

Max Weber and the Moral Dimensions of *Politics as a Vocation*

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ABSTRACT

Weber's discussion of ethics in his famous lecture (and then essay) *Politics as a Vocation* (1919) clearly indicates that two possible ethical stances, the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility, are rooted in 'distinct and irreconcilably opposed principles'. Throughout *Politics as a Vocation*, it is the ethic of responsibility that appears to be endorsed by Weber as suited for political life. Yet, Weber concludes his essay by claiming that a combined ethic is ideal for a political vocation.

This makes Weber's position regarding the ideal ethical stance for a man who has a 'true political calling' appear contradictory: the ethics are opposites but somehow to be combined. Commentators have mostly concluded that, for Weber, the ethic of responsibility is the ideal ethic for politics. That appears further in accord with the fact that a key concern of the speech in its historical context was to warn political students of the dangers associated with an ethic of conviction. Weber, as a realist, was especially critical of a stance that disregarded the corrupted nature of the world, which the ethic of responsibility alone seems to accept. Politicians with single-minded convictions were responsible for Germany's political stalemate, supporting the fact that the ethic of conviction should not be deemed acceptable in politics.

And yet there is much this position neglects by opting for only one of the two ethics, by concluding that only the ethic of responsibility is appropriate for political vocation. My thesis offers something different; something I admit is ambitious. What I propose is the synthesis of the opposition, of finding a way to combine the two irreconcilably opposed ethics.

After connecting *Politics as a Vocation* to major themes in Weber's overall work, this research concludes that a commitment to ultimate values belongs not with the ethic of responsibility but with the ethic of conviction, and that the ethic of responsibility has a wholly

different notion of 'good', a kind of utilitarian one. And so it is when the ethics are treated as two irreconcilably opposed principles that the relevance of the ethic of conviction is revealed since Weber believes only where there is also a *faith* can the individual be said to have a true calling for politics. This fundamental attachment to ultimate values, which is revealed in acts of conviction, is attached to an individual's will to power, making it rational for the politician to make changes to the power system, even if it appears irrational to the dominant rationality.

The thesis therefore emphasizes, with Weber, that the two ethics are each limited by their respective understanding of reality, which means by their differing views of what is rational, of what is a sensible and ultimately, of what is 'good'. So how *can* the two ethics be combined?

The notion of "combining" the ethics does not apply to specific acts; the two ethics are to be combined in the overall career, through the multiple ethical decisions, which the politician must face. Most of the time, the politician needs to act according to the ethic of responsibility but in some cases, a commitment to ultimate values is required. In such circumstances, the ethic of conviction should be deemed appropriate and essential for a political vocation.

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INTRODUCTION

Max Weber's essay *Politics as a Vocation* (1919) is one of his most well-known and most debated works. It has been considered one of his most revealing texts, addressing topics such as the development of the state, the multiple roles within the political system and, most notably, the ideal ethical stance for a man who chooses politics as his vocation. What is especially interesting and has caused much dispute is a division Weber creates between the 'ethic of conviction' and the 'ethic of responsibility'. Though Weber did not seem to believe they could exist in a 'pure form', he did argue that the two ethics were distinct and their principles irreconcilable (*Weltanschauungen*).

This is not to say that an ethic of ultimate ends (ethic of conviction) is identical with irresponsibility, or that an ethic of responsibility is identical with unprincipled opportunism. (...) However, there is an abysmal contrast between conduct that follows the maxim of ultimate ends –that is, in religious terms, 'The Christian does rightly and leaves the results with the Lord' – and conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of responsibility, in which case one has to give an account of the foreseeable results of one's action. (Weber, 1958a, p. 120)

