

5-2015

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Max Weber's Politics as a Vocation: Modernity and Its Discontents

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Undergraduate Honors Thesis Under the Direction of

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Submitted to the LSU Honors College in partial fulfillment of the Upper Division Honors  
Program

May, 2015

Louisiana State University & Agricultural and Mechanical College

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

## Introduction

In 1919, the political climate of Germany was overly charged. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, two famous Marxian scholars, were assassinated, and just a few weeks after their assassinations with Revolution now in the air, Max Weber was to address a throng of radical students at Munich University. Instead of focusing on the issues of the day, however, Weber said to the students, “This lecture will necessarily disappoint you in a number of ways.” For Weber, current issues were only miniscule compared to the significance of politics in the whole of life. Defining politics as a way to share power or influence the distribution of power, “Politics as a Vocation”<sup>1</sup> is above all a technical and abstract journey into the question of what politics means and what it can mean in our lives.

This essay will examine Weber’s political thought on modernity with specific attention paid to the themes found in his famous lecture: *PV*. Specifically, this lecture and its themes deserve a critical analysis because Weber’s advice is not only relevant to our time, it is universally important. Through exploring the growth and development of politics and how it has led to ways of thinking about modern politics and through addressing the reasons of why and how people rule, he provides an invaluable addition to the canon of political literature. By exploring the concepts of rationality, bureaucracy, the tripartite division of authority, the political personality, charisma, and the state, it will become apparent that Weber’s political thought encapsulates some key misgivings of modernity and thus propels the boundaries of political thought forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Politics as a Vocation will for the remainder of the essay be abbreviated *PV*.

Through careful analysis, this essay will answer the following major questions about politics in the modern world: What is rationality and what are the implications for defining it as Weber does? What does it mean to define politics as the legitimate use of violence and what are the consequences for democracy? What are characteristics of the ubiquitous modern institution that is the bureaucracy and what role does it play in authority? What are the three types of authority in Weber's thought and what conclusions can be drawn from examining them?

### **History of Weber's Political Thought**

To first understand Weber's key themes, however, it is essential to examine the influences and development of his political thought. At the turn of the twentieth century, there were a number of intellectual groups in Germany that concerned themselves with the "fate of the individual in the modern, industrial, bureaucratic society."<sup>2</sup> Influenced by the "Sturm und Drang," an intellectual movement that stressed the importance of individuality, Weber led his own modernity-critical group in Heidelberg, Germany centered on his Nietzschean-like critique of modern civilization. Indeed, Nietzsche was a strong proponent of mass culture, criticizing religion because it promotes a slave morality and politics because it "leads the herd to conformity." Modern society had become so chaotic that it has lost the resources necessary to create a flourishing culture and ultimately advanced the decline of humanity. While it is true that Weber's criticism did not question the epistemology of Enlightenment thinking—it questioned the institutions of modern life—like Nietzsche did, his deep diagnosis of the issues faced in the modern world parallels Nietzsche's darkly and tragic view of modernity in the sense that both pedantically examine the fundamental problems of culture.

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<sup>2</sup> Koch, Andrew M. "Rationality, Romanticism and the Individual: Max Weber's "Modernism" and the Confrontation with "Modernity"" *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 26.1 (1993), 126.

The Sturm und Drang mainly argued that the personal experience was in direct contradiction with the modern demand for order and conformity. In essence, the individual would always be in conflict with social institutions. With the rise of the industrial revolution, the Sturm und Drang, like Weber, lamented that with the rise of bureaucracy, individuals would become machines in the social mechanism.

Along with the Sturm und Drang, Weber was influenced by the great philosopher, Immanuel Kant because in his *Methodologies of the Social Sciences*, he says: “the fundamental ideas of modern epistemology... ultimately derive from Kant.” Seeking to reconcile a long philosophical debate, Kant attempted to merge the viewpoints of the rationalists and the empiricists, arguing that there are two ways of knowing: the sensible and the intelligible. For Kant, individuals create the categories by which they see the world; it is only through the modes of perception that exist in the human intellect that humans view the world in an orderly and not chaotic fashion. Rationalists believe that there is innate knowledge and that we use reason to discover these thoughts, while empiricists claim that nothing is innate and that knowledge is derived from experience. The interaction of the senses and the understanding produces knowledge, and it is forever limited to the objective world. In other words, the objects in the world are different in themselves as compared to how they are represented by the human intellect.

Indeed, science is the study of the objective world, and reason allows individuals to “create synthetic statements about the objects of experience.”<sup>3</sup> For Kant, scientific principles do not depend on our modes of perceptions; they exist apriori. This framework of understanding the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 128.

physical world eluded Kant when he was formulating his ethical system because moral commitments are rooted in metaphysics, not science. Therefore, ethical statements can only be grounded in assumptions because they do not meet the same rigor—deduced from actual practice—as scientific statements.

Kant's influence significantly influenced Weber's political thought because as a social scientist and thinker, Weber "was forced to confront the roles played by morality and value commitments."<sup>4</sup> To find meaning in the social sciences, investigators had to choose objects and concepts out of an infinite number of possibilities and reflect on them their personal value judgements. In essence, objective, descriptive analysis rarely exists in the social sciences because the social sciences are by nature not constituted according to universal laws or principles. Nevertheless, it is still true that general theories in the social sciences, such as the law of supply and demand in Economics, can obtain the scientific credibility of, for example, gravity.

Unlike Kant, however, Weber did not stress the role of reason in human evolution. In fact, Weber, was extremely pessimistic about the emphasis on rationality in the modern world. While technological advancements allowed mankind to venture beyond new frontiers of discovery, the expansion of reason into social life "depletes the individual of the spontaneous, creative character of human existence."<sup>5</sup> For Weber, modernity is characterized by its over-reliance on rational thought. The rise of reason is, in a sense, a dualistic ascent between pushing the human race forward technologically, while at the same time, hindering its progress socially.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 129.

But first, it is essential to explore the concept of rationality in detail before discussing its profound implications for modernity. Though often hailed as the harbinger of advancement, rationality is a much more complicated concept than often used.

### **The Question of Rationality**

Rationality has been universally acknowledged as the major theme in Weber's political, sociological, and cultural thought. However, few commentators have investigated the various types of rationality in his corpus. Weber is partly to blame because he is largely responsible for the lack of clarity that surrounds scholarly interpretations and analyses of rationality. Indeed, it would seem that his fragmented discussions of this concept are more likely to mystify and perplex than to illuminate. In *PV*, he says, there is domination by virtue of legality... based on rationally created rules," but when describing the beginnings of "rational juristic thinking," he uses it in a different sense.<sup>6</sup>

Scattered across various spheres of his writings, Weber created a fourfold typology of rationality: practical, theoretical, formal, and substantive. It is important to note, however, that Weber never outlined a specific fourfold typology of rationality, per se. He never wrote anything that delineated each type and its ramifications; rather, he used the term in different ways in all of his writings. According to Kalberg's analysis of Weber, these types of rationality are anchored in a way of understanding the "conscious regularities of action orientations on the part of individuals and, in some cases, 'ways of life.'"<sup>7</sup> These rational spheres depend on

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<sup>6</sup> *PV.*, 2,9.

<sup>7</sup> Kalberg, Stephen. "Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History." *American Journal of Sociology* 85.5 (1990), 1148.

numerous connecting and interacting ideas, values, interests (political and economic) that underlie civilization.

By examining his rationalization processes and discovering the different spheres (personal, public, religious, bureaucratic) of life that encompass each, Weber sought to analyze the degree to which a single realm could be designated as the “originator”—all other rationalization processes fell in line behind this realm, and Weber’s discussion of it is mainly aimed at critiquing Karl Marx’s emphasis on the economic sphere as the originator. Marx’s philosophy stems from the idea that the base (Economics) determines the superstructure of society (art, religion, science,). In essence, everything in society is a product of the distribution of the means of production and how those in power shape the worldviews of those not in power. Weber never answered the question of which realm was supreme, but through analyzing the intense capitalistic activity of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence and comparing it with the struggling economic backwardness of 18<sup>th</sup> century Pennsylvania and the rest of the early colonial settlements, Weber concluded that capitalism could not by itself give rise to an “economic ethic,” a Marxian economic centered model.<sup>8</sup> In Florence, merchants transformed the wool industry into an international business by importing large quantities of higher-quality wool from England and other countries to eventually begin manufacturing even better quality wool at superior prices. The use of bills of exchange eventually became a means of extending credit, one of the first of its kind. On the other hand, Pennsylvania levied extensive taxes on whiskey in order to pay off the national debt caused by the Revolutionary War, which ultimately resulted in the infamous Whiskey Rebellion. This problem thus caused Weber to examine the way in which action was rationalized in particular spheres.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1151.



