsen, 1959/2004: 137, fn. 152).

The widespread emphasis on a non-partisan stance among the university teachers of the time (Bruch, 1980, 2006) had to do with a contempt – deeply anchored in the collective memory of the educated bourgeoisie since the failure of the 1848 revolution – for the 'downs' of day-to-day and realpolitik, which were seen to be insufficiently idealistic and 'merely' practical and goal-oriented. The claimed 'non-partisanship' of a free or 'free-floating' position, however, has never been able to completely rid itself of its 'connection to being' (Mannheim), as can be demonstrated through the sociology of knowledge.[40] Even those who claimed or believed themselves to be unpolitical or apolitical had a political disposition. This was especially true when they referred to political forces and currents in their statements. According to the historian of science Bruch (2006: 21), the 'withdrawal from the political battles of the day' that could be observed among many 'scholars' until 1914 had 'nothing to do with political neutrality. For it was precisely an apparently apolitical scholarly reputation, owed only to scientific dignity, that could be instrumentalised all the more effectively in the public battle of opinion'.

In a way, Simmel's juxtaposition of aesthetic individualism and aesthetic collectivism around 1900 reflected the social and political tension that Max Weber described 20 years later as the intellectual-historical signature of his generation when he remarked to a student: 'The world in which we ourselves exist spiritually is a world largely moulded by Marx and Nietzsche' (Max Weber, quoted in Baumgarten, 1964: 555).[41] In contrast to Weber, Simmel takes a dialectical turn reminiscent of Marx and Engels (see Köhnke, 1996: 316), and yet he ends not with them, but rather with Nietzsche: Only through the negation of individualism by socialism does 'true' individualism emerge, which *sublates* (*aufhebt* in a Hegelian sense) socialism. In the 'passage through a levelling socialism' (Simmel, 1902/1995b: 82), however, it is not an 'association of the free' that emerges for Simmel, as it did in Marx and Engels, but ideally a hierarchical and spiritual-elitist (*geisteselitär*) *individualism* that bears *both liberal and Nietzschean-aristocratic traits*.[42] According to the Nietzschean theory of the eternal return of the same, however, this is by no means the end of history, if indeed history would continue to exist at all.[43]

Cultural enhancement through the revaluation of values and a new type of human being: Simmel's political thinking in the First World War

The First World War began in August 1914. From a domestic perspective, it seemed to offer a solution to the economic, political, social and cultural tensions and conflicts. For many, the beginning of the war promised national reconciliation and unity. However, not all of the population were equally carried away by the general mobilisation. Enthusiasm for the war was to be found primarily among members of the bourgeois, urban and intellectual milieus who idealised the start of the war as the so-called 'August experience' (see Bruendel, 2014: 72; Flasch, 2000).

Like numerous intellectuals, scholars and scientists, most sociologists in 1914 believed that the Germans now had the task and duty to 'manage the [German] spiritual-cultural goods of humanity' (Nipperdey, 1990: 814) and to defend them against the civilisations branded as materialistic (France, England, USA) (see Lübbe, 1963: 171–238, on Simmel: 219ff.). On the eve of the First World War, Alfred Weber had already addressed the then proliferating dichotomy between culture and civilisation in his keynote lecture at the Second Sociological Congress of the German Sociological Association in Berlin in 1912. This distinction was a widespread German pattern of interpretation (Moebius, 2021: 20ff.), which at first expressed a social contrast against the aristocracy, but over time came to increasingly mean a national contrast between Western civilisation, which was disdained, and German intellectual culture, which was thought to be more valuable (Elias, 1939/1977: 1–64). In the course of the First World War, this pattern of interpretation was referred to as the so-called ‘ideas of 1914’ (see Bollenbeck, 1994: 268–277; Nipperdey, 1990: 594).

With a few exceptions, for example Emil Lederer, most sociologists ‘more or less fell for the official war propaganda and interpretation of the meaning of war’ as a cultural struggle (Joas, 2000: 87; see also Joas and Knöbl, 2008: 184–196). No longer was anything to be heard of the value neutrality often loudly and energetically praised at previous Sociologists’ Congresses; on the contrary. Instead of sociologically analysing the war, militancy and mass hysteria with professional detachment, the *German Sociological Association* decided right at the outset of the war to put its ‘forces and resources’ at the service of war propaganda and to educate foreign countries about the ‘justified “rational will to win” of the Germans’ (Papcke, 1985: 139).

Alongside Weber, Sombart and Scheler, Simmel (1914/1999: 23) also endorsed nationalism.[44] In his case, as will become clear, the war became a lesson in the life-philosophical dialectic of life and form. Shortly after the start of the war, in November 1914, Simmel enthused: ‘I love Germany and therefore want it to live – to hell with all “objective” justification of this will from culture, ethics, history or God knows what’. New dimensions of experience, a new community, indeed a ‘new type of human being’ could emerge from the war, Simmel (1914/1999: 28) excitedly argued (see also Joas and Knöbl, 2008: 187; in summary: Knöbl, 2018); at last there was a solution to the ‘tragedy’ and crisis of culture, to cultural alienation and to creative stagnation. In view of the diagnosed cultural decay, war appeared in Simmel’s vitalist view as a veritable ‘moral catharsis’ (Peter, 1996/2016: 96ff.).

In Simmel’s war writings, too, the elements of the political thinking outlined above are present at central points. Thus, ‘like many of his contemporaries, he places the outbreak of war in 1914 in the closest possible relationship to the programme of a *revaluation of all values* proclaimed by Nietzsche and his expectation of the advent of a *new man*’ (Lichtblau, 1996: 124).

