THE DISCOVERY OF SOCIETY

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CHAPTER SIX

MAX WEBER: THE DISENCHANTMENT OF THE WORLD

Max Weber (1864–1920) has exerted more influence than any other social scientist except Marx and Freud. His ideas have had wide currency, first in Germany and then throughout the scholarly world. His term "charismatic leadership" has passed into general usage, and all of social science knows something of the concepts of legitimacy, bureaucracy, rationalization, *verstehen*, ideal types, value-free science, the three-dimensional approach to stratification, and the Protestant ethic with its links to the origins of capitalism. Yet Weber's general sociology and his vision of world history are as yet barely known; they remain hidden behind isolated selections and popularizations, and we are continually surprised as more and more powerful portions of Weber's world view are brought into the light. Weber himself is partly to blame. His works are voluminous but unfinished and scarcely succinct, and even a superficial acquaintance with them turns up notions of such utility that one is tempted to inquire no further. Now, with Marx and Freud passing from view (if not mined out), Weber increases his hold on our attention. The most commanding figure of the great period of German social scholarship, Weber still towers over the world scene fifty years after his death.

Like many great sociologists, Weber (pro-

nounced "Vay-ber") was a man at the center of things, pulled loose from illusions by constant exposure to contradictory points of view. Born in 1864 into a prosperous family of German industrialists, he grew up in Berlin where his father was a judge and a successful politician. Backstage acquaintance with the *realpolitik* of Bismarck's empire made Weber a political realist from his childhood. His father sat in the Reichstag with the National Liberals, representing the interests of the big manufacturers and standing between the Junker aristocracy on the right and the Social Democrats (socialist labor unionists) on the left. It was not a propitious time for liberals in Germany (indeed, it rarely ever was, except during the short-lived revolution of 1848). The landowning aristocracy and the army took a rigid stand against democracy, and the Socialists preached revolution according to Karl Marx. The liberals had no one to turn to except the state bureaucracy, and their ideals went down the drain as their nationalism increasingly became their only political resource. From an early age Weber scorned the unrealistic claims of left and right, but found himself increasingly uncomfortable with the center. Throughout his life an ardent nationalist, he nevertheless saw Germany blundering steadily into a war that would destroy it. His sociology confirmed his fears of imminent disaster, and Weber came to see himself as a twentieth-century Jeremiah, prophesying doom.

He began a career like his father's, studying law at Heidelberg and Berlin. But his pessimism about politics and his own overpowering urge to exercise his independent intellect steered him into an academic career. Germany in the nineteenth century led the world in the eminence of its universities. It was especially prominent in the historical fields. It had been here that Leopold von Ranke and Friedrich von Savigny transformed history from the status of antiquarian chronicles into a science, with its canon: to tell things "as they really were." With German thoroughness, the Herr Professor Doktors had produced detailed accounts, not only in conventional military and political history, but also in economic, legal, and cultural history and in archaeology, ethnography and linguistics. German philosophy, too, since the days of Hegel had a strong historical flavor. Weber trained himself in virtually all of these fields, with the result that his knowledge of world history probably exceeded that of any man who has ever lived.

In an age of growing specialization Weber's feat was the mark of an extraordinary individualist. But Weber was nothing if not extraordinary. Tall, stout, black-bearded, and moody, he impressed all who met him. His colleagues viewed him as a towering intellect. At the end of Weber's doctoral exam Theodor Mommsen, the most eminent historian of his day, rose and said that he knew of no man better qualified to succeed him "than the highly esteemed Max Weber." But Weber stood in an intellectual circle even wider than the world of German historians and philosophers. At his father's house he had met the eminent politicians and academicians of Berlin. In his own house at Heidelberg met the leading

intellects of all fields, as well as artists and musicians. Among his circle would be found such men as Karl Jaspers, the future existentialist psychiatrist, Ferdinand Toennies, Georg Simmel, and a young radical who could not get a university position despite Weber's intercessions on his behalf, Robert Michels. He was fully acquainted with Marxist underground thought. He read many languages, traveled broadly, and knew the English evolutionists and the French positivists as well as the German historians. Weber was a one-man crucible for the intellectual currents of the nineteenth century, and from his central position he forged a viewpoint for sociology as both a science and a study of meaningful human creations. His twin methods of *verstehen* and ideal types emerged from his position at the center of intellectual cross-currents: Social reality is not merely to be explained by mechanical analogies to the natural world, but must be understood (in German, *verstehen*) by imagining oneself into the experiences of men and women as they act out their own worlds. Ideal types, as we shall see below, are the tools for making scientific generalizations out of our understanding of this infinitely complex and shifting world.

A sociologist must sympathetically understand the people around him —indeed, also those who have been dead for centuries—and he is bound to feel acutely what is closest to home. Here, too, Weber was at the center of powerful antagonisms. Beneath the surface of a proper German bourgeois family, Weber's father and mother carried on psychic war. His father—harsh, self-righteous, and authoritarian—clashed incessantly with his altruistic, self-denying, and religious mother. Between the two poles Weber may have discerned the remnants of a rigid Protestant ethic whose discovery is his most famous contribution. Certainly Max Weber himself was a prime example of the ethic: Immensely hard-working, impeccably honest, dedicated, serious, methodical, he drove himself with an inner vehemence that left him insomniac for years and dead at the age of fifty-six.

The family conflict finally took its toll. In 1897 when Weber was thirty-three and just beginning his career as a professor of economics at Heidelberg, he became involved in a quarrel while visiting his parents. Years of suppressed bitterness broke through the respectable patrician formalities, and Weber angrily threatened to break off all contact with his father if he did not change his treatment of his mother. Not long after, he heard the news: His father had fallen dead of a stroke.

Depression set in. A powerful, even charismatic lecturer, Weber found he could no longer teach. When he tried, his arms and back became temporarily paralyzed. He found it difficult to speak; serious thinking was impossible. He took a leave of absence from his job, finally resigned it entirely. He traveled incessantly, yet spent hours in hotel rooms staring at his fingernails. He spent several weeks in a mental institution. The experience opened a new side in him. "Such a disease has its compensations. It has reopened to me the human side

of life," he wrote his wife. "An icy hand has let me loose. In years past my diseased disposition expressed itself in a frantic grip upon scientific work, which appeared to me as a talisman. . . ."

