

For example, his retreat into a view that assumes an unambiguous separation between the scientist and society in order to justify a value-neutral, objective view of science is contradicted by Durkheim's insistence on the social formation of consciousness. If the culture of a society is shaped by its social structure, then doesn't this hold true for the sociologies as well? As we have seen, Durkheim's ideas about social knowledge, social evolution, and modernity look suspiciously like the social values and ideas of a modern, middle class, liberal Frenchman.

His moral vision bursts into center stage in his last great work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* [12]. Durkheim attempted to explain the origin and nature of religion. His thesis, to simplify enormously, was that religious beliefs are really symbolic ways of understanding the power of society to fashion the individual; religious rituals are interpreted as socially integrating practices. Prior to the advent of the Enlightenment, humankind lacked the power of reason to grasp that the supernatural and spiritual forces that they assumed governed human affairs were social forces (e.g., the division of labor, cultural beliefs, law). Modern science destroys this illusion; science forces humanity to confront a reality governed by human and natural forces. In particular, sociology steps forward as the successor to religious social beliefs and ethics. The sociologist occupies the social role previously held by shamans, prophets, and priests. Clearly, there are strong echoes of Comte's fusion of sociology and religion. Durkheim seems to open up the possibility that, by uncovering the true reality of society as a transcendent power productive of human life in the sense of giving our lives coherence and purpose, sociology may become the centerpiece of a religious cult.

Durkheim inherited a dilemma: how to make science both a medium of pure truth and yet socially useful. A science of society too detached from social problems seemed pointless; a science too close to public conflicts was in danger of losing its moral authority by becoming a mere ideology. Durkheim was not alone in wrestling with this problem; his German counterpart, Max Weber, seemed at times preoccupied with the blurring of the lines between science, truth, and values.

Stefan Sedman 'Conducted Knowledge' (1991, Bunka: Oxford)

Max Weber

Weber shared with his French contemporary the view that the period between 1890 and World War I was crucial in determining the fate of modern liberalism. In both France and Germany, industrialization, national unification and bureaucratization, the formation of a secular educational system, the establishment of constitutional government, and the rule of

law marked the triumph of modernization. While Durkheim and Weber were convinced that social modernization promoted a liberal political society, they were aware of its illiberal potential. For example, a centralized bureaucratic state may be necessary for economic development and national security, but it threatens to become a new type of despotic rule. In contrast to many liberals, Weber did not believe that economic modernization automatically translated into social and political liberalization. Whereas in England and the United States, a liberal political culture accompanied industrial capitalist development, German industrialization coexisted with a feudal-like social and political culture. Despite the phenomenal success of the German economy in the second half of the nineteenth century, social and political power remained in the hands of a feudal-styled class of Prussian landowners called the "Junkers."

Germany was unified as a result of the iron will of Bismarck who made the Prussian state into the dominant national force. Prussia was, moreover, ruled by the Junkers. They were a landed aristocracy who aggressively supported nationalistic and militaristic values. Unlike in France and England where capitalist development was paralleled by the economic and political decline of the landed aristocracy, the Junker class adapted either becoming successful capitalists, or, where they lost economic power, they managed to retain their social and political authority. If the Junkers didn't dominate Germany in a directly political way, their social and economic power allowed them to imprint on society their bellicose nationalism, economic protectionism, support of church orthodoxy, and anti-labor sentiment. Prussian Junkers, with the support of a religious and a humanistic elite deeply hostile to Enlightenment values, exercised considerable political authority in Germany through World War I.

Weber came of age in a Germany that was deeply divided. The conflicts between the defenders of modernization and its detractors nostalgically looked backward. Moreover, defenders of social modernization split into hostile camps. There were individualistic liberals who advocated a free market system, conservative nationalists who backed an activist state that could weave together economic development and military national strength, and revolutionary socialists who repudiated both capitalism and nationalism. These ideological divisions expressed deep-seated antagonisms between the middle class, the landed aristocracy, and the working class. The similarity with Durkheim's France is striking except – and this is a big exception – that there was no German counterpart to the Third French Republic. There was, in fact, no German counterpart to the French Revolution or to the English or American revolutions; there was no middle class revolution in Germany. Although the German middle class prospered, it did not challenge the social and political power of the

Junkers. Instead of becoming a political force mobilized to overthrow Junker rule, the German middle classes aped their conservative, nationalistic values.

Whereas Marx, a generation earlier, surrendered any hope of the middle class becoming a progressive force in Germany, Weber did not. Weber was convinced that only the middle classes had the social authority and resources to deal the death blow to the Junkers. However, Weber did not imagine that middle class rule would bring about inexorable social progress. It is not that Weber put his social faith in the working class; he did not. Rather, Weber never fully bought into the social faith of the Enlightenment. Although he was committed to many Enlightenment values, Weber never abandoned some counter-Enlightenment ideas. Curiously, he held onto more of the conservative nationalism of the Junker class than he realized. Whatever hopes he harbored for human progress were tempered by a streak of pessimism and *realpolitik* he imbibed from the Prussian, Lutheran culture that he otherwise detested. Lacking in Weber is the millennial hope we observed in the culture of the Enlightenment, from Voltaire to Marx and Durkheim. Weber's social vision blends a championing of individualism with an equally passionate commitment to nationalism.