Simmel saw in the First World War not only the possibility of overcoming the crisis of culture, but at the same time the potential for a growth in culture and the ‘renewal of our inner existence’ (Simmel, 1914/1999: 29). Accordingly, war ‘never became an end in itself’ for Simmel (Knöbl, 2018: 744), but was a way out of the ‘pathologies of culture’, which he primarily identified – in line with his ideal of personality – in the ‘lagging behind of the perfection of persons behind things’ (Simmel, 1916/1999: 40).

War would finally destroy the ponderous culture that is frozen in its forms. According to Simmel (1916/1999: 51) life-form dialectic – to wit life must express itself in forms, but must in turn permanently break through them – the war has a culture-enhancing ‘positive significance’ for Simmel.[45] Such would be visible, for example, in the fact that war brings about a ‘new ranking of values’ (Simmel, 1914/1999: 49). While culture and society had fallen into a materialistic ‘mammonism’ and the ‘worship of money’ (Simmel, 1914/1999: 17), this ‘absoluteness of monetary value’ was now ‘broken’, which Simmel (1916/1999: 48) took to constitute a ‘deep spiritual gain’. In 1915, in ‘Die Umwertung der Werte’ [The revaluation of values], he argued that the ‘wealthy’ should now give something to the poor and that they could be expected, ‘since these are generally persons of higher education [. . .] to reduce the quantity of food as much as possible in order to save substance, but to increase its quality as much as possible in order not to eat the poor's bread' (Simmel, 1915/2005: 343). This would actually be a win-win situation: what the wealthy gain in quality, the others collect in quantity with more bread.

Simmel's criticism of 'mammonism' as well as the valorisation of the 'willingness to make sacrifices' (Simmel, 1914/1999: 18) corresponded overall to a common pattern of interpretation of anti-bourgeois bourgeois intellectuals,[46] 'who neither wanted to identify with the symbolic world of bourgeois saturation and normality nor to subscribe to materialist-socialist views. [. . .] This contradiction also determined Simmel's praise of war, [. . .] without wasting a single thought on the necessity of ending the war immediately [. . .]' (Peter, 1996/2016: 101).

As for the 'individual law', Simmel had it discursively incorporated and rebuilt into war propaganda for the purpose of a life-philosophical legitimation of Germany's assumed 'European mission'. In 1915, he wrote 'Werde, was Du bist' [Become what you are] (Simmel, 1915/2000), in which he interpreted the war-related 'inner-German gains' and 'Germany's inner transformation' (Simmel, 1914/1999) as endogenous life dynamics. What is more, he no longer projected the educated bourgeois motif of 'Become who you are' or the theorem of the 'individual law' solely onto personalities like Goethe, but applied it to Germany as a whole: Germany was now actually becoming 'what it is'.

Simmel linked this process of Germany's formation and maturation with the country's relevance amid a post-war Europe in the further wartime writing 'Die Idee Europa' (Simmel, 1915/1999). Only with Germany and Austria could the 'spiritual unity we called "Europe"' continue to exist (Simmel, 1915/1999: 55). Here, the movement of transcendence *in* immanence, which also characterises the 'individual law' as a whole (Simmel, 1913/2001: 438), again plays a central role. For 'Germanness' essentially includes the self-transcending moment of 'stretching oneself beyond Germanness'. Seen in this way, 'Europeanness' is not something external to Germanness, but belongs to 'its innermost, most individual life [. . .] – that is why we know that the German nation, strengthened within its own borders and becoming ever more genuine in itself, will one day give the idea of Europe a new life, more powerful and more far-reaching than anything that has gone before, and remind it of its immortality' (Simmel, 1915/1999: 58).

The war forced an existential decision as to whether one wanted to continue to live one's life on the old 'tracks' or whether, after the vitalistic-dynamic destruction of form during the war, one wanted to follow 'new paths on the new ground of life' (Simmel, 1916/1999: 46). According to Lübbe's (1963) interpretation (p. 221), Simmel 'celebrated' the war as a 'liberator of existential authenticity (Eigentlichkeit)'. It was now not only in the fields of art, love or religion that an 'authentic' personality could endogenously develop through its 'deed' and its 'individual law', but also in the vitalistically exalted war.

During the war, Simmel additionally affirmed the German character of the 'individual law' by differentiating between a Romanic and a Germanic individualism. The individualism of the 'individual law', according to which 'the meaning and value of individual existence ultimately grows from its own root' (Simmel, 1917/2000: 304), he described as a 'Germanic individualism' – entirely under the impression of the war and similar to his Rembrandt book (Simmel, 1916/2003). This was contrasted with a 'Romanic individualism' such as that pursued by Immanuel Kant, in which the individual remained merely a type of a universal, the 'human being becoming the type of the rational being' (Simmel, 1917/2000: 304). 'Unmistakably it is much more dangerous, much darker, much more responsible to live in the Germanic way than in the classical-Romanic way' (Simmel, 1917/2000: 305). If the Romanic individualism is an individualism of ratio, the Germanic one is one of 'deed'; if 'the Romanic individual is denied deed [. . .], that supra-individual sphere still remains as the bearer and environment of his being and allows – as we often sense in energyless, contentless existences of the South – welcoming kindness and accessible sophistication to shine in the place where we were actually looking for a personality' (Simmel, 1917/2000: 306) Thus, the 'German individual' is 'after all placed on that responsibility which grows out of the centre which is only his own' (Simmel, 1917/2000: 306).