As the passage underlines, the ethic of conviction resembles a Kantian ethic, prioritizing duty and intention, while the ethic of responsibility places particular importance on feeling responsible for the consequences of our actions. After many comparisons between the demands of politics and the two ethical stances, Weber appears to conclude that an ethic of conviction is not suited for political life. According to Weber, taking responsibility for one's actions was

central to political duty and required politicians to take into account society's corrupted nature and deficiencies when making political decisions. (Weber, 1958a, pp. 119-120) And since the believer in an ethic of conviction is responsible 'only for seeing to it that the flame of pure intentions is not quenched (...) [the believer's actions] can and shall only have exemplary value'. (Weber, 1958a, p. 121)

Combined with the fact that Weber begins his essay with the statement that conduct may be guided by one of two 'fundamentally differing and irreconcilably opposed maxims' (Weber, 1958a, p. 120), one would assume that the ethic of responsibility is in fact the ethic suited for political life. Yet, Weber concludes his essay by claiming that a *combined* ethic is ideal for political vocation.

However, it is immensely moving when a *mature* man – no matter whether old or young in years- is aware of a responsibility for the consequences of his conduct and really feels such responsibility with heart and soul. He then acts by following an ethic of responsibility and somewhere he reaches the point where he says: 'Here I stand; I can do no other' [Luther, 1521]. That is something genuinely human and moving. And every one of us who is not spiritually dead must realize the possibility of finding himself at some point in that position. In so far as this is true, an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine man - a man who *can* have the 'calling for politics'. (Weber, 1958a, p. 127, italics in original)

This second passage has been problematic for obvious reasons. On the one hand, if Luther's stand is seen as an act where the ethic of conviction supplements the ethic of responsibility, how can the ethics also be considered absolute contrasts and irreconcilable? On the other hand, if Luther's stand is seen as an act of responsibility, why would Weber put such emphasis on the fact that only when the ethic of conviction supplements the ethic of responsibility could a man be deemed to have a true political calling? In spite of its limitations and its inability to account for what appears to be two contradictory statements, it is typically accepted that the ethic of responsibility is the ideal ethic for political vocation, capable of combining a commitment to ultimate values with a feeling of responsibility, and somehow superior to the ethic of conviction. (Brubaker, 1984, p. 108; Schluchter, 1996, p. 88) I will argue that such a position assumes that the ethic of responsibility is a 'combined' ethic, because a commitment to ultimate values is originally the distinguishing feature of the ethic of conviction.

The objective of this thesis will be to determine whether the apparent contradiction between the two passages can be explained. Since the ethic of responsibility understood as the combination of conviction and responsibility cannot account for both passages, I will suggest that both ethics be considered limited by their respective understanding of reality, which means by their differing views of what is rational, of what is sensible and ultimately, of what is 'good'.

As for my methodology in approaching these more general matters, it will base itself on Weber's understanding of rationality, a concept which requires that subjective meaning and context be taken into consideration before the evaluation of an act. For now, it is worth just quoting the following and returning to the implications of this sort of passage in the course of my argument throughout the thesis.

Something is not of itself “irrational,” but rather becomes so when examined from a specific ‘rational’ standpoint. Every religious person is “irrational” for every irreligious person, and every hedonist likewise views every ascetic way of life as “irrational”. (...) This essay, if it can make any contribution at all, aims to expose the multifaceted nature of a concept – the “rational”- that only appears to be a simple one. (Weber in Kalberg, 1980, p. 1156)

The sequence by which I shall develop my arguments is, in outline, as follows. The first chapter will provide the historical context in which Weber presented his two famous lectures, *Politics as a Vocation* and *Science as a Vocation*. A summary of *Politics as a Vocation* will then be presented in order to have an idea of its general content. Lastly, since there are many overlapping themes between *Politics as a Vocation* and *Science as a Vocation*, the two essays will be analyzed in general and compared.

