



FAITH IN UNICORNS: SACRALIZATION AND REDEMPTIVE DISCOURSES ON THE SYMBOLIC WORLD OF STARTUPS IN LIGHT OF WEBER

FÉ NOS UNICÓRNIOS: SACRALIZAÇÃO E DISCURSOS REDENTIVOS SOBRE O MUNDO SIMBÓLICO DAS *STARTUPS* À LUZ DE WEBER

FE EN LOS UNICORNIOS: SACRALIZACIÓN Y DISCURSOS REDENTORES EN EL MUNDO SIMBÓLICO DE LAS *STARTUPS* A LA LUZ DE WEBER

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RESUMO

Objetivo. Explorar algumas das configurações simbólicas investidas sobre as *startups*. De forma específica, buscamos (i) resgatar as bases fundamentais de perspectivas e concepções sócio-históricas weberianas sobre o capitalismo e o espírito empreendedor para, metaforicamente, (ii) analisar a prossecução de um ethos particular orientado por marcadores simbólicos sobre o mundo das *startups*, tomando como referência contextual os discursos atuais da corrente do empreendedorismo redentivo que, supostamente, emparelham-se com algumas das observações de Weber.

Design/metodologia/abordagem. A abordagem weberiana abre-nos o olhar para novas possibilidades de compreensão das *startups*, especialmente ao supor que as discussões realizadas sobre estas organizações nestas disciplinas parecem ser atravessadas pela construção de narrativas proféticas e messiânicas em torno do papel social das *startups* e das vidas dos CEOs, sendo essa uma perspectiva pouco explorada pela academia.

Resultados. Destacamos que (i) nem tudo é tão perfeito quanto parece ser no mundo das *startups*, por mais que essa corrente preconize ações que tentam refletir mais da bondade divina e a criação de uma atmosfera de celebração constante, de práticas vitoriosas e de uma fraternidade transformadora; (ii) os conceitos da corrente ligada ao empreendedorismo redentivo se aproximam das observações weberianas; e, por fim, (iii) a suspeita de que outras configurações simbólicas podem estar incorporadas nos discursos dos agentes integrantes dos ecossistemas de inovação.

Originalidade/valor. Está no fato de termos conseguido pensar as *startups* como um fenômeno social a partir da abordagem weberiana.

Palavras-chave: Empreendedorismo redentivo. Liderança carismática. Espírito empreendedor. *Startups*.

ABSTRACT

Objective. The aim of this essay is to explore some of the symbolic configurations invested on startups. Specifically, we seek to (i) rescue the fundamental bases of Weberian perspectives and socio-historical conceptions about capitalism and entrepreneurship in order to metaphorically (ii) analyze the pursuit of a particular ethos guided by symbolic markers about the world of startups, taking as contextual reference the current discourses of the redemptive entrepreneurship current that supposedly pair with some of Weber's observations.

Design/method/perspective. The Weberian approach opens our eyes to new possibilities for understanding startups, especially by supposing that the discussions held about these organizations in these disciplines seem to be crossed by the construction of prophetic and messianic narratives around the social role of startups and the lives of CEOs, this being a perspective little explored by academia.

Results. We highlight that (i) not everything is as perfect as it seems to be in the world of startups, even though this current advocates actions that try to reflect more of the divine goodness and the creation of an atmosphere of constant celebration, victorious practices, and a transforming fraternity; (ii) the concepts of the current linked to redemptive entrepreneurship are close to Weberian observations; and, finally, (iii) the suspicion that other symbolic configurations may be incorporated in the discourses of the agents integrating innovation ecosystems.

Originalidade/valor. This essay lies in the fact that we have managed to think of startups as a social phenomenon from the Weberian approach.

Keywords: Redemptive entrepreneurship. Charismatic leadership. Entrepreneurial spirit. Startups.

RESUMEN

Objetivo. Explorar algunas de las configuraciones simbólicas invertidas en las startups. Específicamente, buscamos (i) rescatar las bases fundamentales de las perspectivas weberianas y las concepciones socio-históricas sobre el capitalismo y el emprendimiento para, metafóricamente, (ii) analizar la búsqueda de un ethos particular guiado por marcadores simbólicos sobre el mundo de las startups, tomando como referencia contextual los discursos de la corriente del emprendimiento redentor que, supuestamente, maridan con algunas de las observaciones de Weber.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque. Weberiano nos abre los ojos a nuevas posibilidades de comprensión de las startups, sobre todo al suponer que las discusiones que se mantienen sobre estas organizaciones en estas disciplinas parecen estar atravesadas por la construcción de narrativas proféticas y mesiánicas en torno al rol social de las startups y la vida de los CEOs, siendo esta una perspectiva poco explorada por la academia.

Resultados. Destacamos que (i) no todo es tan perfecto como parece en el mundo de las startups, aunque esta corriente aboga por acciones que intentan reflejar más la bondad divina y la creación de un ambiente de celebración constante, de prácticas vitoriosas y de fraternidad transformadora; (ii) los conceptos de la corriente ligados al emprendimiento redentor

se acercan a las observaciones weberianas; y, finalmente, (iii) la sospecha de que otras configuraciones simbólicas pueden ser incorporadas en los discursos de los agentes que integran los ecosistemas de innovación.