According to Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl, Simmel's war writings 'certainly do not represent a break in his thinking' (Joas and Knöbl, 2008: 186) in terms of their subject matter (crisis of culture, money economy, individualism, etc.). This also applies to Simmel's main theme of the 'individual law'. Like 'life' in general, he conceived of the 'individual law' as a kind of 'immanent transcendence' (Simmel, 1913/2001: 438). The theorem of the 'individual law', it could be shown, not only guided his understanding of culture, society, art (Meyer, 2017: 117), religious salvation (Krech, 1998: 142ff.) or life (including his own); it also provided his political thinking with a normative principle based on the ideals of the educated bourgeoisie.

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Notes

1. For example, Köhnke demonstrates the constitutive importance of Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal's Völkerpsychologie for Simmel's thinking (Köhnke, 1996: 337ff.; on Völkerpsychologie, see Klautke, 2016). The concepts of 'Wechselwirkung' and of 'objective spirit', for example, which are essential for Simmel's sociology and his concept of culture, are derived from Lazarus (Köhnke, 1984, 1996; see also Goodstein, 2017: 228). From Lazarus' perspective, everything, including everyday life, can be the subject of sociological research, from religion to fashion, from educational paedagogy to correspondence, from adventure to landscape, from jewellery to cup handles. Simmel made all this (and much more) the subject of cultural sociology, because he saw everything as culturally mediated. Moreover, like Lazarus, he always saw the whole embodied *pars pro toto* in these individual phenomena

(Goodstein, 2002: 211). In the following, quotations reproduce the original spelling. All translations of Simmel's texts are my own. For their careful reading, discussion and helpful comments on the text, I would like to thank in particular Lothar Peter, as well as Klaus Lichtblau, Reinhard Blomert, Christian Marty, Martin Strauss and Alexander Wierzock for suggestions on the text, Simon Mussell for proofreading the manuscript and also the four anonymous reviewers, whose suggestions have improved the text.

2. On Weber and Nietzsche, see footnote 35. The turn to Nietzsche that is evident in Simmel *after* the Langbehn review in 1890, especially *since 1892, at the latest in 1895* (Lichtblau, 1996: 104ff., 111, fn. 66, 1984; Köhnke, 1984: 403ff., 1996; Kim, 2002: 385ff.), but does not apply to his aesthetics (Meyer, 2017: 70f.), is comparable to that observed in the naturalist movement (Scheuer, 1974), to which the early Simmel was close (Leck, 2000: 51–62; Köhnke, 1996: 243–270). Nietzsche's impact began in the bourgeois cultural milieu as early as the 1880s (Scheuer, 1974: 160; Weber, 1946/1997: 166, see also on Nietzsche's 'virtue' to 'live according to one's own law', 153), but was widely received since the 1890s (Aschheim, 2000: 17ff.). For general information on the differentiated Nietzsche reception in Germany, see Aschheim (2000, on Simmel: 41f.). As Adolphi (2006: 49–55) has shown, the reason why Nietzsche's reception was so widespread and Nietzsche was virtually a 'fashion', a 'cult' and a commonplace in the history of ideas was because contemporary cultural phenomena and processes of social upheaval such as ideological pluralisation, secularisation, 'emphasis on the individual', 'art as a refuge of authentic life' proceeded 'in the way Nietzsche's "metaphysical" theory of man described these essential forces of our actions and feelings' (Adolphi, 2006: 54). He had summed them up in a particularly appealing way for a particular audience. Adolphi (2006: 61ff.) has uncovered different 'layers' of Nietzsche's reception. Even in Simmel's case only one specific Nietzsche is received. As will become apparent, Simmel could be assigned to the reception 'layer' of 'personality search' (Adolphi, 2006: 65). Still irreplaceable for understanding Simmel's sociology of culture in the context of the turn of the century and the enthusiasm for Nietzsche of the time is, in addition to Lichtblau's (1984) analysis of Simmel's Nietzsche reception and Köhnke's (1996) research on the 'young Simmel', Klaus Lichtblau's (1996) instructive book on *The Genealogy of Cultural Sociology* at the turn of the century. For a general summary on Simmel, see Lichtblau (2019). On the concept of aristocratism, which became widespread in the educated bourgeoisie as a result of Nietzsche's cultural criticism from 1890 onwards, see Vries (2020) and Conze et al. (2013), specifically on Nietzsche as the 'founder of the discourse of aristocratism', see Sieg (2013), and Losurdo (2002/2009a, 2002/2009b).
3. Simmel was not alone in this diagnosis (see Moebius, 2021: 9ff.). Around 1900, numerous diagnoses and perceptions of crisis existed, which identified a society divided into two opposing poles, not only economically, but also politically, culturally, religiously and morally (see Bruch, 2010; Merlio, 2010); as a contemporary example of this 'pessimistic and smug' time, this 'world full of opposites', see Ziegler (1899: 524), who also cites Nietzsche, on whom he published a balanced book (Ziegler, 1900). Adolphi (2006: 59f.) emphasises that in Nietzsche there 'culminated' a 'desire for the self' that was widespread in society at the time.
4. As Hennis (1996: 97, fn. 9) has made clear, Nietzsche's call to 'become who you are', which Simmel will use to illustrate his theorem of the 'individual law', is not meant in the sense of *Ecce Homo* ('as the most mischievous human fish-catcher'), but as in *Schopenhauer as an Educator*, in the sense of, as Nietzsche says, a 'fundamental law of your actual self': 'Nobody can build the bridge for you to walk across the river of life, no one but you yourself alone. There are, to be sure, countless paths and bridges and demi-gods which would carry you across the river; but only at the cost of yourself: you would pawn yourself and lose yourself. There is in the world only one way, on which nobody can go, except you: where does it lead?