Slowly, he began to recover, and in 1904 he was back at work. He took a trip to America on an invitation to speak at the St. Louis World's Fair. The loftiness of American ideals and the corruption of American capitalism fired his imagination, and he returned to Germany to finish his first famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* From then on his production never flagged, although he was unable to bring himself to teach until the end of his life, after the close of World War I. He had lost seven years. The work of the next sixteen has never been surpassed.

Weber's sociology is often obscured behind the maze of crosscutting definitions that make up the opening chapters of *Economy and Society,* his major work. Clear and distinct concepts are essential to make sense out of a subject as complex as the workings of society. But concepts are easiest to grasp if we can see them as they are actually put to use. Weber set himself the task of explaining the greatest development of world history: the rise of modern industrial civilization. In order to do this, he had to push his sights progressively back from economics to law, politics, and religion; to chart the interconnections between kinship and stratification, bureaucracy and warfare, until every institution was connected with every other, and the web of explanation stretched from the present to the beginnings of human life on earth. In exploring the question of economic development, Weber created nothing less than a sociology of world history. His contributions to general sociological theory consist of the models he developed in an effort to grasp the key processes of society without doing violence to the complexities of history as it actually occurred. Weber had nothing but contempt for evolutionist or cyclical theories that blindly simplified the facts to fit a few preconceived principles of growth. In his tightrope walk between vague or inaccurate generalizations and the myriad particular forms of world civilization, Weber moved toward a comprehensive theory of men's social behavior and of the institutions men create. We shall take up first Weber's general sociology, then his vision of world history.

WEBER'S SOCIOLOGY: STRATIFICATION, ORGANIZATIONS, AND POLITICS

Stratification: class, power, and status

Weber's sociology centers around three interrelated subjects: stratification, organizations, and politics. Of these, stratification provides the core theory of society, to which all else is related and within which may be found the forces that move society. Weber was a thoroughgoing nominalist; for him, real people in real physical places are the subjects and

movers of all that exists and happens in society. To be sure, cultural ethos (such as the Protestant ethic), legal systems, and large-scale organizations all have their own logical structures and laws of development. But they never develop by themselves; they develop through the thought and action of real people.

Weber might well have adopted Marx's slogan as his methodology: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please." Weber could not accept a reified abstraction like "Society" as it appeared in organic analogies, nor the *Weltgeist* (world spirit) of Germanic cultural theorists. We never see society, but only groups of men and women. Furthermore, these groups are very different, even within one society. It is an error to suppose that the ethical philosophies of the upper classes express the beliefs of middle-class shopkeepers or peasant laborers. India cannot be summed up in Brahmin philosophy, nor Germany in Hegel. If we are to understand society and culture, we must begin with the actual diversity of separate groups, not with some easy generalization based on a single perspective. Stratification, for Weber, provided the link between the diverse groups we can actually observe and the invisible order through which thousands and millions of individual actions add up to results that individuals neither intend nor control.

What kind of order is it that ties people to others whom they may never see? Weber found three such orders: economics, politics, and culture. A man sells his labor in a factory that exists only because of a nationwide division of labor, and affects the price of goods by the ways he spends his wages; he pays taxes and is killed on a distant battlefield because far-off government ministers struggle for power; his family walks in a funeral ceremony elaborated long ago by a hierarchy of priests and changed slowly from one repetition to another. Each order affects man's behavior, lays down the conditions within which he must make his life, determines both his view of the world and which people he will associate with. But not all men are affected alike. The life chances of the financier's son are not those of the farm laborer's; the ordinary citizen's world view is not that of the party leader; the pious housewife does not inhabit the social milieu of the intellectual. We can see the social order comprehensively if we think of it as a stratification of individuals into groups based on similar economic, political, or cultural positions. Groups of people who associate together are the basic units of society. Much research since Weber's day has shown that it is in such face-to-face groups that people acquire their identities, their values, and their world views. Thus the diversity of society is produced by its major institutions—businesses, states, armies, churches, schools. At the same time, the members of the various groups are tied together through their positions in these institutional networks.

Weber did not find it necessary to ask the general question of what holds society together. He saw that societies over the sweep of history

were always coming together and falling apart, shifting and changing from one set of institutions to another. History shows nothing permanent, but continual war, conflict, and change: states conquering and disintegrating, trade and finance spreading and shrinking, religions and arts slowly shifting from one theme to its opposite. What does remain beneath the change, the concrete basis of human society, are groups of people bound by ties of common feeling and belief: families, households, kinsmen, church and cult members, friends, communities. The core of Weber's view of stratification is thus a theory of group formation, a set of hypotheses about the conditions that bring men together into solidary groups. These conditions are found in the way men relate to the institutional orders that link groups together into a society.

Weber accepted certain motives as a basis for an explanation of human behavior: need for food and material comfort; fear of death and avoidance of physical pain; desires for sexual gratification, for membership and status in a social and moral community, and for a meaningful view of the world. Weber did not attempt to explore the psychological dynamics of these motives nor to account for individual differences in motivation; in these respects his theories may be complemented by the insights of Freud and Mead and by the social theories of group solidarity of Durkheim and his followers. Weber took these motives as given because he found them manifested throughout human history. They enter his theories as the three main sanctions by which men influence each other's behavior: offers of economic gain, threats of physical coercion, and appeals to emotion and belief. Economics, politics, and culture are corresponding institutional realms; class, party ("power group" might be a preferable term), and status group are the groups formed on their bases.