The first categorization of Weber's rationality typology deals with practical rationality. In essence, practical rationality "actively manipulates the given routines of daily life... accepts given realities and calculates the most expedient means of dealing with the difficulties they present."<sup>9</sup> Practical rationalization thus deals with the careful weighing of circumstances and the increasingly precise calculation of solutions to the world's problems. In the modern age of disenchantment where the bonds of magic have been severed, "the capability and disposition of persons for practical rational patterns of action appears."<sup>10</sup> Importantly, this predisposition results in an inclination to oppose the impractical values of the "beyond," whether secular or religious. For example, in the modern world, when politicians<sup>11</sup> employ a cost-benefit analysis on certain foreign or domestic policy considerations, they are using Weber's practical rationality because they each weigh the consequences of choosing one option over the other by deeming one decision as impractical or inefficient.

Slightly different from practical rationality lies the second of Weber's categorizations: theoretical rationality. This type of rationality deals with developing a conscious mastery of the real world through constructing and mastering certain abstract concepts, such as cause and effect, logical relationships, and the formation of symbolic understandings of phenomena. Indeed, many types of thinkers have practiced this form of rationality, ranging from the appearance of ethical salvation religions with "theologians who rationalized the values implicit in religious

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1152.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1152.

<sup>11</sup> For the remainder of the essay, the word politician will be used in a variety of ways. In one sense, it will refer to a leader of men, regardless if that leader is the head of government or someone in parliament. In another sense, it will refer to an ideal type of leader who may not be in parliament or government.

doctrines into internally consistent constellations of values,” to Plato who questioned the idea of symbols (objects) having a true form.”<sup>12</sup>

Whether individuals have answered the question of true form philosophically or religiously, this type of rationality has played a monumental role in shaping the world. Furthermore, though ultimately rooted in the metaphysical realm, theoretical rationalization can sometimes lead to rational-action, as in the previous type of rationality. For example, in the ancient world, the belief in gods being able to protect men from evils—Greek and Roman—was eventually demystified, and abstract (theoretical rationalization) thinking led to the conclusion that “these gods were egoistic beings and that their anger could be calmed only by entreaties and supplications.”<sup>13</sup> Eventually, the idea of appeasing the gods led to the formation of a new range of religious practitioners: priests. By continually employing theoretical rationality to aspects of the metaphysical realm, followers eventually began to change their everyday actions to practice “good behavior” or penance. In the modern world, however, priests have been replaced with entire institutions and ways of life that posit a totally rational picture of the world, so the vast spread of rationality’s influence is far greater and all encompassing.

It is important to note that Weber does not mean to employ his rationalization typology (in this case theoretical rationalization) in a global manner to refer to all civilizations. Rather, different civilizations undergo different rationalization processes that occur at their own rates. For example, the type of rationalization processes that characterize the Chinese, Indian, and ancient Eastern civilizations were different than those adopted by the West—mystical contemplation (Plato and Aristotle), Christianity, and ancient Judaism. In his writings, however,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1153.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1154.

“the various rationalization processes are often discussed by Weber in reference to Western civilization’s distinctive modernization path.”<sup>14</sup> Hence, Weber’s analysis of rationality has a distinctive anti-western sentiment to it, which explains why he is so critical of Western culture.

The third aspect of Weber’s typology deals with substantive rationality. Unlike theoretical rationality but like practical rationality, substantive rationality orders actions into patterns. It does not follow a purely means-end calculation like practical rationality; rather, this rationality “rationalizes” in relation to a past, present, or potential “value postulate.” In other words, this type of rationality involves numerous interconnected value spheres that all play a part in determining action. For example, friendship, communism, Hinduism, or Calvinism all denote examples of substantive rationalities because they are all categorized by their interconnected values that dictate actions—though it is true that each diverges from the other in their specific content.

Substantive rationality possesses a critical feature that makes it unique in Weber’s typology: its radical perspectivism. This type of rationality always exists “in reference to ultimate points of view or “directions.”<sup>15</sup> Each point of view is infinitely connected to other points of view that create an endless array of rationalization processes, which results in a lack of absolute standards or values for the rationalization process. Instead, the process depends on the individual’s implied, unconscious or conscious, affinity for certain values that are consistent. Similarly, irrational systemization results from the incompatibility and inconsistency of value systems interacting with each other. For example, the modern scientist or intellectual who trusts the scientific method and the belief in empirical knowledge is viewed as irrational to the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1149.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1155.

religious man who relies on faith and belief in an omnipotent being. Thus, Weber's concept of substantive rationality ultimately leads him to conclude that science is limited in its ability to prove the superiority of one value sphere over another. Just because capitalism, for example, is the widely accepted form of rational economic practices or because physics and engineering provides humanity with great technological innovations does not mean that they are "valid" processes at the level of a value system.

Finally, Weber's fourth type of rationality in his topology is formal rationality. Generally, formal rationality relates to spheres of life that have achieved a rational and delineated structure of domination due to the rise of industrialization. For example, the rise of the economic, legal, bureaucratic, and scientific spheres all involve, like practical rationality, reference back to a means-end rational calculation. The key difference is that formal rationality involves reference back to universally applied rules, laws, or regulations. In the formal rationality framework, decisions are arrived at without regard for persons or personal qualities of individuals; all arbitrariness is removed. Importantly, Weber's *PV* seems to focus entirely on formal rationality because all of his references throughout the lecture are all linked to some idea of legality.

For Weber, the most "rational" type of formal rationality is the bureaucracy because its sole purpose is to select the most adequate, precise, and efficient solutions to problems by ordering them under universal and specific regulations saying in *PV*, "The bureaucratic state order is especially important; its most rational development, it is precisely characteristic of the modern state."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, legal formal rationality exists when judges rule on issues of law by

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<sup>16</sup> *PV*, 3.

only taking into account unambiguous general characteristics of the case, which is opposed to legal substantive rationality, where judge's rule based on a reference point of ultimate justice or common law tradition. In the economic sphere, actions are judged as more formally rational to the extent that all calculations within the "laws of the market" are carried out regardless of their effect on individuals or ethical systems. This is not to say, however, that the laws of the market do not contain an implicit value system. In fact, Michael Sandal, the renowned Harvard philosopher, states that the value, ethical system of utilitarianism underlies all economic theory in the sense that economics is always aiming towards getting the maximum benefit.<sup>17</sup> Siding with Sandel, Weber's ideas of formal rationality—in fact, all his distinctions—have a uniquely relatable 21<sup>st</sup> century truth to them. In the modern era, surrounded by bureaucracies at every corner, efficiency is the maxim that guides actions.

Though each type of rationality differs in its own way, each also shares fundamental similarities with the other. For example, mental processes that consciously strive to master reality are common to all. Regardless of how each type of rationality attempts to make sense of reality, their common aim is "to banish particularized perceptions by ordering them into comprehensible and meaningful regularities."<sup>18</sup> Differences, however, arise when examining how each type of rationality introduces methodical ways of life for individuals.

However, only one of the four types of rationality possesses the ability to lead a methodical (deliberate, consistent, reasoned) way of life. Practical rationality comes close, but because it is based on continually reacting to changing situations instead of providing structure to them, it cannot induce methodical, rational ways of life. In a sense, however, practical

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<sup>17</sup> Sandel, Michael J. *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012. Print., 126.

<sup>18</sup> Kalberg, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality," 1154.

rationality does incorporate some kind of methodology because one element of consistency always remains: “self-interest regularly guides actions here and introduce a way of life grounded in them.”<sup>19</sup> Theoretical rationality also is constrained by its ability to induce a methodical way of life because once the scientist, for example, is done with his formulation of a hypothesis in the lab, “he rarely directs his actions (his use of theoretical rationality) outside the laboratory.”<sup>20</sup> In a sense, the abstract formation of concepts only minimally plays into a methodical way of life because these abstract concepts are taken for granted and do not require deliberation. Even if it does, it is only for a temporary moment due to contingent circumstances, such as a job or professional involvement that requires such modes of thought. Lastly, formal rationality lacks the ability to induce a methodical way of life because the formally rational patterns usually fail to characterize the civil servants, lawyers, businessmen in their personal relationships. Though the institutional life of these professions may possess formal rationality, that formalness loses its hold once they go home to their families. This key difference between one’s professional life and personal life highlights an important facet of Weber’s rational perspective: that one’s entire life must be guided by a specific rationalization process for that individual to truly possess the qualities he describes. Indeed, one must actively work towards a good and methodical life; it cannot merely be taken for granted. However, formal rationality possess an element unique to it: “Without this juristic (formal) rationalism, the rise of the absolute state is just as little imaginable as is the Revolution.”<sup>21</sup> For Weber, the universal principles applied by jurists of the ages has guided the evolution of previous political regimes to the modern conception of the state.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 1164.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 1164.