Do not ask, go along with it' (Nietzsche, 1874/1988: 340). The maxim 'Become who you are', which goes back to the Greek poet Pindar, is found more often in Nietzsche's work; it is also sometimes attributed to Goethe, but, as far as I can see, it is not to be found literally in his work. On the other hand, it exists in numerous other authors besides Nietzsche and Simmel. In essence, it already exists in Hegel, as Koselleck has shown in his history of the concept of *Bildung* (Koselleck, 1990: 119). Koselleck has also emphasised the 'religious content' of the concept of education and of the widespread educated bourgeois ideal of personality, the 'educational religiosity' (Koselleck, 1990/2010: 123f.).

5. From the massive literature on these ideals of educated bourgeois discourse, see Assmann (1993), Conze and Kocka (1985), Koselleck (1990), Lepsius (1992) and Kocka (1989). More related to the German Reich, but also taking up developments before 1871: Vondung (1976) and Glaser (1993). On the change of the ideal, see Hettling (2000: 72f.), who has shown that the guiding principle of the bourgeois way of life changed dynamically; instead of 'independence', at the turn of the century the 'Archimedean point of the bourgeois way of life' became 'personality'. This ideal can also be described as an expression of an educated *bourgeois* attitude (see Neumann, 2006: 40), because personality in this sense can only develop under very specific conditions of life, that is, conditions that are mostly free of the immediate need to secure a material existence, free of purpose, and tend to have an affinity with culture. As Käsler (1984b: 288) has shown in detail, the early German sociologists came mainly from the 'propertied bourgeoisie' (Besitzbürgertum). According to Käsler, precisely 'because of this', they strived with eagerness for the ideals and 'mentality' of the 'spiritual-aristocratic' educated bourgeoisie as well as the ideals usually conveyed in school and the social environment, which promised symbolic capital beyond the 'merely' material-economic sphere. Simmel, too, came from the propertied bourgeoisie through his father's profession as a merchant ('Chocolaterie Simmel', his father was co-founder of the confectionery shop 'Felix & Sarotti'), but was financially supported by the music publisher and real estate salesman Julius Friedländer, his later legal guardian and uncle, who embodied both the propertied and the educated milieu. For a summary and sociological analysis of Simmel's biography, see Härpfer (2014).
6. It was already clear in the *Introduction to Moral Science*, Volume 2 (Simmel, 1893/1991: 33) that Simmel was moving further and further away from Kant, who in his eyes was advocating a 'general law' with his categorical imperative (Simmel, 1893/2001: 420ff.). As mentioned, Simmel conceded that not everyone was 'strong enough' to shape their individuality endogenously according to an 'individual law' in accordance with a distinctive unity and personality. Many were forced to adhere to a 'general law' (Simmel, 1908/1993: 383; cf. Köhnke, 1996: 490ff.). Regarding Simmel's relationship to Kant, the most frequently cited author in Simmel's work, Kurt Röttgers notes in his analysis of Simmel's relationship to Kant that, for example, with regard to the question of values, 'Nietzsche and not Kant prevails', and even more: 'We thus see that, contrary to his self-stylisation as a "Kant scholar," Simmel had a distance to this "great" philosophy from the very beginning, mixed with ignorance and independence' (Röttgers, 2011: 74f.) Or: 'Later, around 1900, this distance towards Kant becomes clearer and eventually leads to the formula "Kant and Goethe"' (Röttgers, 2011: 70). Even if one thinks of the two together, Simmel's preference was for Goethe (and Nietzsche). 'Interim conclusion: Simmel was certainly not a Kant scholar' (Röttgers, 2011: 71). On the Kant-Nietzsche relationship in Simmel, see the instructive essay by Partyga (2016: 423), who provides a very good overview of Simmel's reception of Nietzsche.
7. Here I follow the original English text (Simmel, 1902/2010). The second part of the English text is missing from the German edition (Simmel 1990).