Once this groundwork is established, various themes in Weber’s works which are relevant in addressing the apparent contradiction in *Politics as a Vocation* will be explored. The second chapter will emphasize the importance of values and ideas in Weber’s understanding of historical causation by comparing it with Marx’s historical materialism. This comparison or rather contrast is important. For if Weber had accepted Marx’s view about ideas being driven by interests, then being with us purely ‘ideological’, it would not have made sense for Weber to write *Politics as a Vocation* in the first place, since the essay explores, in a way at a philosophical level, the intellectual essence and merits of ideas and values. Similarly, if acts of responsibility are not the only ethical actions required by the politician, a hypothesis or an

interpretation I will try to prove, it is necessary to discuss the importance as such of values and convictions within history, all the more so because Weber claims that politics is a domain where man can put his hand on the 'wheel of history'. For Marx, for whom politics is a mere effective economics, that would make no sense. So my second chapter, comparing and contrasting Marx and Weber on these fundamentals, will act as a foundation for my ensuing arguments, showing the historical relevance of beliefs and personal vision in social progress.

The third chapter will then explore the different types of authority, how they each depend on a distinct belief, and how these in turn can be associated with rationality. Since politics involves itself with the distribution, transfer and maintenance of power, it is important to understand how a politician's desire to change the existing structure of power requires a distinct set of beliefs from those persons who wish to maintain the existing power relations. Such belief systems in turn will determine what kind of actions will be deemed rational by each group. This concern about differing standards or conflicts of rationality is at the heart of Weber's social theory and bears on the social role of political vocation. This will later explain why in specific circumstances, an act of conviction can be deemed rational by and for a man with a true calling for politics.

The fourth chapter will then specifically deal with the question of the two ethics and the connections that can be drawn with beliefs, rationality and the notion of 'good'. This chapter will incorporate many of the conclusions drawn in the second and third chapters and show the importance of actions which are deemed irrational by the standard of the dominant rationality. Since such is the case, it will be concluded that both acts of conviction and acts of responsibility can be deemed humanly meaningful even when each ethic is considered limited by its worldview.

CHAPTER 1

THE GROUNDWORK

I. Historical Context: Germany between 1840 and 1920

Weber, like Marx, witnessed the dramatic social and economic changes which occurred with the rise of modern capitalism. With systemic change and increased prosperity however came a political stalemate and Weber was highly critical of the disinterest displayed by the bourgeoisie in Germany as regards new political options and needs. Weber objected to the bourgeoisie's recourse to aristocratic standards of merit; he repudiated the value accorded to duels and honorary distinction based on formalities. Their preoccupations diverted attention from the more important challenges and needed virtues, and resulted in creating an atmosphere which favours the expansion of bureaucracy, emphasizing just more official titles and positions. The situation as Weber perceived was particularly harmful in the case of Germany, precisely because he saw the bourgeoisie there, as compared, for example, to that in England, as underdeveloped. In many of his critical essays, Weber in effect seeks to incite the bourgeoisie to claim its due role in the determination of German politics and affirm its own standards of social prestige; which is also to say that Weber is often regretting that what he is seeking is not happening.

Concomitantly, one of the main problems within Germany was an economic division which could take the country in one of two very opposing directions. **As observed by Mommsen,**

Le problème central de la politique allemande intérieure de son temps était à savoir si l'Allemagne allait employer toute ses forces à se transformer définitivement en un grand état industriel et à

élargir considérablement l'espace vital économique de la nation par des «conquêtes économiques dans le monde» ou bien si, au contraire, la grande prospérité de l'Est de l'Allemagne allait (...) pouvoir s'opposer avec efficacité à cette évolution. (1985, p. 125)

According to Weber, the landowners in the East were preventing the industrial expansion of Germany, an expansion which would be favourable for the country's long-term prosperity. The short-term gains of feudalism and of an economy based on agriculture would not be able to compete with the growing powers of England and the United States. Germany needed to make serious political decisions and unfortunately, Weber did not see in the existing government the vision and willpower necessary to do so.