Weber's central hypothesis is that men who share common positions and interests in the economic arena, in the political struggle, or in the realm of culture are likely to act and associate together and to exclude all others from their company of equals. In the economic market classes are formed as men come together with others who experience similar work conditions. Here Weber follows Marx's discovery: The peasant laborer, the factory worker, the skilled craftsman, the rural landlord, the industrialist, the merchant, the stock-market speculator all inhabit distinct social worlds. Material conditions have a powerful effect on men's lives, throwing factory laborers together in urban tenements and drawing country gentlemen together in their round of visits between estates. Economics shapes not only how men live and in whose company, but also how they see the world and how they will act. Economic position gives men distinctive interests: The worker sees an advantage in demanding higher pay, forming a union, or supporting a socialist party; the peasant tries to keep down his duties to his lord and his taxes to the king; the industrialist opposes unionization and socialism; the financier is concerned about the price of gold and the prevailing rate of

interest on loans. Men are thus moved to act on their economic interests, and the resulting conflict draws men of similar economic position closer together and isolates them from those of opposing positions. How many such opposing groups there will be and how extensive the conflict among them depends on the nature of the economic system in that particular society and on the relationships between economic stratification and political and cultural stratification. Weber incorporates Marx's basic model into his theory of stratification, but he sees economic determinism as only one of three factors.

Weber viewed politics, like economics, as a realm in which struggle is widespread. History, after all, reads most obviously as a record of military conquests and feudal rivalries, palace intrigues and coups d'état, peasant revolts and urban insurrections; the activities of peaceful eras consist of the ups and downs of politicians' careers, the shifting authorities of officials, and the power play of interest groups in voting and lobbying. Thus, men may be stratified by their political interests as well as by their economic interests. Minor government officials are drawn together in a distinct group, as are military officers, independent feudal knights, modern party politicians, or municipal judges. Coercive power is a scarce good; many men are concerned with getting as much of it for themselves as possible, and virtually all men wish to make it bear on themselves as little as possible. As we shall see below, politics may be analyzed as a continual struggle to gain authority for oneself and to evade subjection to the authority of others. Political interest groups may overlap with economic interest groups—feudal knights may represent the landowning class; politicians, the classes of industrialists or workers. But power is a separate pie to be carved up, capable of inducing alignments of its own. The kinds of political stratification and political group formation in a particular society depend on the nature of its political institutions.

It should be apparent by now that Weber saw society as a complex and ever-shifting interplay of forces. Political stratification is influenced by economic alignments and vice versa; both of these interact with cultural stratification. Weber was forced to devise a strategy for talking coherently about this world in which nothing ever stays put long enough for us to pin a label on it and in which our labels always oversimplify what is going on. For this purpose he conceived the notion of the *ideal type*, by means of which he could abstract from reality a form of social action that is rarely or never found by itself. We can discover the dynamics of stratification, for example, if we mentally decompose it into its constituent elements—the ideal types of class, power group, and status group. We can thereby discover the dynamics of economic class formation without having to bear in mind the processes of power politics. Having done this, we can successively take up political struggles and the status-producing effects of culture. Finally, we can apply these insights to the overall stratification of any society resulting from the

interaction of these three processes. The technique is similar to that of the chemist, who explains the properties of a compound first by identifying its constituent elements and then by noting their interactions. The modern sociological research method called the "multivariate analysis" of survey data reflects the same general strategy.

The interaction of culture with economics and politics is especially subtle. As already noted, economic and political positions have considerable influence on the values and beliefs of their occupants. Marx was the first to notice this for economics, and Weber carried out a parallel analysis of politics. We can speak, then, of economic and political determinants of culture. But there is a third way in which culture enters stratification, a discovery of Weber's own. If culture were merely the result of economic and political position, one could not say that culture was important for stratification. People would be stratified by their income or their power; and whatever deference they received or had to give, whatever boundaries were drawn between them and people who would not deign to associate with them (those ranking above them) and people whom they did not care to associate with (those ranking below) would be based on money or power, not on any thing to do with their culture. Weber saw that this was not so: that in addition to the stratification produced by class and power, there were numerous possible hierarchies in the realm of culture. Historically, the most important of these cultural hierarchies have been based on religion. There is a definite stratification within every religion: At minimum there is a difference in status between believers and nonbelievers. The former consider themselves more virtuous and enlightened than the latter, regardless of their respective wealth and power, and such cultural strata are just as likely to associate together and exclude outsiders as are economic classes and power groups. Most religions have much more than this minimum stratification. There are hierarchies from popes, gurus, and high priests on down through minor ceremonial assistants, devoted worshipers, merely formal members, and intermittent sinners. Admittedly, this is not necessarily an exclusive basis of stratification; churches often have property interests and political connections, and clergy may associate socially with correspondingly wealthy or powerful laymen.

Cultural stratification is important especially because it is closest to the way most people actually view their worlds. We feel that we associate with certain people and not with others, not usually because we see ourselves as economic or political allies, but because we like and respect certain people and not others. If we analyze that liking, we find that it usually involves cultural stratification. Respectable churchgoing people prefer others like themselves, not hard-drinking denizens of bars and pool halls; hostesses who practice gracious etiquette and converse about the arts do not invite the backyard barbecue set.

Cultural stratification is thus the most complex and subtle of all the forms of stratification. There are relatively few distinct political and

economic groups in any society, but the varieties and ramifications of cultural hierarchies can be enormously refined, especially in a modern industrial society. Indeed, cultural stratification can subdivide the lines of status distinction to such a degree that virtually every group or individual may have a status of its own. In addition to religion, cultural hierarchies can be based on secularized religious ideals like honesty, hard work, ambition, and self-control (Weber's Protestant ethic); on achievement or understanding in science, literature, music, and art; on good manners, tastes in decoration and clothes, or even on one's prominence as a player or spectator of sports. Cultural stratification may be formally recognized in a society, as in the Hindu caste system based on ritual acts that keep members of the "higher" religions from coming into close contact with those who once belonged to "lower" religions. The ranks of European aristocracy, with their elaborate etiquette and code of honor, illustrate a similar development on a nonreligious basis.

Cultural hierarchies are the substance of the world as most people experience it, but their great significance comes from the ways in which they are connected with the rest of the social order—with economics and politics and their corresponding forms of stratification. This connection can operate in two ways. First, cultural stratification can be the basis for economic and political stratification. The New England colonies are one of the best examples of this: The church leaders were also the political authorities, and only members in good standing of the church congregation—a minority of the people—could participate in governing the community. Moreover, the religious upper class took the lead in organizing commerce, farming, and fishing and thus became an economic upper class. The religious, political, and economic hierarchies began to separate in the eighteenth century, but even today Americans (especially middle-class, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants) tend to judge people's status according to their "respectability" in religious terms— essentially, according to how well they live up to the vestigial norms of the Protestant ethic.