8. Just as Friedrich Tenbruck worked out with regard to Max Weber's value decisions, Simmel and his 'individual law' are not concerned with decisionism in the sense of arbitrary decisions, but rather decisions made out of a kind of 'inner conscience'. Tenbruck on Weber: 'Weber does not place the value decisions that we constantly have to make at the discretion of each individual, but pushes them in everyone's conscience. In "Science as a Vocation," too, he demands of everyone "to give himself an account of the ultimate meaning of his own actions"' (Tenbruck, 1995: 67f.).
9. Here, Simmel is also directed against the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für ethische Kultur* (German Society for Ethical Culture, Treiber, 2018: 513); on this society, founded by the astronomer Friedrich Foerster and the philosophers Georg von Gizycki and Friedrich Jodl, and its journal *Ethische Kultur. Wochenschrift für sozialethische Reformen*, in which Simmel also published, see Köhnke (1984, 1996: 284–301), Lübbe (1963: 142ff., 145ff.) and Lanser (2020). In addition to the founders and Ferdinand Tönnies, the journal counted Friedrich W. Foerster, Theobald Ziegler, August Döring and Johannes Unold among its members. Robert Michels, Mark Twain, Bertha von Suttner, Leo Tolstoy, Harald Höffding and Gottfried Keller, among others, also published in the journal (see Rudolph, 1990: 115). Many other scholars at the time also saw the 'social question' primarily as a 'moral question' (Ziegler, quoted in Bruch 1980: 160f., also on the so-called 'cathedra socialists' and Tönnies).
10. Both aesthetic 'tendencies' can later be found further elaborated, among other things, in the Philosophy of Money (Simmel 1900/1989), which Simmel understood not primarily as an economic but as a cultural sociological work. Money was only an 'example' 'to draw a guideline from the surface of economic events to the ultimate values and meanings of everything human' (Simmel, 1900/1989: 12), in order to 'build a storey under historical materialism' so that 'those economic forms themselves are recognised as the result of deeper valuations and currents [. . .]' (Simmel, 1900/1989: 13). On Simmel's Philosophy of Money (1900) in general, see the volume edited by Hartung and Steinbach (2020) in the series 'Klassiker auslegen'; see also the instructive interpretation by Lichtblau (2022); on the influence of Nietzsche, see Dodd (2013). Both tendencies can also be identified in Simmel's reception of Bergson's vitalism (see Peter, 1996/2016) and his analysis of time: on the one hand, there is the rational, symmetric, objective, 'socialist' time, and on the other, time as an individual process or 'law'. The difference can also be discerned in Simmel's view of the differences between the sexes.
11. I owe my knowledge of this passage to the reading of Taubes (1969).
12. As Lichtblau has elaborated, however, he in any case linked Nietzsche's doctrine of the 'eternal return' with the 'individual law', with a 'decision that always remains *individual*' and a 'radical principle of responsibility' (Lichtblau, 1984: 260f.). Simmel applied Nietzsche's theorem 'ethically' in terms of responsibility (Lichtblau, 1996: 120) and when referring to Nietzsche's (1881/1973: 392) 'eternal return of the same', he wrote: 'Every good aristocracy is deprived of the mere enjoyment of its prerogatives by the consciousness of being responsible – not to other people, not to a law given from outside, but to itself' (Simmel, 1907/1995: 392ff.) One should, after all, live and develop '*as if* we were living eternally, i.e. as if there were an eternal return' (Simmel, 1907/1995: 400). In his copy of Simmel's (1907/1995) *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, from which this quotation comes, Max Weber wrote on this line: 'Excellent twist' (see Mommsen, 1965/2015: 256, fn. 49). He saw in this the ideal of ascetic 'self-discipline' (Nietzsche) as well as an 'analogy with "Puritanism"' (Weiller, 1994: 52; see also Lichtblau, 1999/2011: 232).
13. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche (1887/2019: 259) writes: 'Rather, it was "the good" themselves, i.e. the noble, the powerful, the superior and the high-minded, who perceived themselves and their actions as good, i.e. as being of the first rank, in contrast to

everything low, low-minded, mean and plebeian. It was out of this *pathos of distance* that they first took the right to create values, to express names of values'. On nobility and the associated 'self-transcendence of man', see also the ninth main piece from *Beyond Good and Evil* (Nietzsche, 1886/2019: 205–240) as well as the shaping into the ideal in Weber, see Marty (2019a). For a comprehensive take on 'aristocratic individualism' and Nietzsche's intellectual biography, see Losurdo (2002/2009a, 2002/2009b). Simmel's theory of the dialectic of symmetry and asymmetry reminds one of the later, but more culturally pessimistic 'two-layer theory' of Walther Rathenau; on this, see Merlio (2010: 39f.).

14. With his positive reception of Nietzsche, Simmel stood in marked contrast to his colleague Ferdinand Tönnies, who, after his initial enthusiasm for the early, according to his reading, community-oriented Nietzsche, had moved on to a sharp criticism of the later, spiritual-aristocratic Nietzsche as well as of the contemporary cult surrounding (Tönnies, 1897/1990: 90–101; Lichtblau, 1996; Lübbe, 1963: 170f.) and had branded him with Franz Mehring as a 'philosopher of *capitalism*' (Tönnies, 1893/1990: 103). He saw in Nietzsche's moral criticism and 'individualistic aristocratism' the proclamation of a new 'morality of capitalist rulership' (Tönnies, 1893/1990: 104), which was all too readily adopted by men who considered themselves geniuses. Simmel reviewed Tönnies' book *Nietzsche-Kultus* (1897) and wrote that Tönnies was unable to grasp Nietzsche's contemporary historical significance 'for the simple reason that he approaches him from the standpoint of a modern, socialist evolutionist who accepts the real development with its technical climax, its democratisation of power, its eudaemonistic goals without further ado as what is right and ought to be' (Simmel, 1897/1999: 401).
15. A similar anthropologisation of class-specific patterns of thought, perception and behaviour can be found in later 'philosophical anthropologies' elaborated in the 1920s (for example, by Helmuth Plessner) (see Rehberg, 1981: 179ff.) or by representatives of Critical Theory, who (like Weber) are also influenced by Nietzsche's 'pathos of distance'. Many other sociologists can be named for whom Nietzsche was a relevant source of inspiration (see Baier, 1982; Gerhardt, 1988: 193). The sensitivity to difference or 'pathos of distance' was not the only class-specific anthropological assumption in Simmel; also in proximity to Nietzsche and in Simmel's reception of his 'agonal worldview' (Marchart, 2013: 221), Simmel speaks, as Marchart (2013: 218ff.) has pointed out, of an anthropological 'a priori fighting instinct' (Simmel, 1908/1992: 299) in his texts; similarly to Simmel, an 'agonal worldview' going back to Nietzsche can also be found in Weber, as Marchart (2013: 218ff, 231ff.), among others, has instructively shown in both. 'Struggle' belongs, according to Mommsen, for Weber to the 'basic category of human Dasein' (Mommsen, 1959/2004: 50f.), both for the individual and for society. See his inaugural lecture (Weber, 1895/1993), altogether Mommsen (1959/2004) or also Kaesler (2014: 309), and Kaube (2014).
16. Simmel's perspective on prostitution itself is not entirely unproblematic. As we have just heard, he considers prostitution to be a social evil in pleasingly clear terms, which, according to him, can only be fought if the root of the problem is eliminated (Simmel, 1891/2005: 252f.). Here he agrees with Ziegler (1896: 64), for example, who made it clear to German students around 1895 in unequivocal terms that prostitution was an unjust product of male domination. In Simmel's opinion, however, a ban would have as little effect as if one wanted to fight 'poverty through charity' or 'crime through punishment'. Only 'changed general conditions' could bring this about, but in his eyes, these lie 'in the unattainable distance'; 'we can only work towards them', for the time being it is a matter of 'finding the relatively best form for the prostitution that cannot be eliminated, in addition to the effort [. . .] to eliminate it' (Simmel, 1891/2005: 252). Why he does not consider more drastic measures against men and the social structures that support prostitution remains a question and can be explained against the background of his traditional image of gender (see Klinger, 2018a, 2018b). Instead, he