Originalidad/valor. Radica en que hemos conseguido pensar en las startups como un fenómeno social desde el enfoque weberiano.

Palabras clave: Emprendimiento Redentor. Liderazgo carismático. Espíritu emprendedor. *Startups*.

1. CONTEXTUALIZATION AND INITIAL REFLECTIONS

The business models considered the most innovative and so-called disruptive gained strength in the 1990s with the emergence of communication and information technologies (Castells, 2003) and the consequent explosion of start-up type organisations in California, particularly in Silicon Valley, the birthplace of large technology companies such as Amazon, Facebook, Google, Uber, Airbnb, Netflix and WhatsApp among others. The accelerated and globally scalable growth of these companies has broadened the interest of different institutional and business agents around the startups in the world, namely, the so-called "innovation ecosystems"ⁱⁱ. We have noticed the construction of some narratives with a symbolic appeal about the creation of startups in garages to be the next unicornsⁱⁱⁱ, the (re)production of hard and homogenizing trajectories of leaders considered "successful" and the valorization of the performances of startupperes (Maia, 2019) - who are the main creators of startups - as entrepreneurs of themselves and guided by their own performance, reinforcing the neoliberal logic that holds the subject responsible for the success or failure of the business (Mazzucato, 2014; 2020).

Entrepreneurship through these organizations has received special attention from economics, management, politics, and technology, but has been little studied from the social and sociological perspectives. This is where we intend to contribute to the production of knowledge about this phenomenon, especially bearing in mind that the discussions that take place in these disciplines seem to be marked by the construction of prophetic and messianic narratives around the social role of startups and the lives of CEOs. In "Make it happen: the politics of the search for self-actualization in startups in Brazil and the UK", Faria (2020) identifies the construction of symbolic and prophetic narratives^{iv} around these organizations that coexist in an atmosphere of constant celebration and that have success tied to the willpower of their idealizers, reflected in what seems to be the exercise of a particular ethos, largely ordered by an ethic of positivity, collaboration, mysticism and the profusion of catchphrases, such as "it will work out", "there's no going back from the rocket", "making money above all". The glamorization of cultural and organizational practices of startups established as unicorns also contributes to the symbolic and social reproduction of homogenizing narratives about the lives of leaders and organizations considered "successful" (Lima & Ferreira, 2022).

There are, however, indications that these current dynamics carry aspects previously perceived in the very history of the development of capitalism and entrepreneurship, marking our starting point and analytical cut-out for the reflection and construction of this essay on some of the aspects of the symbolic world of startups. In a specific way, the idea of this essay was evidenced during the process of conducting wider, state-of-the-art research on the phenomenon of startups, in which we found symbolic discourses loaded with religious markers, in addition to the authors' experiences with startups and startupperes^v. For us, something symbolic may be "a term, a name or even an image that may be familiar to us in everyday life, although it has special connotations beyond its evident meaning [...]. It is symbolic when it implies something beyond its manifest and immediate meaning" (Jung, 2002, p. 20).

Still on the relevance of entrepreneurial practices in the agendas of organizational, economic, and technological researchers compared to the interests of sociologists, in Brazil, to exemplify this idea, a search for the terms "sociology" AND "entrepreneurship" in the Capes journal database returned a total of 285 (two hundred and eighty-five) articles published in the last five years, from 2017 to 2021, and an even smaller number in the specific context of startups. We also conducted the same search on the Google Scholar and Scielo databases in order to understand this same contextual relationship in English publications from 2017 to 2021. We searched on the terms "sociology" AND "entrepreneurship" in the titles and abstracts of articles, retrieving, in the case of Google Scholar, a total of 19 (nineteen) publications and, in the case of Scielo, a total of 4 (four) published articles. None of these were focused on the of startups in the context of religious markers. In the same databases, we searched on the terms "Weber" OR "Weberian" AND "Startups", retrieving the article "HOW DO START-UPS GROW? Performances and discourses of entrepreneurs seeking capital", by author Marcel Maggion Maia, which was used as one of the key references of this essay.

This apparent multidisciplinary elasticity and low sociological production on the phenomenon of startups beyond organizational and economic issues, for example, is what motivated us to produce this theoretical essay and raise some

perspectives and socio-historical conceptions of works considered classics in the social sciences, in this case, Weber, to reflect, albeit metaphorically, on the symbolic world of startups as though we were inside an experiential and reflective workshop of unlikely connections, especially given that it is a contemporary phenomenon (Bertero, 2011).

This research was conducted and guided with the main objective of exploring some of the symbolic configurations invested in startups. Specifically, we sought to (i) rescue the fundamental bases of Weberian perspectives and socio-historical conceptions on capitalism and entrepreneurship, in order to metaphorically (ii) analyze the pursuit of a particular ethos guided by symbolic markers on the world of startups, taking as a contextual reference the current discourses of redemptive entrepreneurship, a stream of thought that supposedly corroborates some of Weber's observations. We also emphasize that the construction of this theoretical essay moves away from the common form of scientific production, considered more positivist, i.e., we assume the freedom to create an aesthetic of our own in this essay, embroidering threads of improbable connections between such a current theme, from the Weberian historical-theoretical base.