Second, economic and political stratification tend to turn into cultural stratification. The cold realities of wealth and power are too blatant for most people, for both those on the bottom and those on the top. There is a widespread need to feel that those on the top merit their good fortune. Thus, people who rise in wealth or power attempt to cloak themselves in cultural respectability. The conquering tribesmen of antiquity called on priests to sanction their conquests, just as Charlemagne had himself crowned by the Pope after building a kingdom by war. Later, the way to the top is forgotten; the aristocracy claims that it rules, not by force, but by hereditary right and by the merits expressed in its code of honor and its patronage of the arts. A similar mutation occurs between the robber barons of nineteenth-century finance and the high society of today.

Economic, political, and cultural goods can be traded off for each

other, and Weber postulates a tendency for the three hierarchies to come together in times of social tranquillity. The wealthy try to become powerful and cultured; the powerful use their influence to become rich and surrounded with high culture; cultural elites try to use their prestige to acquire wealth and power. But changes and competition within the realms of economics, politics, and culture periodically upset the composition of classes, power groups, and status groups, and we find the three hierarchies consolidating, breaking down, and rearranging again and again. History is a continuous battle, not only of knights against officials, bureaucrats against politicians, landowners against financiers, industrialists against unionists, and priests against scientists and intellectuals, but of each of these orders against the others. The processes of stratification not only make up the fabric of our everyday lives, but as we shall see below, they turn the engines of history as Weber saw it.

Organizations: patrimonialism and bureaucracy

Surveying world social forms, Weber noted that there are two general ways in which people can stabilize their relationships: either by establishing strong personal ties or by setting up general rules. These were ideal types, of course. Reality is always a mixture of them, although the organizations of traditional societies have usually fallen near the personalistic pole, and modern organizations near the abstract rules pole. Weber often speaks of the former type of organization as patriarchal or patrimonial and of the latter as bureaucratic. The distinction follows broadly from that which Weber's older colleague Ferdinand Toennies made between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society).

Personalistic organizations usually begin with the family household. We find the lord in ancient China or Assyria, or the citizen in Athens or Rome, or the baron in medieval Europe running his estate and his politics like a great family enterprise. Sons and brothers are his most trusted assistants, whether in supervising farming or trading expeditions, fighting a war, or collecting taxes for a higher authority. Servants and slaves are like part of the family, subject to the same loyalties and jealousies and to the same patriarchal whims. No distinction is made between public and private, between the official finances and the domestic purse. The king collects taxes equally for his troops and for his wine cellar, and his subaltern lord pays his own expenses and profits out of what he can collect before passing it on up. This form of organization can be extended across large numbers of people by linking together chains of masters and followers. In a patrimonial regime the king has trusted lieutenants who administer distant sections of his realm; they in turn assign their trusted followers to various areas and tasks; and so on down to the lowest official, whose job it is to coerce the peasants to give up their produce. Premodern trading companies and factories were organized in the same way, but on a much smaller scale.

The main disadvantages of the personalistic form of organization are that it is neither very efficient nor very easy to control. Lines of communication from top to bottom are virtually nonexistent, and orders from above are likely to emerge as rumors below, if indeed they are passed on at all. How tasks are carried out depends almost entirely on the energy and initiative of the individuals involved. Under the circumstances such organizations tend to fall back on tradition—to do a job as it was done last time and as far back as anyone can remember, since there are no other guidelines, and it may not be safe to do anything that a vengeful superior could criticize. At the same time, such organizations continually slip from the control of their founders. Again and again in history a lord conquers a large territory and appoints his most trusted followers to collect the spoils, and they in turn appoint their assistants. By the time the conqueror dies, and sometimes before, the central authority begins to dissipate. Only a small portion of the taxes or booty collected comes through to the king. Eventually the more powerful lords may make themselves totally independent. Sometimes the process continues until the jurisdictions are fragmented down to the lowest level (as happened in medieval Germany); sometimes it is arrested halfway in a feudal compromise splitting authority among the levels; sometimes it is reversed by another conquest.

These political disadvantages provided the impetus for developing the other main type of organization: bureaucracy. Kings and lords long ago found that they could arrest the dissipation of authority, not merely by setting servants to spy on each other (which tended to make an organization secretive and clique-ridden), but by laying down general rules. Instead of leaving procedures to the discretion of subordinates, the ruler himself could control matters from afar by selecting, training, and checking up on men whose only job was to follow the rules. Instead of having general authority over a territory, an official could be confined to one specialized kind of job; power was thus split up and controlled from above. If abuses came from the lack of distinction between personal property and the king's property, a rigid line between public and private could be drawn. Instead of tasks being performed intermittently by local barons, they could be handled by officials recruited for full-time careers and paid specified salaries.

Weber found elements of this type of organization as far back as ancient Egypt and China, but its main development occurred only in Europe as the absolutist monarchies were built on a bureaucratic basis, ending the period of medieval feudalism. The first great bureaucracies (after the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages) were developed in France, Prussia, and Russia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the nineteenth century the form was widely imitated, not only by governments, but by industrial enterprises that needed an efficient form of control over a large and complex division of labor. Since then bureaucratization has spread to all forms of social life—so much so

that Weber regarded it as one of the main themes of modern history.

Considering its advantages, why did full-blown bureaucracy develop so late? Weber pointed out certain social and material prerequisites. The development of writing and then a large group of literate officials were necessary for an organization carrying out specialized rules and keeping records of its activities. A money economy was needed if officials were to be paid in salaries instead of in land or booty. Improved transportation and communication (roads, navigable rivers and canals, a courier system) were necessary if a king was to keep track of what his officials were doing in distant realms. Changing material conditions aided the development of centralized administration. Firearms made the self-equipped knight obsolete and aided the rise of the large, bureaucratic army of foot soldiers. Similarly, the invention of industrial machinery helped replace scattered handicraft production with the bureaucratic factory. But the bureaucratic form itself is historically primary; without its development through the struggles of politics, modern industrial innovations could never have been used and hence would never have been invented.