<sup>21</sup> *PV.*, 10.

Indeed, only substantive reason possesses the ability to introduce methodical ways of life, but it occurs most effectively when theoretical logic rationalizes the values of a given substantive rationality. The content of these hybrid forms of rationalization vary across a wide-ranging spectrum, and they usually result in ethical standards, which imposes a normative element on human action that possesses the quality of the morally good. The good for Weber, similar to Kant's universal law of reason, rests on an ultimate value postulate. In the modern world, however, the "Kantian linkage between principled and thus free action had been irrevocably severed."<sup>22</sup> Because of the pattern-ordering quality inherent in substantive rationality, ethical rationality does not merely involve the "memorization of rules for proper conduct that putatively contain the wisdom of past generations."<sup>23</sup> As a deontologist, Kant sought to guide moral, human action according to a maxim, the categorical imperative. In the modern world, however, with all its incessant questioning on issues absolute rules would face the harsh judge of reason. By consciously organizing action into patterns that are consistent with value constellations, substantive rationality ultimately is the only type that can master reality comprehensively.

These examinations of Weber's different type of rationality exemplify the deep tension in his political thought between his Kantian side for universal value postulates that structure the way we live and at the same time and his Nietzschean diagnosis of the modern world and all the problems that arise with rational thought. The most important issue, however, was the rise of the bureaucratic institution and its administrative functions.

### **The Limits of Bureaucratic Rationality**

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<sup>22</sup> Kim, Sung Ho. "Max Weber." *Stanford University*. Stanford University, 24 Aug. 2007. Web. 05 Apr. 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Kalberg, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality," 1165.

As stated in the prior section, Weber uses rationality in a variety of important, yet different ways. Each possessed its own limits, but only substantive rationality was capable of inducing methodical ways of life into the individual. Weber's account of formal rationality, however, and its emphasis on bureaucratic rationality requires more discussion.

Weber is perhaps most remembered for his account of the bureaucracy and its characteristics: salaried individuals, hierarchical ruling structure, and its emphasis on formal rules and procedures. To understand Weber's account of bureaucracy, however, it is necessary to first understand the different interpretations and theories of bureaucracy put forth by other German and conservative thinkers, most notably Gustav Schmoller. This will place Weber's theories into the context of a long historical debate and shed insight into why he says, "Modern bureaucracy in the interest of integrity has developed a high sense of status honor; without this sense, the danger of an awful corruption threatens fatally."<sup>24</sup>

Schmoller posited that bureaucracy stood alongside the monarchy as a neutral force above the competing interests of party and class and was imbued with a special "political wisdom." Red tape existed in Schmoller's account of bureaucracy, but by a few administrative reforms, the problem could be fixed. Bureaucracy was essentially an independent political force that had the wisdom and objectivity necessary to direct societal affairs. Weber, however, had a different and far more complex account than Schmoller.

Weber saw bureaucracy as not only an effective instrument of administration, but as the "most technically efficient instrument of administration."<sup>25</sup> Unlike Schmoller's conservative

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<sup>24</sup> *PV.*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Beetham, David. *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1974. Print.



view, however, Weber insisted that bureaucracy was only a technical instrument and nothing more. Of course, in the increasing bureaucratization of modern life, bureaucratic institutions can seem to take on a life of their own, but at its essence, these institutions are merely one type of administrative instrument that is precise, soulless, and machine-like, which is in opposition to the conservative view of it possessing superior status or an emotional mystique.

The second aspect of Weber's theory of bureaucracy in opposition to the conservative view is that bureaucracies had a tendency to exceed its instrumental functions and become a force with the power to influence the goals and character of a society. Weber was disgusted at this transformative mechanism of the bureaucracy because it "involved usurping the goal setting function which properly belonged to the politician... and it was one for which the civil servant was by training unsuited."<sup>26</sup> Underlying this second aspect of Weber's theory of bureaucracy lies the inherent limitations of what bureaucracy could not achieve because "All too often the civil servant as a politician turns a cause that is good in every sense into a weak cause."<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the third aspect of Weber's theory of bureaucracy involves the facet of this administrative body as reflecting the class structure of society. Theoretically, the bureaucracy is supposed to be free from bias, but in reality, it is "unable to free itself from the outlook of the social classes from which it was recruited and to which it was allied."<sup>28</sup> In essence, the class that makes up the bureaucracy is able to determine the main features of policy. For example, if the main recruits to the bureaucracy are from liberal backgrounds and are extremely technocratic, the bureaucratic institution will also begin to exhibit such preferences.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>27</sup> *PV.*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Theory of Modern Politics.*, 66.

With Weber's three facets of bureaucracy outlined, it is now important to turn to the question of how bureaucracy was able to advance so quickly in the modern world. Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, modern authority began slowly replacing patriarchal systems of administration and traditional systems of authority with "rational" or "legal" modes of authority. In other words, authority would no longer be personally vested in the mores and habits of tradition as Weber refers to in *PV*, "the authority of eternal yesterday,"<sup>29</sup> or in the authority of a charismatic ruler or war lord. Instead, it would be vested in a system of impersonal rules and written procedures, no thanks to the help of rationalistic jurists who "have been of decisive significance for the Continent's whole political structure."<sup>30</sup> Secondly, traditional authority rested on a belief in the power of the past because creating new laws was limited to individual rulers and their opinions on right or wrong, just or unjust. With legal authority, however, there is theoretically an unlimited scope for new laws, provided the formal procedures are observed. Thus, because these characteristics of the bureaucracy give rise to an official who is "disciplined to treat like cases alike, irrespective of the personal status of the individual, and to apply rules consistently..." bureaucratic institutions inevitably grew because of the continuity and fairness that this system provided in relation to the traditional authority system."<sup>31</sup>

Beetham's analysis of the rationality inherent in bureaucratic institutions seems to contradict, or at least be at odds with, Kalberg's notion of rationality in bureaucratic institutions. As mentioned earlier, Kalberg asserts that formal rationality is the key defining type for bureaucracies because of the specific rules and regulations that are inherent in this administrative system. On the other hand, Beetham suggests that bureaucracies are rational in the sense that

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<sup>29</sup> *PV.*, 2.

<sup>30</sup> *PV.*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> *Theory of Modern Politics.*, 68.

they “ensured maximum precision and calculability of operations.”<sup>32</sup> Beetham thus conflates Kalberg’s notion of practical rationality with formal rationality into one general type of “rationality.” Perhaps Kalberg had more time to conduct research because his article was written later or perhaps, and more likely, Beetham had a certain idea of rationality in bureaucracies because he mainly analyzed Weber’s political writings, while Kaldberg examined the entire corpus of Weber’s writings.

Nevertheless, Beetham’s analysis of Weber’s conception of bureaucracy still sheds important light on this modern achievement. Because bureaucracy has clearly defined spheres of competence and because it is operated to intellectually analyzable rules, this system of administration guaranteed its superiority over all other forms of administrations. Like the prowess of the machine over non-mechanical forms of production, so too was the bureaucracy compared favorably to other types of administration— personal retainers, unpaid amateurs, elected officials. It was the only system that could cope with the increasing complexity of problems that came with the rise of the capitalist market economy.

Weber provides two examples to prove his point: United States and Russia. In the US, Weber observed how “the criterion for election to services rendered to the party...” were more important “than of any qualifications for the particular office.”<sup>33</sup> This system ultimately destroyed the basis of administrative discipline; in fact, the system could only be held together by the unlimited economic resources of the US, but this, too, was possible no longer. In Russia, a quasit-collegial system of administration needed to be replaced. Each ministry operated

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 70.

independently of the other and reported separately to the Tsar. Each department spent an infinite amount of time trying to figure out the other, and the result was a great loss of time and resources. Both countries inevitably became bureaucratized through civil service reform because their prior infrastructure and organization could not meet the demands of the time.