Returning to the discourses of redemptive entrepreneurship, advocates argue that the future of organizations and entrepreneurial culture depends on the next generation of more conscious entrepreneurs, attracting future and potential startupper through the symbolic-religious bias as a necessary practice for the sustainability of business and society (Praxis, 2017). It makes sense, then, to seek in Weber some of his main observations about work ethics, charismatic leadership, and entrepreneurial spirit, as this will help us understand some of the symbolic constructions of startups today.

The so-called approach with Weberian works is configured for the world of organizations as an interdisciplinary place of transit and production of critical-reflective knowledge, but, to a large extent, practical, since the author was dedicated to understanding work ethics, charismatic leadership, entrepreneurship, and the very rationality of work. We intend to advance in terms of interdisciplinary boundaries within organizational studies and individuals, alerting researchers to the importance of sociological investigation of the phenomena, considering its complexities, and subjectivities and, also, to capture other aspects that go beyond the limits of the organizations themselves, such as the economy or technology. As mentioned above, the choice of Weber's works is one of the investigative opportunities to reflect, albeit metaphorically, to further explore and to produce knowledge about startups from what we identify as practices and discourses guided by symbolic markers in contemporary times.

As much as Weber has suppressed from his analyses the understanding of the capitalist prelude - the protopitalist phase - we consider, especially for the development of this essay, what the author terms in his book "The Protestant ethic...". This deals with economic conduct and its religious roots in a class perspective, especially in Germany, and associates the economic and social development of the modern world with Protestantism, these being the main connections of interest to us. For Weber, the Protestant faith and ethics of the faithful contributed to the development of capitalism and an entrepreneurial spirit that drove the Western economy, particularly in relation to attitudes of devotion to work in affection to the religious order. In this sense, to what extent do redemptive discourses retain the action and entrepreneurial spirit ordered by a religious ethic - as observed by Weber? To what extent do they impact the idealised constructions of the symbolic world of startups? These are questions that lead us to consider what seems to be the pursuit of Weberian thought through the discourses of an ideological current linked to a specific type of "doing-entrepreneurship", namely the redemptive one, figuring in its basis the salvation of the faithful, whose vocation is to preserve a religious ethic in business, and the transformation of individual and social realities (Praxis, 2017). This approach seems to reinforce the idealisations of the world of startups, guided, for example, by success, financial prosperity, the constant celebration of positivity that they will win in the entrepreneurial journey, the sharing of information, collaboration as a general rule, and the glamorisation of their practices.

Considering the issues discussed in this brief introductory note, this theoretical essay is organized, firstly, around reflections and articulations between what Weber discussed in his major works (1999; 2001; 2008; 2011; 2013) on the topics of work ethics, charismatic leadership and the entrepreneurial spirit that shaped entrepreneurial practices; the vocational logic that, according to God's designs, guided the faithful in the acceptance of, and devotion of work activities; and the religious atmosphere that seemed to order the work of the subjects of his time. As a secondary theme, and transported to the present context, the essay presents the redemptive discourses that seem to mobilize "new believers" into a specific way of "doing-entrepreneurship" that preserves a particular ethos ordered by an ethic of positivity, collaboration, mysticism, and the profusion of catchphrases in business. At the same time, it seems to contribute to the idealization of the symbolic world of startups. Finally, it displays three reflective syntheses that may be transformed into assumptions for future research.

2. WEAVING PATHS ON WORK ETHIC AND ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT IN WEBER

According to Max Weber ([1905]2013)^{vi}, the increase in activities linked to loans of all kinds, maritime and war financing, piracy, contracts, and large building works, awakened the world to economic practices not seen until the sixteenth century, and today considered entrepreneurial. Colonial entrepreneurs who used the power of their activities to exploit land and slave labour were considered "adventurers", shaping a type of capitalism increasingly involved with acquisitions, speculation, profiteering, fighting, and exploitation. But Weber preferred to think of capitalism not only from the economic point of view, in terms of the drive for acquisition, the earning of the greatest amount of money, or the "pursuit of profit and eternally renewed profit" ([1905]2013, p. 17). He also sought to understand this system from a perspective of class and religious affiliation, beginning by identifying that in Germany, most of the "business leaders and holders of capital, as well as the workers with the highest levels of qualification, and the personnel of modern enterprises", were Protestants, justifying his interest in this social phenomenon ([1905]2013, p. 33).