Indeed, what seems to have been Weber's greatest criticism was the lack of political power displayed by German parties. As Mommsen reminds us in 'Max Weber et la politique allemande', 'En 1896, Weber lançait aux socio-nationaux le verdict de «misérabilisme» parce qu'il les voyait mener la politique par un sentiment de compassion sociale sans aucun sens de pouvoir et de la nécessité d'une sélection sociale.' (1985, p.66) Weber acknowledged that it was the liberal movement's inability to implement its political ideals by physical force which had resulted in its overall failure. That task was instead accomplished by Bismarck as President (beginning in 1862) and then Chancellor (as of 1867). His successes, in unifying Germany in 1871 and establishing its prominence in Europe, had been the prime example of the potential reaches of *Realpolitik* and pragmatism. However, though Weber did share the belief that violence was a necessary mean to political efficiency, he distinguished himself from a large number of German intellectuals and the Pan-Germanic league which advocated a pure form of

power politics. (Mommsen, 1985, p. 92) As Mommsen confirms, Weber's "practical" politics rested on fundamental values and ideals. (1985, p. 72)

Bismarck's actual legacy had been devastating. In spite of the fact that he had accomplished the liberal movement's main objective –the unification of the German states- he had left the country in a state of complete political apathy. The masses were now used to trusting the decisions made by political figures and focused instead on purely economic objectives. Weber's solutions to Germany's political stalemate however can be considered radical for his time. His plea for charismatic leadership and plebiscitarian democracy has been accused of reflecting fascist tendencies. That is because by these terms he basically meant that the people could not rule themselves in the sense of presenting a genuine vision of the future and that it was the role of a political leader to implement his view of a good society in spite of opposition on the part of parliament. Indeed, Weber would go so far as to say that the charismatic leader, elected and supported by the masses, should have veto power over the decisions of parliament, providing him absolute power of the decisions of the majority. And so many have argued that Weber's vision of democracy still assumed unequal relations of power and did not encourage politicians to follow the will of the masses but instead their own. Some have even suggested that Weber's promotion of a powerful leader facilitated the rise of Germany's most notorious charismatic leader, Adolph Hitler. In fact, though Weber was in favour of a leader-based form of democracy, he was adamant about accountability. With power came responsibility and the masses also had the power to re-elect or replace a leader based on performance, leaving the final say to the people. Therefore, to claim that Weber was envisioning a radical form of autocracy is to neglect the importance he assigned to accountability and the power he allocated to the masses to punish an abusive leader.

II. Summary of *Politics as a Vocation*

Weber begins his essay by stating that his audience will necessarily be disappointed by what he intends to talk about. Instead of focusing on political specifics and a critique of the existing state of affairs, Weber decides to deal with the general question of the significance of political action within life as a whole. His objectives in this essay appear to be twofold. On the one hand, he wants to inform his audience of the various general changes which have taken place in the political realm and the distinctions which exist between nations. On the other hand, Weber develops what he believes to be an ideal political stance, what he claims to be that of ‘a man with a true calling for politics’.

In spite of the fact that he does not credit particular political positions over others, he is especially critical of the existing situation of German politics. As such, he uses the examples of the United States and England to criticize the weaknesses inherent to the German system. He criticizes the overreliance on officialdom and the neutral role which is supposed to be assumed by prominent party members when they reach the level of minister. As such, this discourages political advancement and requires bureaucratic standards from an individual whose activity is meant to be, should be, political in nature. In spite of the fact that Germany has high quality officers who succeed in their respective tasks, as a whole, Weber observes that a country which has lower moral standards tends to perform more successfully than one with the ‘superior’ moral conduct. Such is the case with the United States.

Weber presents the history of the modern state and shows how it is ultimately linked to the separation of the means of power from the administration of politics. Weber thus provides the historical development of the ‘professional’ politician, a man who enters the service of political lords, a tradition which began in the Middle-Ages when such individuals provided

counsel to royal figures, for example, when facing an increasingly powerful estate owning class. The demands of modern society required an increasingly knowledgeable team around the ruler, first requiring a finance expert, then a military expert and finally a judicial expert. More and more concerns were distributed among specialized strata of administration and the political sphere itself became exclusively concerned with the distribution of power.