Moreover, bureaucracy is hardly utopian. The kings who created it in order to control their errant knights soon found that their new machinery was slipping from their hands. Once established, the bureaucracy could do its work of administering regulations without a ruler and could even make up new rules as the occasion provided. Indeed, rulers soon began to get in the way of its smooth functioning, and hereditary monarchs grew progressively weaker until they fell in revolutions or degenerated into figureheads. Nor is bureaucracy the epitome of efficiency. Cabinet ministers and industrialists often have little more control over it than do kings. Weber saw in the world around him all the phenomena that have become famous under the labels "red tape" and "Parkinson's Law": the tendency for officials to see rules as ends in themselves rather than as means to ends, the difficulty of finding responsible decision-makers amid a maze of rules and regulations, the tendency for organizations to drift, to expand mindlessly, to make their own survival the highest value. Many of these themes have been explored in subsequent research by such sociologists as Philip Selznick, Peter Blau and Michel Crozier.

Always a political man, Weber discovered organizational politics even in the supposedly neutral instrument of bureaucracy. As was noted with regard to his theory of stratification, Weber saw how men's views and interests develop from the positions they hold, and he saw how rules and regulations could be used in the continual jockeying for authority and autonomy that human beings carry on. What American sociologists have since come to think of as "informal organization" within "formal organization," Weber saw as part of the implicit dialectic of the struggle for control. Personalistic and bureaucratic forms of organization, after all, are ideal types, and reality is always a mixture. As the Weberian scholar Guenther Roth has recently pointed out, the

clever administrator uses *both* strategies of control—a mixture of per-· sonal loyalties and bureaucratic impartiality and the use of special emissaries with diffuse authority to carry out tasks that the rules and regulations impede. Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy were masters of the technique of mixed strategies. Both methods have their drawbacks, but only by tireless juggling between them can an organizational leader actually lead.

Politics: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal legitimacy

Politics is conflict over who shall control the state, the apparatus of coercion in a society. To call the state an apparatus of coercion means only that its ultimate appeal to force is the one thing that all states have in common; it does not mean that all states necessarily coerce most of their members most of the time. A democracy is a type of state in which power is split up among contending parties and separate jurisdictions, so that in fact the state does relatively little coercing. That perhaps is an ideal, and Weber would agree with Hegel's verdict that "history is the chopping-block at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized."

Politics is made up of three components: the groups contending for power, the organizations through which power is sought and exercised, and the ideas and ideals that legitimate authority. We have already considered the first two: the contending groups are found in the stratification of a society and may consist of economic classes, existing power groups, or status groups—each interested in manipulating the state to further its ends. We can have various kinds of political movements: those interested in economic policies and the state protection or control of property; those interested in power for its own sake or in extending the power of an organization (whether it be a party, welfare bureaucracy, army, police force, or court system) ; and those interested in having the state sanction some particular culture with official status (those interested in or opposed to a state religion, the prohibition of alcohol, sexuality in movies, psychedelics, and so forth). We have also seen the various kinds of political organizations that have existed and noted some of their preconditions and dynamics.

There remains the dynamics of legitimacy. Weber saw that men have material and power interests, but that they also see the world in terms of ideas and ideals. Men will fight and die for world views as well as for money and power. The difference between Weber's view and the naïve conservative view that sees the state as a spiritual unity is that Weber realized that men's ideals *differ* within the same society. As Weber put it, men have both material and ideal interests, and their interests often conflict. As Weber noted, a society cannot be held together by force alone. Obviously, an army can control an unarmed

populace. But within the army the general is not necessarily the strongest man, and he may not even carry a gun. Why then are men afraid to disobey him? Because if one man disobeys and the others obey, the single dissenter will be shot. Why don't all the men disobey together? Because if they want to act together, they must have some sort of organization, and that again raises the question of who shall lead and how his authority will be enforced. To the old philosophical question "Who shall guard the guardians?" Weber replied that organizations can be based on force provided widespread beliefs about legitimacy exist. The general's orders are obeyed because each man expects others to obey him, and this expectation is based on the widespread *belief* that the general has legitimate authority.

Weber was well enough acquainted with history and with the daily newspapers to know that orders are not always obeyed, that the legitimacy of a leader or regime can rise and fall. Accordingly, he was interested in the dynamics of legitimacy. Out of his historical perspective, Weber produced three ideal types of legitimacy. First, authority could be based on *tradition:* A king rules because his family has always ruled (so he says), because he is chosen by the gods, or because the tribal council selected him through traditional ceremonial methods. Second, authority could be based on personal *charisma:* "It is written . . . , but I say unto you . . . ," proclaims the prophet, the hero, the dominant personality, discarding tradition in favor of his own revelation. Third, authority can be *rational-legal:* The laws provide the procedure for selecting legitimate presidents and chancellors; bureaucratic regulations delegate authority to the policeman and the passport clerk. Each of these forms of legitimacy has a corresponding form of organization. Traditional rulers are found primarily in patrimonial and patriarchal organizations; charismatic leaders usually have a personal retinue of disciples and a large unorganized following; rational-legal officials are found in bureaucracies.

Each form of legitimacy has its advantages and drawbacks. The traditional leader seems to have little to worry about. Tradition says he is king or chief, and there is nothing anyone can do about it (except of course his enemies in other kingdoms and tribes). Still, Weber points out that political struggle is never entirely absent, although it may be underground. The traditional ruler is often limited by the very tradition. His advisers, noblemen, and priests are seldom idle about interpreting tradition to their advantage and against the powers of the king. If he wants to do things his way, he must continually struggle to interpret traditions to *his* advantage. But there are dangers in success, too; if he extends his power too far beyond tradition, he may lose his traditional legitimacy. Ancient history (and modern, too) is full of kings turned tyrants who were overthrown and replaced by one of the noblemen waiting in the wings.