Taking a deeper look, Weber perceived these same movements in other contexts, such as among the Polish, where the mental and spiritual peculiarities absorbed by the faithful through religious education also determined their professional and career choices. The author highlights that the greater number of Protestant-faithful in relation to Catholics in technical occupations in factories was due to the obedience, of the former, to a divine vocation to labour activity and of the latter, to a greater interest in humanistic, voluntary, and charismatic activities. Weber argues that it was these same Protestant-faithful who first "presented a special tendency to the development of an economic rationalism" ([1905]2013, p. 37), indicating "a very peculiar form of capitalism which has not appeared anywhere else: the rational capitalist organization of [formally] free labour" ([1905]2013, p. 20), notably on the plantations and in the fiefs with the specialisation of the lordly workshops, organised domestic work and the separation of what was understood about business and private life, including organizing the workplace and the residence from a spatial perspective. It is worth emphasizing here that we do not intend to raise suspicions about the ideological-religious beliefs in any of the contexts discussed, but to advance in terms of the influences of their practices on this apparent organisation of the world of life by religious order and design.

We allow ourselves, then, to be affected by Weberian notions of a moral spirit, or ethos, which largely justifies the rationalisation of labour in the specific context in which the author produced his work and, in the same way, what he discussed concerning the existence of practices and experiences of an entrepreneurial spirit that reacted to economic traditionalism. Weber sought to move away from definitions that were too abstract, using references from Benjamin Franklin to interpret the bases of the "spirit of organized and rational capitalism", such as: "remember that time is money"; "money can generate money"; "the good payer will always have credit", "the more of him there is, the more he produces"; "he who spends [...]"; "he who wastes in idleness [...]"; "he who wastes his time [...]" ([1905]2013, p. 53, 54). For him, Franklin's precepts are like portraits of the morality of workers in their trades, and he views, as the main commandment of this entrepreneurial spirit, hard work, the exhaustion of workers' energies to earn as much money as possible, and reinvesting in the enterprises to produce more profit.

Although the theme of entrepreneurship is not central to Weber's investigations, it is through his ability to consider the complexities, the connections, and the multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon that we are able to identify, with a certain emphasis, the seductive figure of the capitalist who earned and reinvested most of his money to accelerate the growth of his company. The logic of work for work's sake is valid and, it seems, the modern subject continues to carry these characteristics into the business world, combining economic rationality with a spirit that privileges his own interests to achieve the success of his enterprises. In this sense, we are led to proceed by Weberian conceptual tensions regarding modern capitalism and what is thought of this logic of work; that it produces only what is necessary for itself, but privileges the production of capital for the progress of business and the increase of profits (Santiago, 2009; Martes, 2010).

In this context, Weber went into some detail when discussing other aspects linked to this way of life based on the religious ethics of this ideal type of capitalist entrepreneur who, despite surpassing the businesses considered traditional and having success as a focus,

"is not related [only] to those more or less refined upstarts. He avoids ostentation and unnecessary expenditure, as well as the conscious enjoyment of his power, and is embarrassed by the external signs of social recognition he receives. His mode of life is, in other words, commonly, and we must investigate the historical significance of such an important fact, distinguished by a certain ascetic tendency, in the way we quoted earlier [...] He derives nothing for himself from his wealth, except the irrational sense of having done his duty" ([1905]2013, p. 72).

This perspective makes even more sense if we consider that the capitalist system requires this devotion to work, to keep producing more profit. Hence, the only "way of life acceptable to God was not to overcome worldly morality, [...] but only by fulfilling the obligations imposed on the individual by his position in the world. That was his vocation" ([1905]2013, p. 96). The Protestantism of the time motivated a work ethic based on rational, methodical, regimented life, which denied worldly feelings and carnal passions and defended work as the source of dignity of existence, work for work's sake, career as a duty and excellence of work activities as a justification of their own salvation.

The actions of these workers were directed towards one main end: eternal salvation, based on a "penitent humility and faithful belief in the word of God and the sacraments" ([1905]2013, p. 133). This deeply rationalised action, linked to the experiences of subjects who should, obligatorily, follow their vocational plans and fulfil what was determined to them, mobilised some of the subversive practices in this disenchanting world of "elimination of magic as a means of salvation" ([1905]2013, p. 145), where many found themselves facing a hard reality to be overcome. A way of life stimulated and guided by the advance of bureaucratization, predictability, and control of their social relations, symbolically within an existential framework little heterogeneous, an iron cage, as the author suggests, characterizing this disenchantment of the world from practices that inhibited their creative capacities and desires, sometimes, silenced.

It is here where we identify other contextual nodes between Weber and the idea of redemptive entrepreneurship, namely, the apparent "double condition" of the narratives of those who advocated this approach. Firstly, we start from what seems to be the pursuit of Weberian thought about the entrepreneurial action of the subject involved and concerned with meeting the vocational designs of a work guided by fraternity, divinity and, especially, the transformation of individual and social contexts through markedly symbolic-religious paths in business. Secondly, we suppose that the redemptive discourses can function as "anti-narratives" about some of the neoliberal precepts that defend the subject of performance and that produce for itself, starting from one of the main premises of this current, which is to put the interests of others before one's own, and the execution of a type of entrepreneurship guided by a religious and not only economic ethics (Praxis, 2017).