Weber shows the unique case in his own time of the party leader, a man with the potential of being a *political* charismatic leader. As he states,

Leadership has emerged throughout the world and in all historical periods, the most important embodiments of it in the past being the magician and prophet on the one hand, and the chosen war-lord, gang-leader or *condottierre* on the other. In the Western world, however, we find something quite specific which concerns us more directly, namely political leadership, firstly in the figure of the free ‘demagogue’ (...) and then in the figure of the parliamentary ‘party leader’ (...). (Weber, 1994c, p. 313)

He then sets out to describe the machine that is built around the politician and on which he is dependent upon. (Weber, 1994c, p. 338) The individuals who compose it, for the most part, serve in the hope of gaining materially from it. And it is from their workings that the political leader, like a military leader, gets closer to his end goal. The machine includes individuals who deal with the financial and electoral side of the equation such as the American ‘boss’ or the English ‘election agent’. The political leader must therefore defend the interests of those who help him to power and be concerned with the allocation of important state positions.

It is at this point of the essay that Weber considers what it takes to be not only a politician in power but to ‘make justice of this allocation of power’, meaning what kind of traits should a man possess who will put his hand on the ‘wheel of history’. This is the cumulative point of his discussion on the role of politics and the functions served by professional politicians. In the way in which the means of power have been separated from the bureaucracy for the exclusive use of those in the political domain, the politician now holds tremendous power in decisions of potentially historical magnitude. Specifically, Weber refers to the notion of justice and of merit, evoking at once the idea that those who should have access to such power are few and far between.

The three basic traits for leadership that Weber identifies are passion, responsibility and a sense of proportion. The demands of modern politics require that the politician distance himself from the events he faces in order to make the most cautious and wise decisions. As Weber had previously expressed in the essay, he had been particularly opposed to the “personal” leadership displayed by Kaiser Wilhelm II whose decisions had compromised many of Germany’s relations with other nations, for example, his public displays of carelessness and contempt toward diplomacy with Russia, France and England.

In reference to the revolutionary movements occurring in Germany, Weber makes pessimistic predictions, claiming that a ‘dark and icy night’ is well on its way and suggests that a large number of his audience, self-proclaimed enthusiasts, will become either cynical and believe no change is achievable, being satisfied with the daily requirements of their positions, or escape into romantic ideals and lose touch with the demands of modern society.

III. Comparison between *Politics as a Vocation* and *Science as a Vocation*

In both *Politics as a Vocation* and *Science as a Vocation*, Weber sets out to determine what traits are demanded in each area of activity. He is particularly concerned to identify the external demands made by modern society and the requirements they entail for the vocational 'calling' in each sphere, politics and science. For instance, Weber begins *Science as a Vocation* with the remark that 'In our time, the internal situation, in contrast to the organization of science as a vocation, is first of all conditioned by the facts that science has entered a phase of specialization previously unknown and this will remain the case.' (1958b, p. 134) Specialized knowledge is at the other extreme of what Weber called the 'Renaissance man', an individual who could be knowledgeable in multiple domains and make revealing discoveries in a wide range of subjects. The prestige and potential breakthroughs associated with a true scientific vocation are thereby dramatically reduced. And in politics, on the other hand, the rationalization of the political domain requires much more practical knowledge and organizational responsibilities on the part of the politician. Modern politics therefore involves a lot more routine and procedural activity than in the past, which can discourage many who want to quickly achieve political results. For Weber, the new reality of each vocation is something which individuals who believe they have a calling, whether for politics or science, must accept first and foremost.