One possibility for the ambitious traditional monarch is to mix his

traditional authority with personal charisma. But this has its difficulties and dangers too. First, in order to be charismatic, one must have some extraordinary personal qualities. To be sure, these can often be evoked by stagecraft and public relations, but the charismatic leader has entered an arena in which the pressure is on, and he must live up to his billing or disappear into that special obscurity reserved for has-been charismatics. Every emergency—famine, riot, invasion, or special omen—calls for a corresponding miracle. If the charismatic leader does not live up to his own reputation, he soon loses legitimacy to a rival charismatic or to an "I-told-you-so" traditionalist. The tides of legitimacy can ebb and flow with startling rapidity, as the history of modern coups d'état demonstrates.

Finally, authority can be rational-legal. But rationalization is another dangerous beast to ride. Once this force is unleashed, there is no individual who cannot be found dispensable. The European monarchs who tried to consolidate their traditional authority by building a purely legal state found in the end that there is no justification for kings in a rational-legal code. The descendants of Louis XIV and Frederick the Great paid for the power they built. Rationalization attempts to remove the arbitrary, to provide a clear and sufficient reason for every social act. Not only kings, but party leaders, prime ministers, dictators, and individual bureaucrats themselves can be found wanting by the standards of the rational-legal regimes they control. Every regime that proclaims its principles—whether in the ideals of socialism, the United States Constitution, or the Declaration of the Rights of Man—is subject to the judgment of its people. Of course, regimes can get away with consideral deviations from their avowed ideals, since they control powerful organizational and material resources, including the communication facilities, which can define much of the reality its people observe. Still, ideals create a rallying point for potential opponents (like the dissident writers in the Soviet Union or the antiracist and antimilitarist movements in the United States) and constitute the weak link in the authority structure of a regime weakened by defeat, economic crisis, or internal conflict among its power holders. The traditional ruler, at any rate, did not have to spend much effort in justifying his actions. Thus, even where they are not lived up to (that is, almost everywhere), rational-legal principles of legitimacy set the basic context in which political dispute goes on.

WEBER'S THEORY OF HISTORY: THE RATIONALIZATION OF THE WORLD

The great transformation in history was that unmistakable phenomenon called "modernization," which turned a world of peasants, lords, and priests into a buzzing hive of organization, machinery, and movement. Weber found the core of that change in the new industrial economy. An explanation of the emergence of modern capitalism would thus be an

explanation of modernity, and Weber's search for its roots led him to describe the social outlines of world history.

Weber began by analyzing the modern economic system. The key attribute is predictability. There is no point in manufacturing large amounts of goods unless you can be sure of a regular market for them, and you cannot get the benefits of modern machinery and specialized division of labor unless you can continuously produce large amounts. Moreover, you cannot run a factory unless you can depend on having a regular supply of workers to hire and unless you can borrow money for capital expenses when you need it and under fair and reasonable conditions. In short, modern industry depends on large and stable markets, a dependable and economically motivated labor force, and a trustworthy financial system. Weber saw that these preconditions were missing throughout most of history and that a long chain of prerequisites had somehow to emerge before the modern economy could take off.

Markets, for example, had been mostly local—peasants producing their own necessities and bartering or selling the rest in nearby towns. Of the many factors that limited larger markets, three important ones were: (1) the riskiness of transporting valuable goods in a world of continuous warfare and conquest, where robbers and barons were equally dangerous and civil order existed only within the walls of one's town or sometimes only in one's house; (2) the general lack of a widespread system of money and credit to facilitate large-scale trading; and (3) distrust of strangers—from other lands, other religions, other villages—which made trading a matter of crafty haggling and merchants often indistinguishable from pirates.

Labor, in the modern sense, was also a historical rarity. Industries cannot run efficiently and competitively if workers are not available who will move from job to job as demand for products changes and who can be attracted to the areas of greatest profit by offers of commensurate wages. (As we see, Weber's economics is in the classical English tradition.) But workers in traditional societies are for the most part not free economic agents. Peasants are often bound to the land as serfs; industrial laborers are usually family members, household servants, or slaves, bound to the enterprise, and a continuing expense whether they are overworked or underworked. Guild monopolies control most of the remaining labor supply. All these various obstacles had to be broken down before the industrial labor force could be brought together in the factory system.

Finally, modern finance is also a recent development. Only in the large kingdoms and empires did a widespread system of money exist at all. Even then, there were many obstacles to a dependable system of loans. Widespread literacy was necessary before the more complex forms of credit—such as the stock market—could arise. Money was lent only at exorbitant rates of interest as long as the risks of nonpayment and failure were great—as they were in an era when courts and police

did not exist to back up contracts and when every business enterprise was risky. Not the least of the danger came from the state itself. Taxes were capricious and often little more than robbery; if a banker lent money to a king, there was no guarantee that he would ever get it back. Thus several great German banking houses—including the famous Fuggers of Augsburg—were wiped out in bankruptcies of the King of Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In such a world the life of a businessman was a precarious one. If by chance he was successful and amassed a fortune, he did not reinvest it in expanding his business, but made every effort to buy himself some land and a title of nobility and thus get out of the business world entirely.

Weber's task was to trace back through history to find out where and how each of these obstacles fell—to determine the one time and place where all the circumstances were right and where the industrial takeoff could begin. The story begins in remote antiquity in a world of tribal societies—some agricultural, some made up of nomadic herdsmen and hunters. Religion played a key role in their social structure and in their world views. Men lived and worked almost entirely with their kinsmen, and the kinship network and the community were united by a common set of ceremonies surrounding all aspects of life. God and spirits were everywhere—in the sky and the trees, guarding the hearth and the door of the house, and legitimating the authority of the patriarch-priest-chief. Like Durkheim, Weber recognized the integrating force of religion in primitive society.

Change came about especially by political struggle. Hunting tribes conquered agricultural tribes, creating two-class societies of peasants and warrior-aristocrats. Conquests went wider and wider; empires rose and fell; kings emerged; complex stratification grew within the ranks of the aristocracy; and royal administration (primitive bureaucracies) came into being. The familiar pendulum swings of world political history began: Overextended patrimonial regimes disintegrated into feudalism and then reconsolidated under a new conqueror. In these larger, more complex societies, wealth became concentrated. A division of labor developed around the royal courts, as artisans, servants, scribes, and merchants specialized to satisfy royal tastes. Priests developed separate hierarchies of their own, amalgamating war gods and nature gods into new syncretisms and pantheons.