In any case, the redemptive ideal seems to make available to subjects a new form of salvation of the self, the other, and the world, through a labour prescription based on a salvationist religious ordering in the context of entrepreneurship. Besides its apparent contributions to the idealization of the symbolic world of startups, this approach also seems to approach new forms of capitalism in contemporary society (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2009; Sennett, 2019), as well as what Henrekson et al. (2010) Shane (2009) observed about the role of the state that tends to stimulate the mass creation of startups as a salvation for the economic and social recovery of a region, without considering aspects less guided by the opportunity-necessity logic that circumscribes entrepreneurship (Williams & Williams, 2014). Shane (2009) further suggests that considering startups as a form of economic and social salvation, without weighing other criteria, can lead to flawed public policies and the consequent misuse of public resources.

2.1 A brief reflection on Weberian vocational logic

Weber suggests that it was only after Luther's biblical translation and interpretations that labor was taken up by religious and vocational conceptions, becoming, to a large extent, a divine calling that, in these terms, was more apparent among Protestants than among Catholics or those of other religions. For Weber, this domestication of the worker's life as a substantial condition of all those who followed his vocational plan - or at least of those who respected it to the letter - was evident, overvaluing the "fulfilment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form that the morality of individuals could assume" ([1905]2013, p. 96), that is, attributing a religious perspective to the most everyday activities of life. In this sense, Weber states that:

"work within the worldly vocation appears to him as the outward expression of brotherly love. This he proves by the observation that the division of labour forces each individual to work for the others. [...] the performance of worldly duty is under all circumstances the only way of life acceptable to God. This alone is God's will, [...] and thus every legitimate profession has equal value in God's eyes" ([1905]2013, p. 97).

It was the duty of the faithful, according to the author, to accept what was predestined to them, reflecting in actions of conformism and permanence in their labour occupations. Conversely, it was the failure of the faithful to fully take on board this work ethic that mobilized them to value material gain beyond their personal needs as they approached worldly pleasures.

To deal with such temptations, Weber began to observe practices with strong appeal to the elements of "grace" and "providence" to combat such pleasures considered corruptible. What Protestantism of the time advocated, according to the author, was that "the individual should remain once and for all in the position and profession in which God had placed him, and should restrict his worldly activity within the limits imposed by his established position in life" ([1905]2013, p. 100), since simple obedience would result in the provision of his needs. It was not necessary to corrupt his actions to attain divine grace; only conformation and obedience were expected.

This was a logic that contributed to creating a motivational and inspirational spirit for entrepreneurship. Thus, Weber revealed that capitalism, during the period of the Industrial Revolution, believed in work linked to the secular asceticism of Protestantism. To what extent is it not this same "spirit" that is advocated, stimulated, and promoted from a religious point of view?

2.2 Charismatic messianic journeys: the ancient gods return to their graves and return as unicorns in contemporary times

In the ancient world, when it had not yet been disenchanted of its gods and demons, the different entities fought among themselves. These gods and their eternal struggles decided the destiny of men, women, peoples, and nations. In the current disenchanted world, the redemptive approach considers that the future of organisations and entrepreneurial culture, especially in relation to startups, does not depend on the bonanza or the perversity of deities, but solely on the actions of the next generation of entrepreneurs. Although now disenchanted and devoid of mystical practices, yet following a similar pattern of behaviour, the prophetic and redemptive discourses on startups are not only directed to the individual or post-life salvation of the entrepreneur, but to the redemption of practical material life (Weber, 2011).

The ancient gods have abandoned their temples and returned to their tombs and, in the form of charismatic powers, men and women of modernity reach the field of entrepreneurial experiences in a spectacular way, and seem to build messianic journeys guided by success. Despite the rationalization, intellectualization and, above all, the disenchantment of the world, as suggested by Weber (2011), the dynamics around startups seem to build businesses that sacralize values, behaviours, and sublime ideals that can serve as an example for all those who strive to reach the Olympus or, in this case, the valley of unicorns. These companies seek to invent new styles of entrepreneurship - in a kind of monumental art -, which does not intellectually manufacture new religions, but new and authentic magical organizational formulas, true "economic prophecies" (Weber, 2011).

These "prophecies" that fall upon the trajectories of startupper appear to result in the creation of "sects of fanatics" that guide the destiny of certain groups of startups. It is a fanaticism that (re)produces coordinated discourses intended to guide startupper, unconditionally, towards entrepreneurial success. These (re)productions are reflected in constant and habitual publicizations of the trajectories of the main leaders and exponents of success stories; entrepreneurs who enjoy prestige and certain attributes that prevent any counterposition or questioning of such prophecies. And the contemporary media market seems to have found, in these trajectories considered "successful", a way to build and stimulate the imaginary of startupper by a socially idealized entrepreneurial world. Netflix, for example, provides films and series that tell the stories of entrepreneurs of the largest companies linked to the world of startups, such as Apple and Steve Jobs, its main creator; Facebook and the strategies and cunning of Mark Zuckerberg; and Microsoft through the biography of Bill Gates' life. Recently, the Brazilian television channel CNN launched a series entitled "Unicorns of Brazil", presenting an overview of the Brazilian context that encompasses more than 14,000 startups, in a context that has seen turnover of almost R\$ 20 billion of investments (Mundo Rh, 2021).