calls for a public brothel system and the abolition of street prostitution. But that prostitution as a whole has to do with a patriarchally structured domination of society (Bourdieu, 1998/2005; Klinger, 2018b), and not only with monogamous marriage and the 'premarital drives' of men (Simmel, 1892/2005: 266), does not occur to Simmel.

17. However, Simmel does not refer to the nobility in the socio-structural sense, but to a kind of elitist spiritual nobility (*Geistadel*) of individual personalities. 'Aristocratic' was, according to Corona Hepp (1987: 69–75), a 'key word of the epoch' in the 'cultural-critical debates around and after 1900'. According to her, 'no cultural-critical author' referred to 'the actually existing upper class', but it was 'always used in a figurative sense' on both the left and the right; after 1900, according to Hepp, the term was often used in connection with 'Geist', that is, it was more about an individualistic spiritual aristocracy (*Geistesaristokratie*), which, however, was then supposed to have real effects on politics, society and culture.
18. On Simmel's lectures on school education and their goal of 'resubjectivising culture' and personality formation by focussing on the individual needs of pupils, see Simmel (1915/1916/2004) and Rodax (1999).
19. For Simmel's spiritual-aristocratic (*geistesaristokratische*) orientation, Stefan George plays a major role alongside Nietzsche. Michael Landmann wrote about Simmel and George: 'In the second half of the 90s, when Simmel began to open himself up to Nietzsche's influence, he also got to know Stefan George. As Nietzsche gave the theoretical impetus for the "individual law," so George presented Simmel, from the human side, with the problem that could only be solved with this concept, and at the same time its vivid confirmation' (Landmann, 1984: 150). On the *Bildungsbürgertum*, George, and Simmel, see Groppe (2001: 160–178), which is also instructive on Simmel's generation of scientists. On Kessler and his wish for a Nietzschean cultural renewal, see Martynkewics (2009: 122–133).
20. That Simmel advocated a Nietzschean *aristocratism* and not a 'Nietzschean socialism', as Leck (2000: 69–83) has claimed, becomes clear again here.
21. For the lectures of the congress, see Schoenflies et al. (1897).
22. According to Karl (2011: 87), three wings within the BDF had emerged: a conservative one, represented in particular by the rural women's associations and the German Protestant Women's Federation, and a moderate one, represented mainly by the ADF. This wing represented the image of women as 'well-educated working women, wives and mothers' (Karl, 2011: 87). The representatives of the radical wing 'sought emancipation beyond their role as mother and wife. They organised themselves in the Frauenwohl association, which had been founded by Minna Cauer in Berlin in 1888. [. . .] In 1899, under the chairmanship of Minna Cauer and Anita Augspurg, the radical associations joined together to form the Federation of Progressive Women's Associations. [. . .] The most important concern of the radical wing was the enforcement of women's suffrage' (Karl, 2011: 87f.) The women workers' movement had difficulty in forming because proletarian men also practised patriarchal domination. Even though August Bebel's *Die Frau und* der Sozialismus (1879), which was banned shortly after publication, represented an important impulse to take women workers seriously and to couple the solution of the women's question with the social question (see Marx Ferre, 2012/2018: 60), the initiative 'tended to come from the proletarian women' (Frevert, 1986: 135f.). As later, however, the 'women's question' continued to be regarded as a 'secondary contradiction' that would also resolve itself with the resolution of the contradiction between capital and labour. On the social-democratic women's movement, see also Frevert (1986: 134–145).
23. As mentioned, a general pattern of relations between proletarian and bourgeois women's movements during the German Reich became apparent, as Frevert (1986), among others, describes in her *Frauen-Geschichte* (pp. 92–145). According to Frevert, the support of working-class women by bourgeois women was not only based on 'philanthropic inclinations', but

also backed by ‘the socio-politically motivated interest in creating a broader acceptance of norms and “virtues” of the bourgeois world that were considered meaningful and necessary. Quite often, this interest was met with blatant rejection on the part of its addressees’ (Frevert, 1986: 100). See also Gerhard (1990: 169–213, 2012: 62–76).