Because of its technical superiority, bureaucracy was advancing at an alarming rate. With this increase, however, came unexpected consequences. Weber's writings contain an ambivalent character of rationality. Specifically, the power of rationalization allowed men to increase their freedom, but the rise of bureaucracy also increased the powers to which they were subject. Weber denoted two different types of bureaucracy: the first is the political administration of the state, while the second denotes a rational type of administration wherever it occurs in society. The first deals with the independence and control of power of the state bureaucracy, while the second deals with the cultural effects of the rise of bureaucracy in society.

In theory, the bureaucracy of the state should only be an impersonal administrative apparatus, but in reality, according to Weber, it is a separate group within the state with its "own special interests, values, and power basis."<sup>34</sup> Its separate interests were rooted in the maintenance and extension of administrative positions and power. Its values were rooted in a belief in its own power of objectivity over the national interest free from party bias. And its power lay in its members' knowledge and experience. These characteristics molded the bureaucracy into a totally special and separate group within the state that pursued its own special interests. Indeed, only another counterbalancing power (not stated by Weber though most probably parliament) could subdue the immense power of the bureaucracy.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 72.

In Russia and Germany, the bureaucracy's power pursued its own interests at the expense of the state interest. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century German and Russian history showed a variety of bureaucratic interests at work: their interest in minimizing the power of parliament, in bypassing parliament and interacting directly with interest groups, and in maximizing the secrecy of governmental operation. The bureaucracy in these countries were able to pursue these avenues successfully; however, they not only involved an interest of power as a means to improve administrative performance, but "power was an end in itself."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the same still holds true today. For example, the entire scandal with Edward Snowden, a former NSA analyst and current whistleblower, exemplifies the idea that contrary to the federal government's opinion on surveillance, the NSA participated in actions because of its own interests: gathering intelligence. Though it is true that the Patriot Act was passed in 2001 that gives the US government power to surveillance potential terrorists or threats to the country, the actions by the NSA go utterly above and beyond any type of justification stated in the Patriot Act, which supports the idea that this bureaucratic institution has overstepped its duties and became as Weber noted, an institution with a life of its own.

Weber observes that the bureaucrats justified their seizing of power because of their beliefs and values. They viewed parliamentary officials as inferior because their rules and laws would ultimately determine how the bureaucracy would run—the bureaucrats considered themselves more aptly able than any parliamentarian to command this office. The bureaucrats were above party politics, which is an additional reason why they pursued their own interests over the "bungling and impractical pigheadedness of the government."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 73

Problems arise, however, when bureaucrats claim to be above the party because their original framework of understanding of being above party lines may, in fact, have been skewed from the very beginning. In Weber's own Prussian democracy, bureaucrats were indeed "impartial," but their impartiality was ultimately skewed because almost the entire bureaucracy was recruited from the conservative social groups.

Indeed, though the bureaucrats had more knowledge over the administrations' affairs than parliamentarians or members in government, their true power lie in knowledge protected by secrecy. In Prussia and Russia, for example, the bureaucracy had a monopoly over the census and production statistics. This knowledge put the bureaucracy into an impregnable position for proposing reforms from its own standpoint because they limited the knowledge of these statistics from parliament. This secret knowledge thus made it difficult for officials to be controlled by their political masters, unless the latter had an informant or some inside source of information.

Germany, Russia, and Prussia thus exemplify what Weber called a government by officials. Though exteriorly a monarchy, these governments were really controlled by the officials. The phrase "rule by officials," however meant two things to Weber: the general sense in which government is ruled by officials or in another, more important, sense that relates to the "bureaucracy occupying leading roles in the state."<sup>37</sup>

As Weber stated, bureaucracy is supposed to be a purely technical instrument and nothing more. However, with the rise of bureaucratic systems and officials increasingly taking power in leading state roles and its tendency to evolve into a separate group within the state, the underlying rational character of bureaucracy itself ultimately results in an irrational

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 76.

rationalization. The bureaucracy cannot assume a political function because it is not equipped for such dealings. A bureaucrat is not held to be morally responsible for carrying out a policy. His duty is to carry it out “exactly as if the order agreed with his own conviction,” while it is the politicians’ responsibility to be held accountable for the policies he pursues, “a responsibility he cannot and must not reject or transfer.”<sup>38</sup> The politician is not restricted to the disciplined duties of his office; rather, he must “make compromises, sacrifice the less to the more important.”<sup>39</sup> While the politician judges situations by how much support he can get for his policies, the official judges situations by reference to rules and expertise. For example, during wartime (WWI) and with the issue of treatment of workers, German officials defined issues in bureaucratic terms, and responded to the striking workers with an authoritative renunciation of the rules, while the British government perceived the issue in political terms: how to maintain an allegiance with the workers to continue supporting the war effort. Furthermore, while the official uses language in a precise and objective manner, the politician uses language as a rhetorical device as a means to win supporters in the face of opposing viewpoints. These difference in qualities highlight the stark difference between the official and the politicians, many of which each will never gain in their respective careers—however good one may be at his job. Without the moral discipline and self-denial of these officials, the entire bureaucratic structure would fall.

As stated earlier, the term bureaucracy in Weber’s corpus is meant not only to refer to the state apparatus, but also to the general type of rational administration present in all areas of modern life. This expansion of the bureaucracy into all sectors of society not only had specific

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<sup>38</sup> *PV.*, 10.

<sup>39</sup> *Theory of Modern Politics.*, 76.

consequences for the interrelationships among political institutions, but it also had significant consequences for society. According to Weber, bureaucracy had a two-pronged effect on social stratification. Firstly, it resulted in a process of social democratization. In essence, parental privilege or circumstances became increasingly irrelevant because “the principles of rational administration based on specialist knowledge and experts demanded the broadest possible social base for recruitment.”<sup>40</sup> Secondly, the importance of one’s pedigree or trade became replaced with a focus on one’s educational background because that is where the bureaucracy recruited its members. This change in focus ultimately resulted in an increase in college enrollment mainly because of a need to fulfill the “demand for certificates,” not because of an inherent thirst for knowledge or virtue. This certificate could guarantee social prestige, a salaried career, and the image of one as being part of officialdom.

With the rise of the bureaucratic class in full effect, the ideals of status, security, and order (stability), became extremely prevalent as well. In fact, with the rise of WWI, the world was well on its way to this type of society dominated by men who “need order and nothing but order... that they became nervous and cowardly if this order falters for a moment, and quite lost if they are torn away from it.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the development of the bureaucracy ultimately invaded the values of everyday life, and Weber was placed in a position where he could only judge these attitudes negatively because of their wider social consequences.

It is, however, important to note that these values of economic stability, salaried pay until death, and order do in fact stem from the bureaucratic system. But closer analysis reveals that the reasons why the bureaucracy is imbued with these values is mainly due to the rise of the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 80.



capitalist enterprise. It is only because of capitalism and its emphasis on private property, profit maximization, and economic stability that the bureaucracy had these ideals to draw from in the first place. In a different society not rooted in the ideals of economics, a drastically different type of bureaucracy could have arisen, and Weber may have detailed an entirely foreign version of his bureaucratic theory.

Indeed, Weber is famed for his elegant theory of bureaucracy and its consequences and limitations in the modern world. He is, however, also famous for his discussion of the politician and the qualities that he or she must possess to effectively wield the power that is politics.

### **The Political Personality**

In *PV*, he outlines his characteristics of a true politician, one who can, in spite of the ethical struggles of leadership, do what needs to be done to succeed. For Weber, this true politician must have a commitment to politics; he must be able to use violence vis-à-vis the state when necessary for the greater good of the people. He must make decisions that sometimes contrast with what the people want in order to do what is best for the state, a human community that successfully claims the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. The object of a science of politics in Weber's view is the fate of the human being who makes this important commitment and of what happens to this being when they are made aware of their political fate. This idea of a vocation or calling for politics is central to what it means to be a cultural being, which is why Weber is so fascinated by "the kind of man one must be if he is allowed to put his hand on the wheel of history."<sup>42</sup> Just as only certain individuals are scientifically or artistically

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<sup>42</sup> *PV*, 20.

inclined, only those with the calling are fit for political activity; however, according to Turner's analysis on Weber, "few are called, and fewer are chosen."<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, another key characteristic for the politician is having the ability to keep the bureaucracy under control politically. In *PV*, he asserts that this individual will have the calling for politics and also an earthly knowledge with a practical mindset of the means by which this task could be attained. These political leaders, however, could only be found in communities with certain types of parliaments and with mass democracy.