Puritanism and the making of the middle class

The future of Germany was tied to the destiny of the middle class. Weber believed that only a strong, politically aggressive middle class could succeed in both modernizing the social structure of Germany and making this nation into a world power. He was not very hopeful. The German middle class had a history of retreating from political struggle. In his early writings, Weber sought to explain the political immaturity of the German middle class. In the process, he elaborated a vision of an heroic middle class fashioning the world in its own image in the hopes of politicizing the German bourgeoisie.

This moral and political motivation underlies Weber's first great work of sociology, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [13]. Although its chief theme revolves around the link between Protestantism and capitalism, the subtext is Weber's appeal to the disillusioned, hard-working, inner-directed Puritan as an ideal for the German middle class.

The Protestant Ethic explores the religious origins of the "spirit" or culture of capitalism. Weber believed that modern capitalism would not have developed without certain psychological attitudes and orientations. In order for individuals to risk the capital investment involved in starting up an enterprise, and in order for workers to accept the disciplined, specialized labor of industrial capitalism, there had to exist a culture that

made this behavior meaningful and valuable. Why should an entrepreneur work hard and sacrifice in the present for an uncertain future payoff? Of course, once capitalism was established, entrepreneurs would be compelled to accumulate wealth and reinvest profits in order to be competitive. However, in the early stages of capitalist development, there was no market mechanism that enforced self-sacrificing, risk-taking behavior. Weber wanted to explain why individuals would become entrepreneurs.

Weber identified a cultural milieu in European societies that contributed to the rise of modern capitalism. This culture valued discipline, hard work, frugality, deferred gratification, the accumulation of wealth without ostentatious consumption, and a pride in economic success. Unlike many European liberals who maintained that humans are naturally competitive, hard working, greedy, and economically motivated, Weber argued that this behavior is culturally induced. And while Weber agreed with socialists that competition enforces entrepreneurial behavior once capitalism is established, they did not identify the social forces that initially encouraged this behavior.

Weber proposed what at first glance seemed like a far-fetched thesis: Protestantism formed the cultural origins of capitalism. Of course, Protestants were not motivated by economic interests. Quite the contrary, the Protestant Reformation was a movement of spiritual renewal in revolt against the materialism and secularism of the Catholic church. Its salvationist doctrine, however, unintentionally propelled entrepreneurial activity. Weber's story is sadly ironic. The intense spiritual salvationist hopes that drove Protestantism unwittingly created a vast materialistic, secular civilization devoid of morally elevated aspirations and values.

In ascetic Protestant sects such as Calvinism, Pietism, Methodism, Baptism, and Congregationalism, Weber found a cultural world view that placed a high *religious* value upon entrepreneurial behavior. Weber's most famous example is Calvinism. Calvin enunciated the doctrine of predestination: God predetermined who was saved at the moment of creation. Moreover, priests were not privileged to act as the chief messengers of divine judgment. The clergy had no special insight into the purpose of creation nor into the calculus of salvation. Good works, charity, monetary contributions, or prayer did not guarantee salvation; each individual was alone with his or her own doubts about personal salvation. In response to the heightened feelings of anxiety that spread throughout the religious community, Calvinists appealed to external signs to interpret the fate of their souls. Economic success served as a chief marker of religious fate. Accordingly, economic behavior was imbued with transcendent religious significance. To work hard at an occupation and to signal success by a prosperous business or career achievement, rather than by conspicuous

consumption, was perceived by the community as a **clear indicator of a saved soul**. The salvationist religious meanings attached to **entrepreneurial** behavior formed the cultural matrix for the rise of modern capitalism.

The full irony – and pathos – of Weber's tale is revealed in the finale of *The Protestant Ethic*. The very success of Protestantism in stimulating capitalism would result in its death knell. Once capitalism was established, competition would enforce entrepreneurial behavior; religious motivations would be replaced by secular, utilitarian ones. The Protestant work ethic would give way to motivations based on survival, status, and power.

Weber's perception of the emerging modern capitalist civilization shared little of the celebratory spirit of the Enlightenment. In contrast to liberals and socialists who championed industrial development for making possible a new era of individualism and social progress, Weber laments the decline of a culture of moral virtue and individualism. Inspired by religious values that emphasized actively engaging worldly affairs, the Protestant in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a genuine individualist. His or her nineteenth and twentieth century heir is trapped in a capitalist, bureaucratic system, what Weber called an "iron cage" [14].

The Protestant Ethic did not offer an entirely pessimistic social vision. Although the full glory of Protestant individualism can never be recaptured, Weber hoped that the Puritan spirit of worldly activism might be an inspiration to the German middle classes. The self-made Puritan who struggled relentlessly to refashion the world in his or her own image was precisely what was lacking among Weber's contemporaries. The German middle class seemed to aspire to little more than staking out their own small share of Germany's wealth and prestige by accommodating to Prussian rule. *The Protestant Ethic* offered a partial explanation of this phenomenon. In Germany, it was not the worldly activist ethic of Calvinism that shaped its culture but a more traditional, other-worldly Lutheran spirit that was dominant. Lutheranism enjoined the individual to fulfill the duties of the occupation or social station one occupies; its spirit is one of world accommodation rather than transformation. Lutheranism shaped a culture that produced a placid, other-directed individual. The contrast between the inner-directed Puritan who struggles to refashion the world and the other-directed, socially accommodating Lutheran was intended to stimulate self-awareness and social activism on the part of the German middle classes.