In a number of these large societies—notably China and India—and in independent cities and small states on their peripheries—notably in Greece and Israel—a great change took place in the realm of religion between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C. Talcott Parsons, a leading interpreter of this phase of Weber's work, calls it the "philosophical breakthrough"—the rise of the great world religions. In each of these—Confucianism, Brahminism, Buddhism, Greek ethical philosophy, monotheistic Judaism and its later offshoots, Christianity and Islam—the nature of man's relationship to the physical and social worlds changes. The

change consists of *separating* the idea of the natural world from the idea of the spiritual world. Instead of gods and spirits routinely intervening in the world around us (as in Greek mythology), there exists another, very different realm: heaven and hell, another sphere of reality, a world of ideal principles.

The consequences of this change were far-reaching. As long as the world is in the play of gods and spirits, it cannot be taken as a very predictable place. One can only try to placate its invisible rulers by ceremonies and sacrifices or to control them by magic. But once the spiritual realm becomes separate, both nature and society can be treated in a more stable way.

First, by removing animistic entities the world becomes open to rational explanation. The door is opened to scientific investigation and explanation. This new-found rationalism can spill over into the social realm as well. Men can think of laws based on consistent general principles, instead of bowing before the eccentricities of sanctified tradition. Political and social arrangements, too, become subject to a rational critique—although this latter implication was not really seized upon until the French Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.

Second, religion itself can develop in new directions. Primitive religions merely describe an accepted if invisible side of the ordinary world. A man placates the gods in order to kill his enemies and make his crops grow; he does not worry about being good or going to heaven. (Think of the heroes of the *Odyssey* or the early part of the Old Testament.) The philosophical breakthrough opens up two new possibilities: (1) The spiritual realm can now be a place to which man escapes from the trials and tribulations of the world. If the righteous man—the one who follows all the rituals and does all his duties—nevertheless has bad fortune in the world, it does not fundamentally concern him. In fact, the material world can now be seen as a dangerous temptation, for the truly holy man concentrates only on his salvation. (2) The ideas of good and evil can develop separately from the ideas of worldly success and failure. For the primitive man sin simply means misfortune; as long as he is prosperous, healthy, and powerful, he has a clear conscience. The philosophical breakthrough puts a new ethical obligation on men. They are now to be concerned with justice and injustice toward their fellow men; conscience becomes its own reward and punishment.

These new possibilities, especially the second, are potential forces for great changes in society. The new ideas of good and evil and the concept of a world of perfection can provide tremendous leverage for changing the world to make it live up to these ideals. Here in antiquity we find the basis of Weber's Protestant ethic, which was to play a powerful role in the takeoff of industrialization 2,000 years later.

There is one more crucial attribute of the religions of the philosophical breakthrough: They are all *universalistic*. Earlier religions are limited to the members of one family, one tribe, or one ethnic group. The world religions, emerging in or near empires with unlimited ambitions of

ı conquest, exclude no one. Indeed, earlier religions are tolerant; they con-
ceive of a pluralistic world of many peoples, each with their patron gods.
But for Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and so on there is only *one*
god or spiritual reality; all else is false, illusory, or subordinate. This
shift is crucial because religions mark the limits of solidarity in society.
In primitive and traditional societies, men are bound together with those
who share a religious community. One can and must trust men who
worship the same household or tribal gods. But strangers—men with
different gods—are alien beings who cannot be trusted. One result of
this setup was a widespread prohibition on usury—lending money at
interest to other members of one's own religious group. Outside the
group one could bargain in as cutthroat a fashion as possible, since there
were no ethical obligations toward outsiders. Thus, to universalize a re-
ligion was abruptly to broaden the community within which peaceful so-
cial transactions could regularly be carried out.

The philosophical breakthrough opened many of the doors to industrial-
ization: laying the basis for a moral community of trust underlying peace-
ful commerce, rationalizing the legal system, motivating men to remake
political, social, and economic institutions in keeping with an imperative
to transform the world more closely to the ideal. But these implications
took a long time to work themselves out, and not all of the world re-
ligions opened up just the right path to the transformation of society.
Weber made a sweeping set of comparative studies of the various re-
ligions, of which *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is only
a preliminary version of the case of Christianity. The others were *The
Religion of China, The Religion of India,* and *Ancient Judaism;* he died
before he could begin his studies of Islam and early Christianity. His
broad conclusion was that only a certain kind of breakthrough—the mix-
ture of the ethical and scientific rationalism of Greek philosophy with the
legalism and world-changing activism of Judaism that made up Chris-
tianity—gave the impetus for rationalizing social institutions and chang-
ing the world in the economic and political upheavals of modernity. Con-
fucianism, Brahminism, Buddhism, and Islam he found entwined with the
patrimonial order of stratification in such ways that they strengthened
the unpredictable, irrational aspects of their societies rather than weak-
ened them.

In Europe the key story concerns the growth of the Christian Church—
the first large-scale, truly rationalized bureaucratic organization in history
—and its growing consolidation with the remnants of the Roman Empire,
itself legally rationalized under the influence of Greek culture. The age-
old pendulum of political consolidation and disintegration swung on, but
was nearing the end of its monotonous cycle through time. By the six-
teenth century kings began to build the bureaucracies—using priests as
their first bureaucrats—that would eventually destroy the fragmented
and conflict-ridden feudal system, establish a predictable set of laws and
a trustworthy monetary system, bring peace and order to large expanses
of territory, and carry out regular tax policies. Commerce spread; me-

chanical inventions were sought and made; and handicraft industries developed. Western Europe perched on the brink of industrialization, held back only by government mercantilist policies of establishing monopolies and by the feudal bondage of labor to the soil.

The final obstacles fell in England—ironically, the Western European country in which the feudal gentry had fought the most successful battle against the king and in which royal absolutism was least far advanced. After the civil war of the seventeenth century the small gentry class gained control of the state bureaucracy and used it to further their economic interests—moving the peasants off the land, thereby creating a labor force for the textile mills, and establishing an economic policy that would remove restraints on competition. The battle was fought and won by radical Protestants: men who felt that work, honesty, and rule following were the commandments of God and were further impelled by a powerful vision of the ideal world of heaven and hell. Their emergence *at this propitious time in history is not yet understood,* but the tradition from which they emerged is clear: They revived the early spirit of Christianity and brought to fruition the world-transforming potential of the religious breakthroughs of antiquity.