But first, it is important to explore Weber's conception of politics and its relation to citizenship—the essence of what it means to be a cultural being in society. The political personality is a type of ideal human being with the capability to become a genuine, ethical man. Because a vocation is a calling rooted in human conviction, there exists no explicit link between vocation and citizenship. According to Weber, the state has no inherent purpose, for it is merely a framework, a conception of legality, and its citizens are members in a direct sense. However, to be a cultural being, one must have freedom of the personality (or the freedom of purposive activity), and it is only through the intermediate group (a group formed for the collective purpose of individuals) and its relationship with the state that the individual can achieve the two types of freedoms that Weber defines explicitly in his writings: "Freedom of movement and freedom of conscience."<sup>44</sup> Weber's statements echo Aristotle's notion that all men are associational, or political, by nature. In fact, when he visited America in 1904, he witnessed a trend for Americans to form associations for the most trivial purposes—American business clubs, for example. Thus, Weber's ideal citizen is made possible by the fate of the politician, but it

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<sup>43</sup> Turner, Charles. *Modernity and Politics in the Work of Max Weber*. London: Routledge, 1992. 106.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

culminates in the rise of associations that possess the freedom of purposive conduct, which echoes de Tocqueville's claims that democratic societies in isolation are weak and feeble. Since the state has no inherent value, these intermediate groups, whatever they may be, give value, and thus purpose, to the state.

In order to establish a consistent political personality, Weber's task was to confer value upon a world whose character was, according to *PV*, that of hard boards, a world that requires tact and even-headedness when handling. He distinguishes among three components of the psychological makeup required for the kind of human who is permitted to "put his hand in the spokes of the wheel of history."<sup>45</sup> These three qualities are passion, responsibility, and a sense of proportion.<sup>46</sup> By passion, Weber means an individual who has the capacity to, in spite of all the uncertainty and irrationality of his endeavor, pursue his calling. By responsibility, Weber's account is two-pronged. First, he means the ideal political personality will have a responsibility to the cause in which he or she is devoted. Secondly, he means responsibility to future generations and the quality of life of a political community. Weber's writings express a relationship of historical dependence between the ideals of the present and those of the past and of the future with those of the present. These two types of Weberian responsibility recall the duality of culture: is culture meant to be understood in relation to individual autonomy or is it meant to be understood as the relationship between politics and ethics and the claim "that the ethical life results in the life of the political community?"<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>46</sup> *PV*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> *Modernity and Politics*, 115.

It is only by possessing the two aforementioned qualities that the ideal politician can possess the third quality of distance. By distance, he means distance from things, other human beings, and one's self. This threefold typology implies that the ideal politician must have a balance among these three types of distance, but it also begs the question of what is the relationship among each. Weber describes many politicians who do not *genuinely feel* what they take upon themselves, but intoxicate themselves with romantic sensations."<sup>48</sup> The leader becomes too vain and begins to not objectively strive for power, but to search for a "purely personal self-intoxication, instead of entering the service of the cause."<sup>49</sup> Weber means that these politicians have collapsed their distance between themselves and value (things). If there is no distance towards value, then one cannot understand the relationship between one's self and the world. Hence, the reference to a lack of proportion. Furthermore, the self-distance that defines the politician with a vocation for politics becomes complicated because the politician's self-distance becomes too great that a devotion to a cause eventually becomes submission to a cause. On the other hand, the self is so intertwined with its own identity that values become tangential to political action, and devotion to public opinion becomes submission to public opinion. The ideal political actor has the capacity to navigate between these self-distances.

In essence, it thus seems that to have a vocation for politics, one must commit oneself to "an activity not in terms of the validity of a value, but in terms of an understanding of the tragic relationship between values and the resistance life offers to their actualization."<sup>50</sup> The ultimate value of politics is a relationship between self, value, and the world, and the ideal politician has

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>49</sup> *PV.*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 121.

undergone an experience with the world, understood its tragedy, and has still retained a faith in the integrity of the “diabolic” forces of politics. Politicians do not merely experience life and reinterpret their cultural experiences. They are not too flexible, nor are they too rigid. To lead a truly human life does not mean that one is a politician. Rather, when one leads a life politically, one leads a truly human life.

In *PV*, Weber uses a language of culture, value philosophy, and tragedy. Weber tries desperately to hold together to accounts of the political personality: a passionate but stable relationship to ultimate values and personal development. Like the task of the philosopher faced with hermeneutics, the task of the politician is not how to escape the political sphere, but how to enter it correctly.

### **Weber’s Politics**

With the discussion of the political personality completed, it is now important to turn to the second characteristic of Weber’s ideal politician. Like the entrepreneur or official who, according to Weber, “directs the machine (political), and keeps the members of parliament in check,”<sup>51</sup> he is also concerned with the ability of the politician to control the bureaucracy, which ultimately forms a constituent part of his broader theory of democratic institutions. Weber noted a contrast between two types of parliamentary systems: one of weak powers and one of strong powers. Though these types of parliaments differed, they shared a common function, which was their role in expressing the consent of the governed to their government. What mattered, for Weber, was the constitutional position of parliaments. If a parliament could only, for example, refuse financial or legislative petitions or present petitions on behalf of the subjects, it could not

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<sup>51</sup> *PV*, 14.

realistically participate in the work of government—its leaders could participate in “negative politics.” On the other hand, strong parliaments directly sent its members to government, and they had to maintain the majority in order to remain in office—its leaders could participate in “positive politics.” Strong political leaders who were capable of taming the powerful bureaucracy would, Weber thought, be developed in strong parliaments, which is why he says of parliament, “the practice of committee reports and public criticism of these deliberations is a condition for training, for really selecting leaders and eliminating mere demagogues.”<sup>52</sup>

In Britain, for example, governmental leaders were recruited from parliament and were held directly accountable to it. Strong parliaments attract strong leaders because parliament was recognized as the “traditional” route to office and the beginning of a political career. Though the institution of parliament itself has its critics, Weber asked two fundamental questions regarding them: If there is no parliament, what institution would control the bureaucracy? If direct democracy replaced parliamentary systems, how would the rulers control the bureaucracy when “every mass state democracy ultimately leads to bureaucratic administration?”<sup>53</sup> Some nations are too politically weak for parliaments. Parliament attracts careerists who care more about their careers than passing meaningful legislation for the betterment of the people, hence his reference to the American system that results in “organizations of job hunters drafting their changing platforms according to the changes of vote-grabbing.”<sup>54</sup> Parliaments create a distinction between the “active” and “passive,” which are the majority of people in the country, participants in

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Theory of Modern Politics*, 100.

<sup>54</sup> *PV.*, 17.

government. Under modern conditions, only parliaments possess the viability to check the vast power of the bureaucracy.

With the existence of committees of inquiry, parliaments provided not only a recruitment ground, but also a training ground for politicians. By possessing the ability to probe the administration and scrutinize it, Parliament essentially functioned as a direct check on the administration because the bureaucracy could no longer wield its power to keep information secret and thus control its own agenda.

It is important to note that Weber's advocacy of parliamentary government should not be interpreted as a democratic theory because it solely focused on analyzing the means by which successful politicians were trained and recruited. It did not advocate increasing democratic values, such as increasing the influence of the people who are governed by the government's policies. Thus, Weber's alignment with democracy is only a contingent one because he believed it could provide the best guarantee of political leadership.

Weber's final aspect of his theory of democracy lay in his account of universal suffrage and mass democracy. Like Weber's theory of parliaments, his second aspect of his theory of democracy is also distinctive in character. Weber discusses the importance of the mass in politics—it cannot be ignored in the political process. The term mass, however, carried different terms for Weber. For example, mass in one sense merely meant an aggregation of large numbers, or in another sense, it could refer to the various social classes that composed it at any particular time. The mass of democracy itself represents an indication of democratization—the leveling of status and birth.

The mass, however, carries it with different manners in which it can become involved in the political realm. For example, the mass can be “activated” by the leadership in power regardless of the type of government structure, and they can use the mass for irrational means, which is why “the party... must woo and organize the masses, and develop the utmost unity of direction and the strictest discipline.”<sup>55</sup> In contemporary politics, candidates for president or any other office often go campaigning and give rhetorical fueled speeches to the masses. By using clever words and appeals, they often gain the support of the masses.