Explaining Western modernity and the irony of history

The Protestant ethic thesis originally appeared as an essay in 1904. Subsequently, Weber pursued the theme of Western modernization in a series

of comparative studies. Investigations of Greco-Roman and Mesopotamian civilizations, followed by studies of China, India, Ancient Judaism, Islam, and medieval Christian civilization analyzing the development of law, religion, cities, political structures, comprised his two master works, *Economy and Society* and the *Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion* [15]. In each study, Weber asks, "why did modernization initially occur in the West and not in Eastern civilizations?". For example, why did modern science originate in the West? Why did a rational-legal system first develop in Roman civilization? Why did modern capitalism arise in the West? How to explain the Western political formation of constitutional government, the rule of law, parliamentary bodies, civil rights, and political parties?

Weber's sociology of modernity avoided naturalistic explanations that appealed to human nature, individual psychology, climate, or geography. He rejected explanations of social development that relied on one factor, for example, the economy, population, or ideas. Although Weber did not avoid an evolutionary story of humankind that posits change as patterned and meaningful, he did not assume a set of fixed stages humanity passes through towards a predetermined endpoint. Nor did Weber relate a story of the progress of humanity from a lowly beginning to a higher, liberated endpoint. Nevertheless, Weber's sociology of civilizations reveals a vision of the meaning of history that centers on the fatefulness of modernity. To illustrate Weber's sociology of modernity, I will consider his study of Chinese civilization, *The Religion of China* [16].

At various times in its history, social conditions in China were favorable to modernization. Despite the accumulation of economic wealth and the formation of trade companies and merchant associations in China, modern capitalism never developed. Despite its technological superiority over the West through the early modern period, modern science remained foreign to Chinese soil. Despite the formation of a political empire, Chinese bureaucracy remained highly traditionalistic. Weber intended to explain the absence of modernization in China.

Weber offered less a dynamic analysis than a static, almost snapshot picture of China. Chinese unification in 221 BC proved fateful. Rule by warring feudal lords was replaced by a bureaucratic empire ruled by an emperor and a cultural elite (mandarins) who administered the empire. The mandarins were the principal carriers of the state ideology: Confucianism. State and ideological social control from above was reinforced by control over the individual in daily village life by a rigid kinship system. Weber held that each of these pivotal social forces (the bureaucratic state, the Confucian ideology, the village kinship system) contributed to blocking Chinese modernization.

The emperor was the symbolic ruler of China. The class of mandarins who administered the bureaucratic state effectively ruled China for some 2,000 years. Weber distinguishes the "patrimonial" bureaucracy of China from the modern Western bureaucratic state by its essentially personalistic character. For example, the emperor, in principle, owns and has unlimited control over all bureaucratic offices, personnel, and resources; officials serve at the emperor's discretion; their loyalty is to the emperor, not to their office or to an ideal of bureaucratic professionalism. The Chinese patrimonial state avoided both "refeudalization" and modernization. By limiting terms of office, routinely circulating officials, implementing a system of surveillance, and instituting an examination system that fostered an identification of the mandarins with the imperial state, the emperor sought to avoid decentralization. On the other hand, political modernization was opposed by the mandarins since a modern bureaucratic ethic of expertise, specialization, and technical training would undermine their legitimacy. The mandarins were joined by the emperor for whom a modern bureaucratic order, with its notions of the rule of law, the authority of the office, and professionalism, would restrict imperial power.

The patrimonial bureaucratic state not only opposed political modernization, it impeded social and economic modernization. For example, Weber argues that the imperial state favored a more personalistic legal system that gave wide latitude to the decisions of the judge. By contrast, a modern legal code operates according to rules of evidence and precedent that greatly restrict the discretion of the judge. In the West, the development of a modern juridical code (e.g., in Rome) was made possible by the existence of an independent strata of jurists and lawyers. Imperial China opposed the rise of such a group as a restriction on the emperor's rule. Similarly, the imperial state favored state-financed and -controlled businesses over a free market because it feared the development of an independent merchant class. In Weber's view, the patrimonial Chinese state suppressed the very forces that could have been the vehicles of social modernization.

The only countervailing social force to the imperial state was the village clan. Despite the ambitions of the imperial state to exercise total control over society, the expanse and diversity of China made that impossible. Village life was more or less free from state rule but was dominated by the local kinship system. Instead of creating space for social innovation, the clan reinforced Chinese traditionalism by exerting strict control over the individual and village social life. Anchored in a culture of ancestor worship and the rule of the elders that made tradition and social customs sacred, the village clan enforced social conservatism, for example, by

greatly restricting occupational choice, individual mobility, and the accumulation of individual wealth.

Imperial rule was, ultimately, in the hands of the mandarins. This cultural elite administered the bureaucratic state on a daily basis; they shaped the political culture of China. It was the mandarins who made Confucianism into a state ideology.