24. On ‘scholarly politics’ [Gelehrtenpolitik] in the Reich, see generally Bruch (1980, 2006); on the ‘socialism of the educated’, see Bruch (1985: 157ff., 1985: 122ff.).
25. On the topics, problem descriptions and debates of the ‘women’s question’, see Gerhard (2012: 69–76) for a summary.
26. The use of the term ‘Wartturm’ goes back to Tönnies, see Wierzock’s (2014) characterisation of Tönnies’ non-partisan political position, but it describes the position of many social scientists in the Reich who saw themselves as mostly non-partisan (Bruch, 1980: 161; Käsler (1984a, 1984b): 269f.; Lenger, 2012: 17), also Max Weber (Mommsen, 1959/2004: 19), Werner Sombart or members of ‘Ethical Culture’. The nationalism prevalent among many, which was openly expressed throughout the First World War in 1914 (also in Simmel’s work), also saw itself as (and, with a few exceptions, was) non-partisan (Ringer, 1969: 129ff.). Simmel saw in it a solution to the tragic cultural crisis, as will be shown in the last section (for an instructive summary, see Lichtblau, 2019: 93–97; Watier, 1991; Joas, 2000; Joas and Knöbl, 2008: 186ff.; Knöbl, 2018).
27. The entire quote from Weber’s inaugural address in Freiburg reads: ‘For the dream of peace and human happiness, above the gate of the unknown future of human history stands: lasciate ogni speranza [abandon all hope!]. Not how people will *feel* in the future, but how they will *be* is the question that moves us when we think beyond the grave of our own generation, which in truth also underlies all economic policy work. It is not the well-being of human beings that we are eager to breed in them those traits with which we link the feeling that they constitute human greatness and the nobility of our nature’ (Weber, 1895/1993: 559).
28. Not with the Other, but against the Other: This position applied to Weber also on a global scale and was evident in Weber’s inaugural address of 1895, in which he – quite differently from Simmel at the same time – propagated a nationalist and imperialist German ‘world power politics’ (‘Weltmachtpolitik’) and ‘*eternal struggle* for the preservation and up-breeding of our national species’ (‘*ewigen Kampf* um die Erhaltung und Emporzüchtung unserer nationalen Art’ (Weber, 1895/1993: 571, 560; see Mommsen, 1959/1959: 73–96).
29. On Goethe as Simmel’s role model, see also Müller (2021: 280ff.). On Simmel’s ‘Goethe complex’, Meyer (2017: 113–126) is particularly instructive. On the historical-discursive foundation of the ideal of personality, see, among others, Zilsel (1918/1990): 124ff., 1926), who places it close to the ideal of genius and sees it in the larger context of the emergence of the ideals of inwardness, authenticity, freedom and individuality. See also Taylor (1989/1996), describing the ‘internalisation of the sources of morality’ (p. 788), which was pushed in particular by Nietzsche. See also Martynkewics (2009: 155–168) for the general ‘hunger for personality’ in Wilhelmine society.
30. Instructive on Weber’s ideal of personality is Marty (2018: 305ff., 2019a, 2019b, 2020). Simmel also says pointedly: it is not about ‘doing’ but about the ‘peculiarity’ of ‘being’ [‘Eigenheit des Seins’] (Simmel, 1907/1995: 384).
31. Perhaps Weber is also alluding to Nietzsche’s talk of the demon in *The Gay Science*, a quotation that Simmel reproduces at length in his passage on the ethics of responsibility (see Lichtblau, 1984: 260f.) in *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche* (Simmel, 1907/1995: 393f.): ‘How if one day or night, a demon crept up on you in your loneliest solitude and said to you: “This life, as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live it again and countless times; and there will be nothing new about it, but every pain and every pleasure and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small and great of your life must come back to you,

and everything in the same order and sequence – and likewise this spider and this moonlight among the trees, and likewise this moment and myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over and over again – and you with it, dust from dust!" – Would you not prostrate yourself and grind your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you ever experienced a tremendous moment when you would answer him: "You are a god and I have never heard anything more divine!" If that thought were to take hold of you, it would transform you as you are and perhaps crush you; the question of all and everything, "Do you want this again and countless times?" would lie as the greatest weight on your actions! Or how would you have to become good to yourself and to life in order to *desire nothing more* than this last eternal confirmation and sealing?' (Nietzsche, 1882/1973: 250).