In the modern world, anything short of universal suffrage was, for Weber, incompatible with modern institutions—capitalism, bureaucracy, the nation state—because each of these organizations shared a common belief in equality of status and treatment. Equal suffrage was merely an extension of these underlying principles. With the rise of the modern state founded on a belief of equal treatment, Weber denounced the fact that some states allowed citizens to have political rights during wartime, which were denied to soldiers on the front. Historically, one’s political right was linked to his or her ability to provide military sense and support to the war effort. Now, however, these differences in ability to provide did not exist because men no longer owned the equipment they used in battle. Thus, Weber argues that universal suffrage and mass democracy were made possible by the “prior process of social democratization that was already far advanced.”<sup>56</sup> In essence, the state was made possible by the expropriation of private goods of citizens; the “separation of the administrative staff, of the officials, and of the workers from the material means of administrative organization is completed.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>56</sup> Theory of Modern Politics, 105.

<sup>57</sup> PV., 4.



If universal suffrage was thus unavoidable, its rise reinforced one of Weber's political ideas called the "law of the small number," which means that in every type of political organization, there will always be a leading group capable of superior political maneuvering, hence the vast number of "well-disciplined yes men"<sup>58</sup> in parliament. In policy formulation, proposals most usually come from the top, and others are involved only when their support is deemed necessary. The mass becomes involved largely from above and almost never from below—think of the extremely small number of legislative bills introduced by citizens and passed through both houses of Congress. Thus, the key insight to the rise of universal suffrage in an era of mass democracy was the rise of the new elite roles brought about by these changes, for it is only the elites who even have the ability to make politics their vocation: "Under normal conditions, the politician must be economically independent of the income politics can bring him... he must be wealthy."<sup>59</sup>

The first change that occurred was the decline in local rulers who had previously played a major role in selecting candidates and a rise of the party and party bosses, whose professional job was "to mobilize votes through either an entrepreneurial basis or through a bureaucratic party boss."<sup>60</sup> Inevitably, the rise of universal suffrage carries with it an increase in the inter-local bureaucratic organization, and it thus continues the snowballing effect of the bureaucracy. Second, now the political leader, who stood at the head of the party bureaucracy (the president or the prime minister), became the key player for getting the mass vote in the campaign. Prior to

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>60</sup> Theory of Modern Politics, 107.

this, members of legislative bodies acted more as individuals, but now they were grouped into a “following” behind the political leader, which meant their success depended on the leader.

Thus, political democracy shifted power from the role of individual legislators and local notables, who were respected for their virtue and word, to a new set of roles that required a different skill set. Weber’s account of democracy is unique because it makes no reference to democratic values, such as freedom of speech or thought. The main focus for his democratic theory was that parliaments were judged according to their ability to be a sufficient training ground for leadership, and the advantage of mass democracy lay in the opportunities it provided for the rise of outstanding individuals.

Paradoxically, however, strong parliaments have the ability to protect individual liberties in the face of a tyrannical leader, such as by keeping his powers in check through negating bills or policy. This function, however, was only minimal compared to its main function, which is why Weber’s account is drastically different from the founding fathers of America’s account of democracy. While they focused on protecting the citizens from the power of tyranny and factions, Weber focused on the ability of democracy in a more “positive” sense.

More importantly, Weber also recognized that certain leaders possessed charismatic authority that allowed them to get extraordinary measures passed. Through appealing to the mass with “specific gifts of the body and mind,” charismatic leaders possessed a basis for implementing profound change.

### **Charismatic Politics**

Most studies of Weber focus extensively on the personal attributes of charismatic leaders and their relationships to society, bureaucracy, or party machines. The charismatic ruler is not

obeyed for his knowledge or virtue, but because of his “recognition as the innerly called leader of men.”<sup>61</sup> For example, in an extensive study of Weber’s charismatic authority, Professor Thomas Dow Jr. examines the nuances of charisma in Weber’s political thought.

In Weber’s original formulation from *Economy and Society*, charismatic authority exists when individuals use their personal attributes as a “valid basis for their participation in an extraordinary programmer of action.”<sup>62</sup> Charismatic authority is diametrically opposed to both traditional and rational authority because it is outside of the realm of everyday routine and is an explicit revolutionary force. Charisma breaks all norms. It compels the adherence to what is alien over tradition.

It is thus a form of social, political, economic, and psychological release. The inherent limits of traversing the unknown can only be overcome by identifying with the charismatic leader and his apparent gifts of body and mind. This release is indeed liberating for individuals, which is why the followers of charismatic leaders are often “moved to complete personal devotion.”<sup>63</sup>

Weber interestingly links charisma with ecstasy— becoming totally involved with some subject, an altered state of consciousness. Its nature is in a sense Dionysian—it is the life force itself. Leaders with charismatic authority can release this life force from others, but their followers do not give their allegiance to the externally appealing characteristics, such as ethical principles or rhetoric, but rather to the power of charisma itself. Charisma literally expresses,

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<sup>61</sup> *PV.*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Dow, Thomas, Jr. "An Analysis of Weber's Work on Charisma." *Wiley* 29.1 (1978), 83.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

discovers, and releases our unique individual power, which frees emotional and instinctive elements formerly repressed by societal, religious, or rational convention.

Though Weber is indeed fascinated by the nature of charisma, it is not in itself a solution to the problems and emptiness of bureaucratic conformity. Charisma is irrational and irresponsible because its actors are not influenced by the nature of the consequences of their actions, nor is there any sense of continuity or stability in a charismatic regime.

In the modern world, however, charisma faces numerous elements that corrupt its true nature. The norms, conventions, and institutions that all define modernity all ask a type of opposed relationship with charisma; it is conceptually forever beyond the reach of bureaucratic rationalization because of its overarching emphasis on emotion. Many seek this position of power—political dilettantes, vain men, or those without the ability to feel responsible—but many do not have the balance needed between unrestrained charisma and repression. Those who follow an ethic of purely ultimate ends, do not care about consequences and hence will do anything to justify their actions in society. According to Weber, those who follow an ethic of ultimate ends can make the tough decisions because they can distance themselves from making such a decision. They “make a decision and leave the rest to God”; the ends justify the means. On the other hand, those who follow an ethic of pure responsibility will not be able to make the tough decisions necessary to rule. Those who follow an ethic of responsibility take into consideration the multiple viewpoints, the means justify the ends.

One may, however, argue that these two ethics are in complete opposition to each other. For example, how can someone who takes into account all the consequences for his conduct possibly be able to make decisions that involve violence to other men? The answer is quite paradoxical. The “mature” leader is capable of taking into account the consequences of his

actions, truly feeling responsible in heart and soul for his actions, but in spite of it all, he is able to say “Here I stand; I can do no other.”<sup>64</sup> In this way, both ethics are supplements of each other because this leader can express himself passionately in defense of an ethic of responsibility. Only individuals with these qualities can truly be said to be the man who has the calling for politics. Charisma is thus to be guided by an ethic of responsibility, and this ethic in turn has a natural affinity with science because science clarifies both the means necessary to achieve one’s ends and the consequences usually anticipated with these ends.

Indeed, the nature of charisma is truly interesting and revolutionary. But it is important to examine the nature of charisma in relation to actual power and politics. Power, though a commonly cited concept, carries with it numerous facets that are often left unexamined. Usually thought to be the ability to get others to do what you want, to change the preferences of others, or to limit the ability of another to perform an action, Talcott Parsons, the famous Harvard Sociologist, identifies that “there is on analytical levels, a notable lack of agreement about its specific definition, and about many features of the conceptual context in which it should be placed.”<sup>65</sup> Power in and of itself is not effective because it is merely a concept that has no relation to anything else. To be effective, it must be “transmuted into a symbolic form, and this endowed with a legitimation that it would not otherwise have.”<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, it must be holistically supported by new institutions and legal organization in society.

This theoretical transmutation movement is charismatic not because its leaders are charismatic, but because these movements strive for radically altering the known reality. They

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<sup>64</sup> PV., 27.

<sup>65</sup> Talcott, Parsons. “On the Concept of Political Power.” *American Philosophical Society*. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society. (1963), 232.