From the perspective of the Judeo-Christian tradition, Confucianism appears less as a religion than as a cultural ideal. For example, Confucianism lacks a concept of a creator God with whom individuals have a personal relation. Confucianism imagines the universe as an ordered cosmos in which all beings have a fixed place and purpose in a hierarchical order. Cosmic harmony is to be maintained by the individuals establishing an equilibrium internally (psychologically) and externally (socially). The Confucian ethic enjoins an ethic of individual control over feelings and behavior as a way to maintain emotional and social balance. Its social ethic emphasizes family piety, literary cultivation, and public service. Private wealth and power are important but only if they are achieved through public office; private enterprise disturbs inner and outer poise. The Confucian ethic directs the individual to accommodate to the world as it is, to fulfill the duties of one's social station. Material comfort, familial honor and security, and a public office carrying status are the **earthly rewards** to be expected from following a Confucian ethic. Foreign to Confucianism is the Puritan struggle to refashion the world according to a moral vision.

As in his studies of India, ancient Judaism, or ancient Far Eastern civilizations, Weber's study of China purported to be a scientific analysis of the divergent paths of the West and the East. Weber catalogues the factors that stimulated the breakthrough to modernity in the West and obstructed modernization in the East. For example, the worldly activist ethic of Protestantism promoted modernization, whereas the Confucian ethic of world accommodation, in combination with the imperial bureaucracy and the village clan system, impeded modernization in China. As much as Weber tried to document his perspective on modernization by painstaking empirical comparisons and tentative causal sketches, his sociology discloses a moral vision suggesting a tragic human drama.

The standard Enlightenment historical narrative envisioned a progressive movement of humankind from a simple underdeveloped social state where the individual was dominated by the group, myth, and nature to a complex advanced society where, with the aid of science, the individual reigned supreme over nature and history. The perspectives of Comte, Marx, and Durkheim are variations on this story of social progress. It was not Weber's vision. His view of social evolution originates with the

bureaucratic civilizations of the ancient Far Eastern and Roman civilizations. Although Weber admires their achievements of national unity and military prowess, this is bought at the price of individual freedom and social dynamism. Whether Weber is discussing the Imperial empires of ancient Rome, Egypt, or China, he underscores the bureaucratic stifling of social pluralism and individualism and, ultimately, their social paralysis and decline. Political liberalization and social modernization go hand in hand; where institutional pluralism and individualism are permitted, a prosperous and dynamic social state flourishes. For example, the overriding theme of Weber's sociology of China is that modernization failed, in large part, because the imperial bureaucracy suppressed countervailing social forces. By contrast, in the West, state bureaucracy had to contend with multiple power centers, e.g., the church, jurists, and lawyers, an independent merchant class, cities freed from centralized state authority where social and cultural innovations were encouraged. Weber's vision is decidedly liberal: social pluralism and individualism promote an innovative, dynamic society.

Weber does not, however, fashion this liberal theme into a narrative of modernization as social progress. The story he tells is that of the movement of the West from bureaucratic empire to social liberalization to the present day where European nations are potentially returning to some form of bureaucratic empire. Modernization is described, so to speak, as consisting of two phases. The first phase, roughly from the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, was the dynamic phase. Western societies created modern science, free-market capitalism, the inner-directed individualism exemplified by the Puritan and political democratic structures such as rule of law, constitutionalism, civil rights, and parliamentary government. Successive waves of social modernization threatened to undermine this liberal, individualistic society. In particular, the spread of bureaucracy and its utilitarian, status-oriented culture to all modern institutions fashioned a society of other-directed, spiritually bland, and apolitical individuals ruled by a soulless bureaucracy. In other words, Weber saw in China not simply the past from which Western modernization departed but the possible future of the West and humanity. The tragic irony of the present is that the future of humanity may be less the utopian visions of the Enlighteners than the dystopian reality of bureaucratic despotism. Distracted and dazed by modern utopian dreams, Enlighteners, tragically, are not even aware of the dystopian world that humankind is entering. Whether this blocked vision was the tragedy of Enlighteners or whether the tragedy was Weber's inability to see that he projected the worst features of Germany onto humanity's future is crucial in assessing his social vision.

Charisma and bureaucracy: the modern dream turned nightmare

Unlike his Enlightenment predecessors and contemporaries, Weber does not relate a story of humankind's continuous march forward. Weber imagines a perpetual conflict between the forces of order that threaten to squash individual freedom and those that support social innovation and change. If bureaucracy represents the exemplary force of order, then charisma is the power of change. Weber charts a movement from bureaucratic empires to social modernization in the West in which charismatic movements play a key role [17].

Weber puzzled over how to explain social change in the face of the conservative power exercised by bureaucratic empires. In the concept of charismatic movements, he identified a force whose collective intensity could offset bureaucratic social paralysis. Charisma is the magical power that an individual claims to possess. The charismatic leader commands public authority by virtue of claiming to possess extraordinary powers. Between the charismatic leader and the disciple, there are powerful magical and emotional bonds; the leader enunciates a social mission that the disciple pledges to enact. Charismatic movements are potentially revolutionary social forces in that the personal loyalty that the disciple owes the leader is to be demonstrated by pursuing an agenda of social change. Despite the fact that charismatic movements inevitably either dissipate or are routinized (i.e., evolve their own stable social life), Weber believed that they have been key forces in loosening or destroying the social stranglehold of bureaucracy.