How does the mediatization and commodification of these stories considered "successful" impact on startupper? To what extent do these stories represent the diverse realities of startup entrepreneurs? How do they see the trajectories of these leaders, who seem to gather the magic formulae for success? These are some questions that arise out of this brief reflection and from a search of startupper, who seem to be constantly waiting for new prophet-guides and new saviors to illuminate their entrepreneurial trajectories (Weber, 2011). In the likely situations of entrepreneurial difficulties, it is these "natural" leaders who can offer specific "physical" and "spiritual" gifts to startupper for the salvation of themselves, others, and the world, correlating psychic, political, and economic categories (Weber, 1999).

Within this perspective, some agents integrating the so-called innovation ecosystems seem to be carriers of this charisma, especially the leaders, who bring together such magic formulas for the success of their businesses. The defenders of the redemptive ideal also seem to carry aspects of this charismatic leadership, and come close to what Weber discusses when he states:

"the bearer of charisma assumes the tasks he considers appropriate and demands obedience and adherence by virtue of his mission. Whether he finds them or not depends on success. If those to whom he feels sent do not recognize his mission, his demand fails. If they do, he is their master insofar as he knows how to maintain their recognition by means of "proofs". But, in this case, he does not deduce his 'right' from their will, in the manner of an election; on the contrary, the recognition of the charismatically qualified person is the duty of those to whom his mission is directed" (Weber, 1999, p. 325).

Thus, what determines charisma are not orders external to the world of startups, but a determination that occurs through internal factors, qualitative characteristics of the mission, and the power of its bearer. In this sense, startups organized and idealized by redemptive entrepreneurship, from the Weberian perspective, seem to have a purely charismatic authority for the institution of a world-changing business. The bearers of this charisma possess the freedom to propose new and different strategies, especially guided by religious ordination and designs, to try to introduce organizational models that, above all, seek to modify individual and social contexts in contemporaneity (Praxis, 2017).

3. POSSIBLE ARTICULATIONS BETWEEN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTION OF THE REDEMPTIVE IDEAL AND THE SYMBOLIC (RE)PRODUCTIONS OF THE WORLD OF STARTUPS

Examining the origins of redemptive entrepreneurship leads us to formulate some questions that seem to be central to its advocates, such as: What is the purpose of those who decide to undertake entrepreneurship? What guides them? For whose sake is entrepreneurial energy mobilised? For oneself? For others? It has become increasingly common to idealise businesses guided by 'purpose', but fundamentally, the redemptive approach to entrepreneurship seems to invest in narratives guided by a symbolic-religious ordering that seeks to reflect more of the divine goodness in entrepreneurial actions and even as a device of love, service, and transformation of individual and social realities of the world (Praxis, 2017). Its proponents claim that unbounded self-interest is reprehensible and can be destructive for both the entrepreneur and society, corresponding to the logic presented by Weber ([1905]2013) relating to the brotherly love of work focused on others, and the notions of "grace" and "providence" regarding the fulfilment of a supposed vocational plan, and justice in ensuring that the personal needs of workers are met and provided for.

The eagerness of the faithful followers of the redemptive current to transform the world is embodied in such a way and defended with such fervour that they seem to embark on messianic narratives of recruiting new adherents, attempting to combat some of the business practices that are condemnable to them. They respond to worldly entrepreneurial narratives^{vii} with ingenuity, creativity, and fraternity for the sake of others, insisting that the purpose of the wealth of entrepreneurship must be to serve the interests of others rather than their own. Weber ([1905]2013, p. 96) brought this same discussion, observing a "work within the worldly vocation which appears to him as the outward expression of brotherly love, [...] the division of labour forces each individual to work for others" out of the love one should have for one's fellow man.

In this sense, Praxis (2017) remarks on the increase in the number of young people interested in startup-type organizations, and argues that a new generation of entrepreneurs, one that is much more sensitive to social and environmental issues, is no longer being shaped by the promises of riches, but by the social reputation caused by the impacts of their businesses. We agree with the idea that young people, in general, are more aware and are acquiring more sustainable habits in their personal and business practices and ways of life, but we question whether this measure overcomes, as Praxis (2017) suggests, the "race" for money when it comes to thinking of starting a new business. If it were so, to what extent would discourses such as those uttered by supporters of the redemptive ideal fail to reinforce the (re)production of symbolic narratives about the world of startups and startupper?

The research of Pires (2021), Faria (2020), Maia (2019) and Shane (2009) reveals aspects of a climate of constant celebration among startups, of performances built to achieve defined goals, of catchphrases uttered by leaders and companies mediated as "successful", of the dissemination of narratives and trajectories of the great entrepreneurs of startups as holders of magic formulas for success, of a particular aesthetic that adorns the so-called collaborative and fun spaces. Analogously to Weber ([1905]2013), it is possible to perceive the renewal of a type of contemporary entrepreneurial spirit inserted in a prophetic context, and of constant celebration among startupper who, in the case of the redemptive approach, preserve moral and symbolic principles rooted in religious traditions that seem to be reflected in the great contemporary events for startups, such as the Web Summit, the Startup Olé, the Case Startup Summit^{viii}, and many others. It is through events like these that we can perceive the construction and incorporation of a symbolic atmosphere, guided by success through hard work, the unicorn race, and other symbolic configurations.