<sup>66</sup> Kalyvas, Andreas. “Charismatic Politics and the Symbolic Foundations of Power in Max Weber.” *Duke University Press*. New German Critique, 78.

strive to create and control the symbolic foundations of political authority: the very structures that determine whether power is strong or bad, right or wrong. They are extraordinary because their politics goes much deeper than normal politics. They do not accept and reproduce the normal society. They challenge the existing widespread substantive beliefs about political and judicial order. They seek to bring about a revolution in convictions before undertaking a political revolution of institutions and laws.

How charisma becomes the revolutionary force of history is a question that Weber does not directly address, but with a simple thought experiment, it becomes clear how Weber would have answered this question. Imagine a government with legitimate norms, authority, economic inequality, and institutions. Political rule is viewed as obligatory and just. Power is defined. Laws are recognized. The origins of these beliefs are part of a broader legitimate moral order, partly rooted in the values and meanings from religious organizations.

However, asymmetrical relations of power, economic inequality, and political domination still create a feeling of subordination, which breeds feelings of dissatisfaction, distress, and suffering. These feelings can remain dormant as long as the social organization continues to appear moral and meaningful. In times of tension, such as war or political crises, these feelings will make the masses more attentive and prone to promises of change. Charismatic leaders may arise during these time and use their special gifts of body and mind to create a new substantive vision of the world. Regardless if a leader arises, however, once the charismatic movement “gets going,” it is their mission to propagate a system of values that enable the subordinate classes to

view the current system as wrong. The primary goal of a charismatic movement is thus to launch a “hegemonic, cultural attack gains the dominant world view.”<sup>67</sup>

These movements seek to expand the scope of their doctrine to resolve the conflicts caused by subordination. Strategically, these movements aim to found a new political authority founded on a common view of the world and sharing the same concept of the good. They must, however, consistently adapt to the continually changing needs of the masses, and they must penetrate into social life in multiple ways, such as in both the private and public realm. Once the system of new norms has been established, “it signals in the era of normal, everyday politics.”<sup>68</sup> Weber, however, preferred to examine the charismatic leader over charismatic groups mainly because he associated religious figures with these charismatic movements and because it is only charismatic movements that are affected by the dis-enchantment of the world, not charismatic leaders.

Weber characterizes the modern world as an era of dis-enchantment. The rational has taken over, and the irrational has fled from the ordinary status of human affairs. The unknown, the mystery of life, has been replaced by a culture where everything can become known through the process of rationalization and science. This process of dis-enchantment results in a weakening of the “symbolic realm,” which is why it is understandable that only a few charismatic leaders would be able to rise and change the status quo. In fact, Weber is so pessimistic about the situation that he thinks that one of the “most crucial political questions is

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 90.

whether a genuine political leader would ever appear to counterbalance the rise of meaninglessness.”<sup>69</sup>

The rise of modernity ushered in an era of the “death of God.” Not to be taken too literally, this phrase encapsulates the idea that modern ways of thinking have shattered the absolute belief in one god or one world view with the rise of many rival gods or world views. But why then would Weber still remain pessimistic about the probability of charismatic movements given the fact that modernity is a prime ground for differing worldviews, none of which is firmly embedded in the norm of society?

The answer lay in Weber’s distrust of the masses. He even attempted to reconcile this dilemma between democratic legitimacy with an anti-authoritarian version of charisma, but his attempt still falls short. In his opinion, the mass could not be a carrier of charisma because it is too emotional and carries with it uncontrollable impulses. He adopts the conventional anti-democratic view of the masses, which encompasses the idea that they can easily become controlled by demagogue. While it is true that charismatic movements are usually organized around democratic lines, elitism (oligarchy) was still more favorable than democratic foundations founded on extraordinary politics, though Weber was suspicious of both charismatic movements and leaders—he still preferred to focus on the leader rather than the movements.

For instance, if a charismatic movement succeeded, it would be subjected to the aforementioned Weberian concept of the law of small number, which would result in a system of unequal norms and procedures. Though the movement may begin with the most democratic of intentions, it needs to adopt some type of bureaucratic and hierarchical structure in order to keep

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 92.



the movement going, which inevitably threatens the charismatic driving force of the movement. On the other hand, charismatic leaders, though supported by the masses, can remain external to bureaucratic pressures and movements because their charismatic authority transcends these structures.

Secondly, the modern era of democracy does not really give the masses the opportunity to “govern,” per se. In a world with increasing social differentiation, the idea of a unified “will of the people” or of a general public good are false. The people can never truly be unified in democracy, for all they can do is “determine the way in which the executive leaders are selected... by means of public opinion.”<sup>70</sup>

Thirdly, a charismatic mass movement is incapable of directing the notion of charisma into a constitutional power. Weber’s reasoning perhaps lies in his vocation as a sociologist because he merely viewed constitutions as a reflection of the current balancing of social and political forces, not as a document that embodies the substantive values of an established worldview. Weber’s view of law, both formal and general, was also too negative and limited to allow for democratic constitutional making. Limited in the sense that the judiciary or legal structures of societies were always constrained to the “iron cage” of rationality. In other words, these structures would simply employ procedures based merely on teleological efficiency, rational calculation, and control. These peculiar views on the judiciary ultimately resulted in a dichotomous gap between charismatic-democratic legitimacy and formal legality. By linking charisma with de-formalized law and irrational decisions, which was in stark opposition to conventional legal structures, Weber’s modern sovereign could only either be charismatic with

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 97.

no formal legal structure, or it could speak through the law but in the process, it would lose its charisma.

Weber did not consider the possibility that the charismatic sovereign might be able to rule with the ideas of formal law, which is why he was unable to reconcile charismatic foundations with a stable constitutional order. This narrow explanation may be the reason why he focused so much of his analysis on the charismatic leader—this leader could “locate” charisma within the constitution, but he or she would not be at the foundation of the constitution. Weber essentially opted for a second best solution to his charismatic democratic dilemma: that of a “frail, weakened, and unstable personal charisma.”<sup>71</sup>

Because of all the aforementioned reasons, Weber abandoned the instituting, collective dimension of charismatic politics. His later political writings of charisma all mostly focus on the political executive with charisma already integrated into normal politics. By rejecting mass charismatic movements in favor of a charismatic leader, Weber was still trying to hold onto his theory of charisma. Hence, his appeal to a “crippled” form of a charismatic leader. In the process of ignoring the powerful and revolutionary nature of charisma, Weber’s later analyses of charismatic leaders have lost their “creative, founding, and symbolic powers.”<sup>72</sup>

In the end, many will disagree with Weber about what great political virtues consists of. But the core issue is that there is little left of charismatic extraordinariness. Weber was extremely doubtful about the irrational in politics, for he feared that a leader would rise up and undermine all rationalistic thought. Weber’s doubts about the masses and the institution powers of charisma also led him to cancel the distinction between extraordinary and normal politics,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 103.

which ultimately led him to endorse a doctrine of the ordinary. With the rise of the state, however, charisma would no longer be an issue.

## **The State**

Often used with such ease and clarity in colloquial discussions, the state is a term of political organization that carries with it connotations of legitimacy, economic markets, and hierarchical rule. However, to obtain a clearer picture of the state, it is necessary to view it as a structurally specific and historically unique “organization of the rule of men over men.”<sup>73</sup>

Weber famously defines the state as a community that has a monopoly over the legitimate means of physical violence in *PV*. Power and struggle seem to be primordial elements of social life—they are the components of which politics is composed. Neither, however, exists in a pure or abstract form because each is embodied in particular institutional structures that have their own frameworks. However, this definition has two criteria that must be examined in order to posit a better understanding of Weber’s conception. The first criterion defines the state as a monopoly of the means of violence, and the second criterion defines the state according to the legitimate use of those means. What is important to politics are the meanings implicit in the use of such violence and the command-obedience relationship inherent in it.

There exists a difference between legitimate command and the situational context in which those norms are legitimated, which, according to Weber, are rooted implicitly or explicitly in charisma. During normal political times, leaders seek to legitimate and appropriate the means of violence, but during extraordinary times, which require charismatic leadership, leaders seek to

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<sup>73</sup> Duszka, Karl. "Max Weber's Conception of the State." *Springer* 3.1 (1989), 73.

produce a belief in its legitimacy. Thus, in the first framework actors compete with an established framework of authority, while in the second, they institute new frameworks “within which normal politics will take place at a subsequent temporal stage.”<sup>74</sup> Weber was aware that social phenomena and political institutions were historically changing, so an adequate “understanding of any historical epoch presupposes then a knowledge of the specific institutional context in which the struggle for power has taken place.”<sup>75</sup>

But first, it is important to understand the perspective by which he viewed the underlying components of the state. For him, every social entity (a religious, economic, or political entity) can be traced to human relations as its ontological substance. Weber thus sought to reduce such social concepts to the action of individuals.