Once the industrial revolution was in full swing, its progress was unimpedable. New social classes appeared, transforming politics from the exclusive province of military aristocrats and court cabals to an object of mass movements and bureaucratic manipulations. Science, education, and mass communications were unleashed, to transform again and again the nature of stratification and of industry. England rose to wealth and world power. The rulers of other nations, however fearful of modernization's destructive effect on the old order that supported them, were forced to emulate England in order to keep pace militarily; otherwise, they faced the risk of becoming colonies of the modernized states.

From his towering intellectual vantage point, Weber watched the panorama of events flow through the centuries. *Die Entzauberung der Welt,* he called it—the master trend of history, the disenchantment of the world. Rationalization steadily pushes back the uncertain, the mythical, the poetic. Once all the world was seen through a veil of ritual and ceremony, goddesses and fire-breathing dragons, and the thousand fearful chances of everyday life; now daily railroad trains bring tourists to the castles of Transylvania. Even the God-fearing Protestant entrepreneur *has disappeared, replaced by the bureaucratic employee. Once the mod-*ern system is established, it runs of its own accord. But the Protestant ethic is not dead, it is merely secularized. Its spirit hangs on in the very institutions of modern society and in the tightly controlled personalities of the men who work in a world of rules and regulations, merit ratings, and bureaucratic security. In an America split in cultural war between a white middle-class generation still deep in the Protestant ethic, and their own sons and daughters rejecting the "uptight" world in alliance with

the members of a black culture that escaped only by being kept at the bottom, Weber's sociology strikes the central theme. No one saw more clearly than Weber the ways in which our lives are "haunted by the ghosts of dead religious beliefs."

For all his voluminous writings, Weber was first and foremost a polit-ical man. From his early career he was active in the law courts and government agencies of Berlin. His interest in economics was first stimulated when reform groups commissioned him to study the problems of labor immigration in East Prussia and stock-market manipulations. He began with his father's upper-class imperialist loyalties, but increasing exposure to the hardships of the lower classes shifted his sympathies gradually to the left. But he had no illusions about the costs of reform. He regarded the socialist utopia as an ideology with which the leaders of the Social Democratic party kept their followers in line, and he was in accord with his young friend Robert Michels' analysis of the "Iron Law of Oligarchy" in party politics.

The Marxists' flaw was that they failed to see the bureaucratic nature of the modern economy, whether it be capitalist or socialist. Weber became interested in Russia during the abortive revolution of 1905 and learned Russian in order to follow the events firsthand. His analysis was a remarkable foresight of the Soviet period. Should Russia lose a major European war and the revolutionary left come to power, he predicted, Russia would experience a bureaucratization of the entire social struc-ture such as the world has never seen. Considering Weber's views on the quality of life in a bureaucracy, his expectations were anything but optimistic. "The dictatorship of the official and not of the proletariat is on the march," he wrote.

The situation in Germany was scarcely more hopeful. Weber's growing disillusionment with conservative nationalism came as he watched Ger-many's inept foreign policy, losing allies and progressively isolating herself while at the same time carrying on an arms race and an increas-ingly strident campaign of nationalist self-glorification. He placed the blame on Germany's political structure: an impotent parliament inca-pable of controlling an irresponsible state bureaucracy; an army staffed by the defensively arrogant aristocrats of a bygone era; and a foolish hereditary monarch initiating policies that trapped the rest of the nation in their wake. In the 1890s Weber took part in efforts to create a responsible democratic party, but he dropped out when its hopelessness became apparent.

When World War I finally broke out, the release from years of tension came as a relief. Weber was at first enthusiastic. "In spite of all," he declared it "a great and wonderful war." As a fifty-year-old reserve officer in the German army, he was called to duty as the director of military hospitals in the Heidelberg area. A year later he retired and went to Berlin to wield what political influence he could to end the war.

After his first enthusiasm had worn off, Weber quickly realized that Germany's military and political leadership was incapable of carrying out a victorious policy and that a prolongation of the war could only result in the destruction of German—indeed, of European—power and the turning over of world domination to America. By 1918 his last loyalties to the Kaiser were gone, and he published a series of newspaper articles calling for a democratic constitution for postwar Germany.

The fall of the old regime seemed to take a personal weight from Weber's shoulders. From the Versailles peace conference, where he served on the German delegation, he wrote that he slept soundly at night for the first time in many years. Even his inability to teach was overcome. He accepted a professorship at Munich, where he lectured to enormous crowds of students, intellectuals, and public dignitaries. Politics suddenly showed opportunities. Weber became the leader of a new liberal democratic party. An arch realist, he nevertheless saw a ray of hope. Political parties might be corrupt oligarchies, but only within free parliamentary competition might leaders arise capable of controlling the recalcitrant state bureaucracy and giving the nation intelligent policies.

But time had run out. In 1919 Weber fell ill of pneumonia, and he died the next year at the age of fifty-six. His party collapsed; the first of the German republic's many economic and political crises was upon it. Responsible leadership would not be forthcoming; the irresponsible ones were already gathering in the beer gardens of Munich. Politics is a dangerous and morally taxing vocation, Weber had told his students in one of his famous last lectures. The idealist as well as the cynic is caught in webs of consequences far beyond those intended in his acts. Ideals alone are not enough; they must be accompanied by hard realism, sympathetic imagination, and an unyielding sense of responsibility. The following might have been his own epitaph for his accomplishments in the realm of knowledge as well as his failures in the realm of politics:

Politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards. It takes both passion and perspective. Certainly all historical experience confirms the truth—that man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible. But to do that a man must be a leader, and not only a leader but a hero as well, in a very sober sense of the word. And even those who are neither leaders nor heroes must arm themselves with that steadfastness of heart which can brave even the crumbling of all hopes. This is necessary right now, or else men will not be able to attain even that which is possible today. Only he has the calling for politics who is sure that he shall not crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer. Only he who in the face of all this can say "In spite of all!" has the calling for politics.[1]

[1] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 128.