In another ironic twist, Weber believed that, while charismatic movements were pivotal in engendering modernization, the latter environment is hostile to charisma. For example, the secularity of modern culture diminishes the credibility of individual claims to possess magical powers. Similarly, capitalism fosters a utilitarian culture inimical to charismatic authority. Perhaps the most significant obstacle to charisma is modern bureaucracy which encourages individuals to value a secure and orderly social environment. In fact, Weber thought that the defining feature of Western modernity was the spread of bureaucracy, along with its conservative culture, to all social spheres. The bureaucratization of society anticipated a bleak future for humanity. To the extent that social modernization went hand in hand with bureaucratization, the advance of science, democracy, law, and so on promised to inaugurate a stultifying era of bureaucratic domination. The very social forces that have brought forth a dynamic modern society have stimulated **bureaucratization**. For example, capitalism introduces

a dynamic market system, but its need for a massive infrastructure of transportation and communication, and a legal administrative apparatus that ensures that contracts are enforced, encourage the bureaucratization of the state. Similarly, market competition inevitably leads to the development of giant corporations which, with their high capital investment, coordination of massive resources, and planning, stimulates economic bureaucratization. Or, modernization entails political democratization (e.g., the spread of civil rights, political parties, representational political bodies) which, in turn, requires bureaucratic administrative structures to sustain mass democracy. Gradually, but inevitably, bureaucracy spreads to virtually every social sphere – the economy, government, political parties, church, welfare, military, education, and science.

Bureaucratization implies a unique administrative and social order; social institutions are organized according to a spirit of impersonality and professionalism. Bureaucratic institutions are divided into offices, each defined by a specific function and social role; offices are arranged in a hierarchical way so that there is a kind of top-down command system; individuals are assigned specific roles with clearly marked duties and authority. Bureaucratic business is carried out according to a set of impersonal rules and procedures that aim to exclude personal considerations and conflicts from interfering with institutional operations. Finally, bureaucracy creates a new type of worker, the official or white collar worker, who is a technically skilled, specialized professional hired on the basis of qualifications.

Weber maintained that bureaucracy's spirit of impersonality and professionalism makes it the most efficient mode of administration in modern societies. Its spread is inevitable and irreversible. For example, bureaucratization makes possible mass democracy and national social planning. Moreover, bureaucracy promotes social justice and equality, as individuals – as both clients and officials – are, in principle, treated equally and fairly. The same features that make bureaucracy efficient and socially beneficial, however, render it a truly ominous social force. Weber left little doubt that bureaucracy was the most powerful social force in modernity, one that threatened humanity with a bleak future.

Bureaucracy is said to signal a substantial diminution of individual freedom. In a bureaucratic society, individuals lose control over the means to satisfy their needs. For example, in a bureaucratic economy, whether capitalist or socialist, most individuals do not control access to the means of production (technology, raw material, labor) which, given their sheer size, technical complexity, and cost, are either bureaucratically administered or beyond the resources of most individuals. We are dependent on economic institutions for our livelihood. Similarly, the bureaucratization

of the means of scientific and scholarly research means that individuals gain access to research technology and textual materials only as members of universities or research centers. As these institutions own the means of scientific production, they exercise control over the form and content of science. Weber concluded that as institutions are bureaucratized, and individuals lose direct control over the means (e.g., economic, educational, military) to shape their own lives, they become dependent on bureaucracy to satisfy many of their needs. Bureaucratization fosters an experience of the self as dependent and powerless. It cultivates an other-directed type of individual who values cooperative and approval-seeking behavior, the very opposite of the inner-directed, Puritan self who sought to refashion the world.

Bureaucracy foreshadows a political calamity. As individuals become dependent on bureaucracy, they believe that their fate is sealed by it. Ironically, modern citizens lose interest in politics, even as they are empowered by the franchise, political parties, and parliamentary bodies. Moreover, politicians find themselves dependent on the technical knowledge and skills of bureaucrats in order to formulate and implement public policy. The reliance of policy makers on the technical knowledge of bureaucratic officials and their limited public accountability encourage high-level bureaucrats to appropriate the policy-making powers of politicians. The expanding political role of the bureaucracy is, according to Weber, unfortunate; democracy suffers because citizens lose power and political representation; the power interests of the nation suffer because bureaucrats are not leaders with political vision but pursue limited, parochial interests.

Weber paints a bleak picture of the development of modern Western modernity. The initial dynamic phase of modernization energizes widespread bureaucratization which threatens to thwart individuality, freedom, and democracy. In the face of the bureaucratization of society, the two dominant social ideologies become obsolete. Classical individualistic liberalism, with its championing of unrestrained individualism, a free market, and minimal government, is irrelevant since it ignores the social and political meaning of bureaucratization. The socialist promise of freedom through state economic regulation and mass democracy would unintentionally expedite the spread of bureaucratization and political authoritarianism.