We assume that it is not necessary to explicitly carry religious markers – such as the redemptive approach - to reproduce some of the main actions pointed out so far. The events cited in the previous paragraph, for example, do not present any kind of religious ideology in their publicized pieces to be characterized as supporters of the redemptive ideal. Nevertheless, they end up reproducing some of the practices perceived by the symbolic-religious approach in question. Thus, to what extent is the exercise of a particular ethos, ordered by an ethic of positivity, collaboration, mysticism, and a profusion of catchphrases, consciously incorporated into the daily practices of the different agents involved in innovation ecosystems? How do they contribute to the symbolic constructions and idealizations about the world of startups? These questions also point to the existence of other dynamics and symbolic configurations in the discourses of the different agents that are part of innovation ecosystems, and that can be explored in the field.

The redemptive approach also suggests that entrepreneur must seek to balance his ambitions, desires, efforts, and contentment, only then to achieve what they think about success. This ethos seems to run contrary to the prevailing economic cultures, as it is more interested in promoting the building of businesses not as a source of power and wealth, but as a device for renewing a spirit that puts the interests of others ahead of its own, (re)creating its own charismatic leaders who, to a large extent, differ from those who primarily seek financial profit. Entrepreneurship, for proponents of the redemptive approach, is one of the divine vocations that needs to be renewed in the current context, to reflect more of the divine goodness, as Weber ([1905]2013) observed regarding religious ordination on the lifestyles and entrepreneurial actions of the faithful of his time.

Ideologically, despite holding precepts that appear to contradict those of the prevailing economic cultures - such as not overvaluing profit and the image of the performance subject, and belief in "providence" and "grace" as a practical action for business success -, the supporters of the redemptive approach seem to reinforce the idealization and the (re)production of a symbolic world that falls upon startups and startupper. They also substantiate this prophetic atmosphere of constant celebration built by other narratives, and stimulate the image of the current entrepreneurial spirit based on the logic that "everything is possible, you just have to believe^{ix}". Thus, we presuppose that there is an apparent conceptual tension that brings redemptive entrepreneurship closer to prosperity theology - of the sacralization of values, the daily practices of the company, and the discourses of faith in search of what they think about success and the transformation of the world -, although it is far from the main aspect that advocates material wealth as a divine guarantee for all believers. The narrowing of the gap is created by a mystical, almost religious atmosphere, and the multiple possibilities available for achieving success.

4. CONSIDERATIONS ON ALL THE ABOVE

Discussing what we call reflective syntheses, it is noted that little has been theorized and discussed in the scientific field about the redemptive ideal of entrepreneurship, as reflected in the lack of academic production on this phenomenon. Despite this, we can perceive some of the practices of this approach incorporated, consciously, in other forms of organizations of different agents of innovation ecosystems and that end up contributing to the symbolic constructions and idealizations about the world of startups. The connections thought and developed so far, the reflexivity about the multiple scenarios that took the Weberian context as a starting point, and the discoveries throughout the writing process, allow us to sketch three reflexive syntheses that organize the field of possibilities of this theoretical essay. To do so, we summarize our main objective, set out at the beginning of this essay: to explore some of the symbolic configurations invested in startups. Specifically, we seek to (i) bring out the fundamental bases of Weberian perspectives and socio-historical conceptions of capitalism and entrepreneurship in order to, metaphorically (ii) analyse the pursuit of a particular ethos guided by symbolic markers in the world of startups. We also highlight our interest in searching in Weber's works, especially "The Protestant Ethic...", for some of his main observations about work ethics, charismatic leadership, and entrepreneurial spirit, seeking, albeit metaphorically, to understand the actions and constructions (re)produced by redemptive discourses about the symbolic world of startups in contemporaneity.

Our intention is not to create ideological disputes or question the beliefs of those who identify with redemptive entrepreneurship, but to perceive, in the light of Weberian thought, the margins for the exercise of association, reflection, articulation, and understanding of social phenomena in different historical contexts. Therefore, as a first reflexive synthesis, we highlight that not everything is as perfect as it appears to be in the world of startups. Although this ideal advocates actions that seek to reflect more of the divine goodness and the creation of an atmosphere of constant celebration, victorious practices, and a transforming fraternity, startups are set in an economic scenario of disputes and increasingly competitive markets. Ideologically, redemptive entrepreneurs may even preserve and insert some of these symbolic-religious concepts in the cultural and organisational practices of startups, but it is likely that they need to balance a plurality of activities in their daily lives, led by the harsh and less glamorised realities of those that are mediated. Thus, to what

extent does this redemptive approach contribute to the impacts on the subjectivities of entrepreneurs, for example, in terms of anxiety, pleasure-suffering, sickness, burnout, leisure, social gatherings, and family practices? These are questions that arise and that can be explored in the field.