It becomes complicated, however, to reduce such broad social concepts to individuals when in the modern world, individuals usually live in groups. For example, in Weber’s *Economy and Society*, there is little mention of individuals actors orienting their behavior to the expectation of others. The pages in his book detail wars, conquest, rationalized doctrines, classes, status groups, and other discussions of collective groups confronting each other. Some critics may argue that there is a discrepancy between Weber’s perspective and his writings in *Economy and Society*. This is not so. He was fully aware that combined action of a collective cannot be reduced to the action of the one. There emerges a constellation of actions, which are all composed of an ambiguous number of collective and individual “unit acts,” that are embodied in the action of concrete individuals. Particular actions are integrated into collective units and become stable formations among the short term individual actions. The purpose of

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<sup>74</sup> Charismatic Politics, 74.

<sup>75</sup> Weber’s Conception of the State, 74.

understanding the essence of what a state is, therefore, to identify its structural traits and to show how these structures developed over the course of history amid the struggles of people for the right to command others.

As popularized by *PV*, Weber defines the state as the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory. However, there exists numerous characteristics of a state that are not mentioned in his lecture: centralized power, a rational constitution (planned distribution of powers of command), an administrative and legal body, a legislative branch capable of changing the aforementioned bodies, activities geared toward the realization of this administrative and legal body, and regulation of the competition for political offices according to rules.

Numerous critical, defining features arise from defining the state in this way. First, Weber means to emphasize, like his theory of bureaucracy, the impersonality of political rule, the rational distribution of power, and the character of its order. Second, it suggests that the state as a political apparatus is a continuous activity of a plurality of men who are exercising the powers of command on the basis of impersonal norms established by decree. The exercise of power is vested in an office, not an individual, which is why “acquiring the incumbency of an office is what political struggle is all about.”<sup>76</sup> While Weber defined power as the realization of one’s will despite the resistance of the other, power in the modern state is inextricably linked to a legitimate office created by normative-legal order of the political community.

Numerous forms of political organization have existed in the past and encompassed some characteristics of the state, such as the polis, monarchy, fortress kingdom, and kingship. During Weber’s time, multiple concepts of the state emerged, claiming a somewhat universal validity to

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 76.

the state, which Weber rejected. The state instead was historically unique, developing out of patrimonial and feudal structures of domination—both differentiated forms of the rule of men over men. In the Weberian analysis of power histories, power was originally rooted in traditional authority where kings relied on folklore and divinity to justify their power. Next came the age of charismatic authority where a magnetic individual, most famously Napoleon, could rise to power with a magnetic personality. Finally, the last age of authority is Bureaucratic. Power in this era is rooted in knowledge.

Weber's way of understanding the state and its origins, however, is drastically different from a conventional point of view. Historiography, the study of piecing together bits of history to create a clearer picture, is usually used to examine the past. But for Weber, "time is only the neutral medium in which the empirical manifoldness of social life develops," which explains why he uses grand, generalizing statements when referring to a time period."<sup>77</sup>

The state was thus in essence a sequence of accidents that were not guided by the Hegelian Absolute Spirit (historical driving force of freedom) or the Marxian Objective History (historical driving force as a classless society). Its origins, however, lay in the individual historical processes of the Occidental world.

## **Conclusion**

With all the theses and profound concepts advanced by Weber, the reader may find himself perplexed and confused by the tangential and complicated way in which Weber articulates his thoughts. The inevitable question is thus how should audiences judge *PV* and its themes? The simple answer is that it is undoubtedly a provocative and insightful work that

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 80.

deserves to be hailed among the greatest political writings of all time. The long answer is that Weber has left some severe gaps in his reasoning that merit attention.

Though his assertion that “Every state is founded on force” raises a new perspective on thinking about politics, he fails to explain why it is force that is the defining characteristic. He explains in vivid detail how and what states must do to maintain their force saying, “to maintain a dominion by force, certain material goods are required...”<sup>78</sup> In fact, the entire speech is filled with examples that merely explain what a state needs to do for power, none of which explains the underlying assumption of why power is the characteristic in the first place. Perhaps he wanted to explain this idea in more detail at a later time or perhaps, and more likely, violence was the only conclusion he could arrive at given his critique on modern culture. If bureaucratic organizations are always operated according to *logos*, there is bound to be at one point in time a clash between the ideas of *logos* and *mythos* because *mythos* was the way of understanding prior to modernity. Hence, the conception of the state must have surely been predicated on violence because underlying the literal foundation of this concept is the notion of tension.

Secondly, his famous discussion of the three types of legitimacy faces scrutiny as well. He seeks to answer the question of when and why do men obey? Though his answer is unique, it is too brief and paradoxical to be taken at face value. The entire answer only takes up a few lines in the lecture, and he vaguely explains to his audience that “fear and hope”<sup>79</sup> are the reasons why people obey the following forms of legitimacy. While his answer in the modern world holds because, for example, fear of getting fired and losing the ability to pay for one’s family is definitely an incentive to obey, it is much less transparent in the age before capitalism. In feudal society,

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<sup>78</sup> PV., 3.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 2

where peasants swore oaths to their lord, his argumentation still, however, holds because fear of being punished in the afterlife would be a strong incentive. However, fear and hope, that which compels individuals to obey, also causes individuals to break the law. Hope can be the means by which individuals break the law, whatever its form of legitimacy, to make better lives for themselves by protesting or rebelling against the corrupt regime. The same can be said of fear. Taken together, Weber's mechanism by which he justifies authority is also the cause of destroying authority.

Thirdly, Weber makes an important distinction between administrative officials and political officials saying, "According to his proper vocation, the genuine official, will not engage in politics... This also holds for the so –called political official."<sup>80</sup> While the characteristics that define each are diametrically opposed, which was examined in detail earlier, Weber naively thinks that the skills in one cannot transfer or seep over into the other. For example, while it is the politician's duty to feel for a policy being passed and invest emotions into it and it is the administrator's duty to implement it, an administrative official may encounter rules that are too unethical and that consequently must be broken sometimes. Though the administrator must separate his own feelings from any rules, it poses a deeper question for Weber's theory of modernity: If Weber laments the rise of the rampant rationality that characterizes all modern institutions, why does he still advocate for the bureaucrat to follow all the rules? This contradiction ultimately leads one to conclude that Weber would rather have a flawed society than an anarchic one.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 10.



Fourthly, Weber's discussion of the political personality and its emphasis on distance falls short of actual political practice. Weber stresses that distance is the defining quality of the politician, going so far as to say, "Lack of distance per se is one of the deadly sins of every politician."<sup>81</sup> While it is true that politicians who get too close to a policy idea or cause may lose track of what is important and ultimately become distracted from ruling effectively, it is also true that politicians who sever the distance between themselves and objects will be so personally invested that they will ensure that their goals are materialized. Weber does not distinguish between appearing distant and actually feeling distant in *PV*. So while the passionate politician is possible "only through habituation to detachment in every sense of the word," it is possible that this may only be required on an internal level, which leaves open the possibility that he may be outwardly non-distant.

Now aside from the critiques of the lecture, Weber's statements deserve accreditation because he links the political personality with the ethical life. Even if a ruler made the perfect policy or was loved by the people, he would still be lacking if his balance between the two ethics was not in sync. By linking ethics and rulership, Weber proposes a politics rooted in the classical philosophies of Aristotle, Plato, and the like, while at the same time rooted in the practical thinking of Machiavelli. Viewed in this way, Weber creates a synthesis between the great thinkers of the past, thus propelling the boundaries of political thought forward.

A critical audience may find itself asking what was the point of Weber's lecture? Perhaps it was to explain the concept of a vocation of politics, as explicitly stated by Weber. Perhaps it was to criticize the foundational thinking of politics as he did with science in his other famous lecture. Perhaps, and most likely, it was to tell his audiences a story—the story of politics—and

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 21.

how this story affects us in our daily, often troubled, lives. To avoid the polar night of icy darkness of modernity, perhaps we should all heed Weber's advice: "Even those who are neither leaders nor heroes must arm themselves with that steadfastness of heart which can brace even the crumbling of all hopes."<sup>82</sup> Viewed in this light, we can hope for the future.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 27.

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