What can be done? Like the Puritan that he so admired, Weber counsels that we face facts: The evil today is neither capitalism nor socialism but bureaucracy. Neither nostalgia for the past nor the utopian flight from the present are responsible reactions to *irreversible social bureaucratization*. "Where administration has been completely bureaucratized, the resulting system of domination is **practically indestructible**" [18]. Weber offers a **sobering view of European social prospects. Bureaucracy is permanent,**

but, if we promote multiple, conflicting bureaucracies, some vestiges of social dynamism and freedom can be preserved. Thus, Weber defended capitalism against the socialist Left less because he disagreed with their critique of its class inequalities than because he believed that capitalism preserves the tension between state elites, business owners, and unions that promotes social dynamism and freedom. Weber was especially worried that the bureaucratization of politics would give rise to mediocre, conservative leaders who would be either guided by parochial social interests or ruled by the bureaucracy. In the context of the ongoing conflict among world powers, Weber feared that weak political leaders would diminish national power and pose a danger of political or economic colonization. He recommended a political arrangement that would encourage the rise of charismatic leaders to offset the bureaucratization of the state and the political parties. Toward the end of his life, he defended a political system in which political leaders would be selected directly by the citizens. Ignoring the potential for abuse, Weber hoped that this would permit the rise of charismatic leaders who would otherwise be repressed by bureaucratized political parties and interest groups.

Science, truth, and values

Weber was a theorist filled with contradictions and irony. He was an Enlightenment who passionately believed in the power of reason and science. He was an ardent defender of modernity against its critics. Yet Weber's vision of modernity is bleak. He imagined advanced phases of modernization resembling the stultifying empires of the ancient East: authoritarian bureaucracies dominating public life and a retreat into cult movements and parochial utilitarian lifestyles in the private sphere.

Despite his dark vision of humankind's future, Weber never relinquished an Enlightenment faith in science. Unlike conservative or romantic critics of modernity who viewed science, like other aspects of modernity, as socially destructive, Weber's faith in science was never shaken. Even in the face of humanity's imminent descent into darkness, Weber imagined himself as remaining soberly engaged with the world as it is. Like the Puritans he so admired, Weber would not take flight in prophecy or ideological fancy. If science had to abandon its dream of a resurrected humanity, it must not forsake its role of compelling us to take a sober, responsible look at ourselves.

To the extent that Weber preserved an Enlightenment faith in science, it was a sobering faith compared with that of many of his predecessors and contemporaries. For Condorcet and Comte or Marx and Durkheim,

science was a **catalyst of modernization** and social progress. Science destroyed the myths and superstitions that constrained our lives and originated from ignorance, error, or priestly manipulation. Science freed us from prejudice to see reality as it is; it revealed humanity as the active agent in shaping the social world. Finally, science promised to uncover the principles of social organization and laws of history; it made possible a rational organization of society by providing moral and policy guidelines based on social knowledge.

Weber shared a belief in the disillusioning power of science. Science can force us to take responsibility for our behavior. By clarifying the social world as a sphere of individual actions, science compels individuals to grasp their own actions as socially consequential. Weber even imagines a "moral" role for science: by clarifying the personal and social implications of our values, science can exert pressure on us to act in a morally responsible way. Science cannot, though, illuminate the meaning and purpose of history; it cannot provide us with directives for social action since moral decisions are always subject to contention and ultimately are matters of conscience [19]. In this regard, Weber criticizes Enlightenmenters who wish to go beyond viewing science as a medium of social disillusionment to constructing new world views or myths. Efforts to replace a religious with a scientific world view (e.g., Comte or Marx) are doomed to failure because of their artificial, merely intellectual character. Moreover, Weber was intent that science forfeits its credibility when it goes beyond interpreting facts to assigning meaning and value to social events.

Reacting to the tendency of many social scientists to blur the line between science and morality and to make science into a quasi religious world view, Weber advanced the doctrine of value neutrality. **Social science** should confine itself to establishing facts and causal relationships and proposing general models and sociological principles. **Value judgments** and proposals for social reform belong in the realm of private life and politics. Why? Because, while it is possible to have knowledge about social facts and their relations, judgments about their value or rightness are a matter of opinion or ideology. It is a matter of empirical science that capitalism involves private property and the production of commodities; it is a matter of ideological values as to whether capitalism is defended because it expands freedom or criticized because it creates inequalities. Science and ideology, factual knowledge, and moral judgment are, in Weber's view, separate intellectual spheres.

In Weber's more considered reflections on science, however, he is compelled by the logic of his own analysis to throw suspicion around this neat division between science and morality. This point deserves clarification.

The scientist, says Weber, never approaches reality with a blank mind. Reality is always filtered through a conceptual lens. We always know the world from a particular standpoint. A standpoint involves a series of assumptions about the nature of the world. For example, an image of the social world as a hierarchical purposeful order, a social organism, an aggregate of self-interested individuals, a dynamic contradictory system, or images of society as driven by economic or class dynamics, religious ideas, or nation-state conflicts, frame what we can know. These overarching, cohering frameworks are products of a specific social milieu and cannot be directly subject to empirical verification or proof. Yet their role is pivotal in scientific research. They guide our problem selection; they frame what we see, how we see the world, and the significance and role that "facts" or "events" play in social knowledge. These overarching frameworks are translated into a series of concepts, typologies, and causal models that make possible a scientific or empirical-analytical ordering of reality.