As a second reflective synthesis, and closely related to the first, the concepts of the ideal of redemptive entrepreneurship are fundamentally close to Weberian observations about the pre-modern subject who, in that context, defended the vocational plan and religious ordination over work. This seems to reveal a perpetuation of the religious influence on personal and working lifestyles, and its cultural force that seems to inspire the new generation of entrepreneurs, more sensitive to social and environmental issues, to model innovative businesses, especially through startups, from other symbolic-ideological perspectives. The renewal of the Weberian entrepreneurial spirit is what also seems to contribute to the (re)production of these organizations as an ideal type, reflecting a particularized communication full of symbolic and, in many cases, religious terms, slang, and expressions. Some examples are “angels” to refer to potential financial investors; “valley of death” - a critical period in the development of the startup; “unicorn” - a business worth over one billion dollars; “zone to win” – a methodology for implementing innovative practices; “innovation ecosystem” - agents that come together to develop innovative businesses; “smart money” - money invested intelligently; “incubator” - the host environment, “management support” – mentors and charismatic guides; and “seed money” - seed investment that is fundamental to the beginning of a startup, among others.

Finally, the third reflexive synthesis is a suspicion that, like redemptive entrepreneurship, other symbolic configurations - value chains, representations, and attitudes towards entrepreneurship - may be incorporated in the discourses of the different agents that make up innovation ecosystems. Sometimes without being aware of it, they begin to collaborate with the (re)production of symbolic and prophetic narratives about startups, reinforcing the construction of an ideal world in which their entrepreneurs seek, above all, visibility and prominence in the race of the unicorns, creating an atmosphere of veiled competition in an organizational universe that is assumed to be essentially collaborative and cooperative. This may cause some interpretative confusion, as they approach other symbolic-religious doctrines that advocate the search and overvaluation of wealth for themselves. To what extent do the discourses of the supporters of redemptive entrepreneurship depart from the ideological field? Do their entrepreneurs effectively implement the precepts of this current in the daily practices of their innovative and transformative businesses? These are other questions that can be explored through field research.

The production of this essay sought to set out some of the ideas and connections between different approaches, and the Weberian conceptual rescue, considered one of the main classics of the social sciences, to metaphorically reflect on some of the most particular aspects of redemptive entrepreneurship in terms of the constructions and (re)productions invested on the symbolic world of startups. The questions that emerge throughout this paper, especially in the last section dealing with reflective syntheses, are possible indications for future research. Methodologically, we hope to stimulate the production of creative, authorial, and critical-reflective theoretical essays. We also hope to arouse curiosity and investigative interest about the world of startups, especially in terms of practices that carry symbolic-religious markers, and we suggest that this analysis be expanded from a deeper contextualization about neoliberal capitalism, entrepreneurship, and other forms of symbolic (re)productions about the world of startups.

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ⁱ Startups are innovative, lean, repeatable and scalable business models, considered, according to what we have identified, as one of the main forms of entrepreneurship today. Increasingly, the possibility of becoming an entrepreneur by opening a startup has crossed the imaginary of the subjects that initiate in this world.

ⁱⁱ "Innovation ecosystems" are understood here as networks of social relations marked by relations of strength and power among their different institutional and individual agents. I propose to move forward in terms of the sociological problematization of a term widely used by organizations to identify and understand other dynamics established around startups and startupper. The term "innovation ecosystem" can also be identified as an "innovation environment", characterizing a set of different agents that come together to promote and support innovation and entrepreneurship, notably through startups. It was the American James Moore (1993) who first developed and pushed the idea of "ecosystem" in the business field, by arguing that companies do not act in isolation, but in associative and cooperative blocks with common goals, such as the creation of new products, innovative services, and profit generation. I also emphasize that the production of this essay arose from a larger research project for a doctoral thesis (in progress) that aims to pursue innovation ecosystems from the paths of startupper, from a critical-reflexive perspective on some metaphors, often fallacious, that seem to idealize a world of success and glamorization of startups.

ⁱⁱⁱ A unicorn startup has a market price evaluation of over one billion dollars. This term was coined in 2013 by Aileen Lee, and currently occupies the imagination of most startupper.

^{iv} Faria (2020, p. 02) argues that startups are considered businesses constituted in a perspective of "salvationist narratives" and prophetic, exalting a scenario of multiple achievements.

^v Besides "researching about", one of the authors also "works with" startups and contributed his experiences and practical experiences, enriching this essay with other perspectives.

^{vi} The main work by Max Weber (1864-1920) adopted for the construction of this essay, and especially this section, is *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, published in 1905 in the German journal *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft*. The chosen edition was

translated by Mário Moraes and published in 2013 by the São Paulo publisher Martin Claret. The "non-references" in the paragraphs make mention of it, otherwise they show the citations to Weber's other works catalogued in the last section of the essay.

^{vii} According to the religious faithful, practices that have no religious bias or that do not represent religious values in everyday actions.

^{viii} These three events take place every year: the Web Summit is considered the biggest technology and entrepreneurship event in the world, and takes place in Portugal; Startup Olé promoted by the University of Salamanca, in Spain; and Case Startup Summit is an amalgamation of two great events and is considered the biggest online entrepreneurship event in Latin America.

^{ix} Alluding to some of the prophetic and salvationist speeches that seem to figure in the daily lives of startup entrepreneurs.