32. According to Simmel, Goethe is 'the great justification of mere humanity *out of itself*' (Simmel, 1912/2003: 270). Goethe was so often praised as a natural scientist during the German Reich that, according to Mandelkow (1980: 191), one had the 'impression' that one was dealing with 'one of the most discussed natural scientists of all time'. However, Goethe's scientific work was usually completely separated from his poetic work; only Simmel and Chamberlain forced a 'breakthrough towards a synthetic way of seeing the totality of Goethe's work' (Mandelkow, 1980: 191). According to Kruckis (1995: 281), one could also observe in Simmel the 'tendency' to 'take Goethe's natural philosophy and science seriously again and to relate him – as in the mid-century tradition – to nature (the inner or individual "law")', the 'characteristic of life-philosophical Goethe interpretation by Dilthey, Simmel and Gundolf [. . .]. Goethe is the best proof of the correctness of their theorems and therefore their favourite subject'. Finally, at the end of the book, Simmel elevates Goethe to a symbol and example of the human in general, to the solution of the 'question of the possibility of a successful modern existence. Thus, the monograph traces a paradigmatic unfolding of the individual law on the basis of a historical personality that nevertheless already operates under the conditions of the "divide" between individual and society, mind and life, for which Goethe imposed himself as the only all-round positive case study' (Meyer, 2017: 126). On Goethe as a central figure of identification and integration of the German-Jewish educated middle classes, see Mosse (1985/1992: 76f., 1990: 171). On Goethe and Weber, see Marty (2019b).
33. In Goethe, in addition to the 'individual law', the life-form dynamic, which is central to Simmel's philosophy of life, has already been addressed. Simmel (1912/2003: 79ff.) also makes this clear in his Goethe book. Goethe is the one who has repeatedly broken forms in a living way through 'metamorphoses' and transformations, forms in which life, however, must necessarily express itself or objectify itself, but which life or the life process, in turn, permanently transcends in its becoming.
34. The English translation was taken from Wetters (2014: 202).
35. Weber's 'personality ethics' (Treiber, 1991: 288) incorporates cultural Protestant elements that complement these characterisations (see, e.g. Treiber, 1991, on asceticism and the methodisation of life and the closeness to Nietzsche in this respect). The strong influence of Nietzsche on Weber is now well documented in the literature (see Fleischmann, 1964; Eden, 1983; Hennis, 1987, 1996; Peukert, 1989; Weiller, 1994; Kim, 2002: 385ff.; on Simmel and Weber especially Kim, 2002: 409ff.; Scaff 1987; Marty, 2019a, 2020; Mommsen, 1965/2015; Kemple, 2020; highlighting the ambivalences Lichtblau, 1999/2011; Kim, 2002: 385ff.; on Weber and Stefan George, see Weiller, 1994: 61–162; Groppe, 2001: 561–622; Brodersen, 1970). As Rehberg (1979: 218ff., 234 fn. 86) emphasises, Weber's normative attitude, which even had an impact on the formation of his theory (Rehberg, 1979), was not that of an adapted 'comfortable' bourgeois, but of a 'grand bourgeois' who was willing to fight. On Nietzsche's influence on Weber's method of the ideal-type, see Stegmaier (1994: 89ff.).
36. On this ideal of personality formation, see more precisely Koselleck (1990/2010).

37. For Simmel, this path was not only a political one; according to him, 'personality' could be found under conditions of life with an affinity to culture, such as 'art, love, religion or sociability' (Kim, 2002: 177f.); as his cultural-political endeavours showed, however, politics should create and promote these conditions of life.
38. For orientation: As Tönnies remarked, according to Wierzock, on the spectrum of the party system around 1906, there was at that time 'an antagonism between the German Conservative Party, the National Liberals and the Centre [. . .] on the one hand, and the German Free-minded People's Party and the Social Democracy on the other' (Wierzock, 2014: 106). On the parties in the German Reich, see Wehler (1977): 78–90).
39. On 'plebiscitary Führer democracy', see Weber (1918/1988: 267; 1919/2014: 191f.); summarising and showing the effects on the Weimar Constitution, see Mommsen (1959/2004: 364ff., 378ff., 389ff., 416–441, 1963/2015); on the Nietzsche reference, see Marty (2019a, 2019b). Other contemporaries also adhered to this concept in nuances, for example Ernst Troeltsch or Alfred Weber (Demm, 1990: 256–306, especially 294ff., 2000; Loader, 2012: 134ff.; Hacke, 2012: 479). In the 1920s, Alfred Weber was a member of the 'Vereinigung verfassungstreuer Hochschullehrer' (Association of University Teachers Loyal to the Constitution), which later renamed itself the 'Weimar Circle' and, together with other left-liberal forces, advocated a 'Führerdemokratie' (leadership democracy) (see Döring, 1975; Demm, 2000; Loader, 2012: 111, 138). Tönnies was also a member of the 'Weimar Circle'.
40. On the spiritual-aristocratic (*geistesaristokratischen*) 'free-floating intelligentsia' in Alfred Weber and Karl Mannheim, but also on the intellectual-sociological differences between the two, see Loader (1997, 2021); there are also some structural, non-accidental, milieu-specific similarities between Simmel's political thought and Alfred Weber's concept of a spiritual-aristocratic leadership and cultural elite (see Loader, 2012: 131–143). Eberhard Demm (2000: 246) characterises these ideas as 'defence strategies of the educated bourgeoisie against the "revolt of the masses"'.
41. On this signature of the time, see also Scheuer (1974), who emphasises the proximity of this signature to naturalism, and Leck (2000: 16f.).
42. Much like Marx and Engels, who deliberately say very little about what their model of communism should look like and how it should be shaped, Simmel also mostly abstains from offering a detailed description of aristocratism.
43. I owe the reference to the end of history to Klaus Lichtblau.
44. Early on, however, he was eager to become internationally known as well. Around 1910, Simmel was the sociologist in Europe whose texts had been translated the most (Pyythinen, 2018: 2).
45. The process by which life gives rise to forms and self-legislated 'worlds' (of science, art, religion, etc.), which then become independent, autonomous, emancipate themselves from the initially vital 'purposes', their service to life, and acquire an intrinsic value, is what Simmel (1918/1999: 234, 236ff.) called the 'rotation of axes' in his *Lebensanschauung*. 'Simmel taught that life, for its own shaping and enhancement, in a "rotation of axes" drives forms out of itself which, on the one hand, are also "life," objectified life, objective spirit, but which, on the other hand, gain independence against it and can, precisely through this, set a limit to it and point it in the right direction. [. . .] Life can no longer fill the forms from the past that it finds around it, can no longer "cultivate" itself with them, and must break them up for the sake of new forms that are now more appropriate to it' (Landmann, 1984: 155).
46. As with Stefan George, Heidegger or Simmel, Christian von Krockow (1958/1990: 28) perceptive observation of an 'anti-bourgeois bourgeoisie' and a 'class suicide' – according to which the bourgeoisie was often most sharply analysed, fought against and despised from within its own ranks – was confirmed.

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