Our broad intellectual standpoint governs the major changes in scientific theories. As a standpoint shifts, so will its empirical and conceptual apparatus, including what problems are considered important, the underlying concepts, causal models, and so on. Weber makes it perfectly clear, moreover, that it is not specialized scientific research that drives these broad shifts in the standpoint and conceptual structure of science, but changes in the surrounding social context. Broad social changes alter our basic images of society and social values which, in turn, get translated into new areas of interest, problems to study, and new conceptual and empirical approaches.

All research in the cultural [social] sciences in an age of specialization, once it is oriented towards a given subject matter through particular settings of problems and has established its methodological principles, will consider the analysis of the data as an end in itself. . . . It will lose its awareness of its ultimate rootedness in value ideas in general. . . . But there comes a moment when the atmosphere changes. The significance of the unreflectively utilized viewpoints becomes uncertain. . . . The light of the great cultural problems moves on. Then science too prepares to change its standpoint and its analytical apparatus [20].

Is not Weber saying that it is social interests and values that structure science, that govern its problem selection, conceptual approaches, and transformation? It is this understanding of the social structuring of science that compelled Weber, despite his principled declaration of the separation of science and morality, to conclude that it is but a "hair-line that separates science from faith" [21]. Weber still hedged. He was convinced that

values inform science in its problem selection, concept formation, methodological criteria (e.g., economy, precision, consistency), and interpretive function. Moreover, if broad social interests and values are the prime movers of social scientific change, perhaps Weber should have surmised, with his usual sober and disillusioning candor, that the idea of science as a pure sphere of knowledge is itself an illusion of the modern West!

Afterword

Some historians argue that the generation of social thinkers who came of age between the 1880s and World War I represent a breakthrough to a truly scientific study of society. They contend that, for all their brilliance, Comte and Marx were philosophers, moralists, and ideologues; they were more interested in changing the world than in knowing it. Durkheim and Weber are said to be the true founding figures of scientific sociology. They abandoned partisanship in favor of scholarship, philosophy for empirical research, ideology for science. I disagree. No less than their predecessors, Durkheim and Weber approached human studies with moral and sometimes specifically political purposes. Their sociology was formed in response to particular social developments with the aim of affecting their outcome. Despite their rhetoric of value-neutrality and objectivity, they constructed social visions that carried moral and political import. Moreover, is Durkheim's vision of historical evolution in the *Division of Labor in Society* or Weber's narrative of the social rationalization of the West any less grand or mythic than the social vision of Comte or Marx? I don't think so.

Durkheim and Weber are heirs to their predecessors in an additional way: They fully absorbed the concept of the social character of humanity. Against the conventional wisdom of their time, Durkheim and Weber insist on the social formation of the self and his or her embeddedness in institutions and webs of cultural meaning.

The social shaping of the self is a chief motif in Durkheim's sociology. For example, in *Suicide*, he argues that the act of self-destruction, an act often imagined as psychologically driven is explained by social conditions, for example, the degree to which an individual is socially integrated or regulated. Against the individualism of much social and political thinking of the time, Durkheim advances a compelling picture of social forces, not individual desires, as the dynamic force in history. Does Durkheim's sociology erase the individual as an agent of social life? I don't think so. In *The Division of Labor in Society*, he proposes that individualism is a product of social forces. In industrial societies, the individual becomes a

common cultural belief and value. This makes possible legal protections for the self and a wide latitude for subjective choice and expression. I consider Durkheim to be an originator of a social liberal ideal. In contrast to the individualistic liberal social ideal that views society as the sum of self-interested, rationally calculating individuals, Durkheim approaches the individual as embedded in social institutions and emphasizes the importance of shared cultural beliefs and values as a condition of freedom and social unity.

Weber was no less an advocate of a social concept of the individual. In particular, Weber emphasized the cultural construction of the self. This was a key point in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In popular and scientific thinking in Weber's time, it was often assumed that individuals are naturally motivated to compete for economic goods and accumulate wealth. Capitalism was often regarded as an expression of human nature. In contrast, Weber held that capitalist economic behavior, which entailed work specialization, career success, accumulating wealth, and delayed gratification, is a result of social beliefs and values. Weber traced a "capitalistic" economic ethic to the Protestant Reformation. He arrived at the paradoxical conclusion that it wasn't human nature that produced capitalism but the spiritual longing of Puritans who assigned to capitalist behavior a religious, redemptive value. In other words, Weber asserted the cultural formation of individualistic economic behavior.

Weber was decidedly more individualistic in his sociological approach than Durkheim. In Weber's sociology, society is inseparable from the subjective meanings and actions of individuals. He had little patience with sociological concepts that did not refer to subjective meaning. The importance that he assigned to charismatic leaders in effecting social change highlights the dynamic role that Weber attributed to the individual in his sociology. I prefer Weber's way of thinking about self and society because it affirms the subjective making of social life as much as the social making of the self. Curiously, while Weber's broad sociological approach is quite congenial to a liberal social ideal, his political values edged into a nationalism that compromised his individualism.

In many key respects, Durkheim and Weber inherited the broad impulse and aims of Comte and Marx. Although I do not see a break between the two generations in terms of a movement from ideology to science, I detect a shift from thinking of society as an organic whole to a field of conflicting social forces and practices. Comte and Marx imagined society as an organic whole or integrated system; its parts were neatly interrelated, and the major axis of social formation and its direction of change could be easily identified. For example, Marx sketched a picture of a society organized around a "base" of property ownership and class

social division upon which a "superstructure" of law, culture, and politics was erected. Property relations determined class division which determined the formation of the whole society and its mechanism (class conflict) and direction of change (socialism). Admittedly, Durkheim did not entirely abandon a view of society as an organic whole. Despite retaining the language of organicism, Durkheim considered the different parts of society (the state, economy, family, religion) as interrelated in complex, multicausal ways. Weber abandoned organic metaphors entirely. Society was framed as a field of social practices, meanings, conflicts, movements, and long-term trends. Thus, whereas Marx proceeds from property to class to social stratification, Weber speaks of multiple axes of stratification (class, status, party). Property and class are no longer the "social base" but one axis of social formation; culture and politics are no longer "superstructural" effects but parallel aspects of social organization. Against the current of nineteenth century organic thinking, Weber substituted an image of a "fractured" or "decentered" social field.

Durkheim, and especially Weber, have occupied a special place in my own intellectual biography. I was a Marxist by the time I finished my undergraduate degree. But even then I was a cautious Marxist, charmed yet suspicious of the completeness, neatness, and certitude of the Marxian system. I was seduced by the beauty of this social vision. Marxism resonated with my high-minded criticalness towards the United States; it furnished a sophisticated language of social criticism to substitute for my more individualistic folk language. Yet, even as an undergraduate I was uncomfortable with the absence of a language of self and subjectivity in Marx. I recall that my reading at the time was divided between Marx and the symbolic interactionism of George Mead and Herbert Blumer. I was enamored, as well, with the existentialist philosophy of Camus and Sartre which romanticized individual choice and rebellion.

I pursued my graduate studies at the New School for Social Research. I kept reading Marx and the history of Marxism. I was not alone. This was 1974. It seemed like all the passion that many of us channeled into social protest was directed into elaborating a Marxist social critique. Courses on Marxism were packed; reading groups focusing on a particular canonical Marxist text proliferated. At the same time, my doubts about Marx were growing. I was dissatisfied with his core categories of labor, property, and class. I was unhappy with his failure to incorporate a view of the self as an agent of history. In light of my experience in the protest movements of the sixties, I could not think of culture as superstructural. Social life seemed a great deal more messy and fluid than the Marxian picture would allow. I was searching for approaches to society that responded to these concerns. It turned out that the New School for Social Research was a

haven for scholars of Weber. I quickly found myself fascinated by Weber. He spoke to my interests in a sociology that took the self and culture seriously. My experience in the counterculture and psychotherapy had underscored the importance of nonrational and symbolic sources of human behavior and social life. Weber seemed tuned in whereas Marx was deaf to the symbolic and affective aspects of the human condition. The rest of my graduate education was preoccupied with orchestrating a dialogue between Marxism and classical sociology.

In recent years, I have come to be far more critical of Durkheim and Weber. My reservations are both broadly intellectual and political. I was always uncomfortable ideologically with these classical sociologists. Their liberalism seemed compromised by the lack of a strong commitment to social and political democracy. Indeed, Weber's liberalism was discredited by his nationalism. I share none of his trust in a powerful state. Moreover, Weber's commitment to democracy, even political democracy, was at best weak, at worst cynical. Weber's nightmare image of the relentless bureaucratization of the modern world precluded a vision of democratic social change which was anathema to this child of the counterculture. In the end, Weber's sober, indeed somber, social outlook seemed at odds with the peculiar sense of social hope I shared with many Americans. If my unhappiness with Weber related, in part, to his pessimistic, nondemocratic world view, Durkheim seemed almost Polyanish to me. Despite Durkheim's democratic social values, his sociology was bereft of a drama of domination and resistance. I learned to appreciate the dynamics of solidarity and moral regulation from Durkheim, in particular, his unorthodox view of modern societies as sacred, religious cultures. I was frustrated by his apparent deafness to the sounds of oppression and political struggle.

In recent years, I have come to see Marxism and classical sociology as very much products of their time. For all their criticalness towards the Enlightenment, Marx and Comte, Durkheim and Weber are very much the children of the Enlightenment. Marx never escaped the economism and utilitarianism of the classical economists he criticized so severely. Comte may have ridiculed the Enlightenment for its blind faith in reason, but he was no less inspired by a vision of human perfection that his own science of society would bring to fulfillment. Durkheim raged against the individualism of Enlightenment social science, but his own sociology made the individual into a sacred entity. And for all his animus against the naive social hopes of the Enlightenment, Weber never relinquished the Kantian hope that reason made autonomy and moral responsibility possible.

The classics were captives of the era of modernity. Their grand narratives of human history invariably began and ended in the West; scripted men as the primary actors; wrapped themselves in the mythic aura of

science; marked out good and bad, evil and redemption, without ever owning their stories as moral tales. Today, we can appreciate that their faith in science, reason, individualism, progress, and the West were entangled in the making of modern nation-states and colonial empires, but also in producing powerful moral and political visions filled with social hope for a better world.

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PART 2

DISCIPLINING THEORY: THE MAKING OF A SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY CANON