It is worth noting that Weber is especially critical of the youth and its inability to measure up to the demands of modernity, of a specialized and routinized world. As he observes in *Science as a Vocation*, 'What is hard for modern man, and especially for the younger generation, is to measure up to *workaday* existence. The ubiquitous chase for 'experience' stems from this

weakness; for it is weakness not to be able to countenance the stern seriousness of our fateful times.’ (Weber, 1958b, p. 149)

There is a certain overlap between Weber’s prescriptions for the political and the scientific calling since in each case he advocates both a passion capable of surmounting external difficulties and a cool intellect. For the politician, a pragmatic approach is insufficient without faith since the political vocation is not reducible to cold calculations. What is required of the politician is passion understood as ‘passion to the service of a cause’, which is opposed to ‘sterile excitation’, a romantic idealism which was characteristic of many intellectuals of his time. This genuine emotional connection to a cause is what anchors the true politician’s endeavours and allows him to surmount the slow and tedious demands required by modern politics.

Similarly, for the scientist, enthusiasm is a prerequisite and a decisive factor for inspiration. (Weber, 1958b, p. 135) According to Weber, it is this passion which will allow the scientist to overcome the years and possibly a lifetime of unsuccessful attempts at discovery. For Weber, ‘Without this strange intoxication, ridiculed by every outsider; without this passion, this ‘thousand of years must pass before you enter into life and thousands more wait in silence’ (...), without this, you have *no* calling for science and you should do something else.’ (1958b, p. 135) It is also what will allow for perseverance in a time when scientific progress quickly replaces one set of discoveries for another. Yet, Weber admits that no amount of enthusiasm or appropriate emotion will yield scientific results without a ‘cool intellect’ and this is what differentiates a dilettante from an individual with a true calling for science.

It is worth specifying that in both cases, that of politics and science, the first condition for the vocation is passion. In *Politics as Vocation*, Weber argues that charisma is at the root of all

political calling (1958a, p.79) whereas Weber famously proclaims in *Science as a Vocation* that ‘Nothing is worthy of a man as man unless he can pursue it with passionate devotion’. (1958b, p. 135) It is this passion which must then be combined with a pragmatic and grounded approach if success is to be achieved.

Both the scientist and the politician must be careful of vanity, of setting aside one’s ultimate aim for the sake of a feeling of distinction. This topic is thoroughly examined in *Politics as a Vocation* and applied specifically to the case of the genuine politician. In *Science as a Vocation*, however, Weber discusses the illusions of personality inside and outside the scientific domain. The cult of personality, a desire to cultivate experiences and to be distinguishable, is a phenomenon which is especially noticeable in the youth and it can likely become an obstacle in the spheres of science and politics. In science, it can be identified by a desire to be ‘something other than just a mere specialist’ and the motive becomes a need to ‘say something in form or in content that nobody else has ever said.’ (Weber, 1958b, p. 137) An individual who falls prey to vanity loses touch with the true aim of the vocation and is automatically deemed to have ‘no personality’. (Weber, 1958a, pp. 116-117) In politics, Weber considered vanity to be one of the most common sins to which the politician succumbs; it involves seeking power for the sake of power, falling prey to the intoxicating feeling of power itself. When this happens, decisions are not based on the likelihood of accomplishing the objective but on a concern for the perception others will have. Such vain individuals prefer the illusion of meaning and power and are again deemed by Weber to be worthless. According to Weber, personality is achieved by working in one’s vocation, by dedicating oneself to one’s task. Indeed, ‘in the field of science (and politics), only he who is devoted solely to the work at hand has ‘personality.’’ (Weber, 1958b, p. 137)

As for what distinguishes science from politics, ultimately this concerns values and meaning. As Weber explains in *Science as a Vocation*, science's original aim in Hellenic times was to determine what was the right concept of the beautiful, the good, and the just and was therefore intrinsically linked with the determination of meaning. Then, with the advent of rational experiment, science was deemed the way to true nature. But instead of providing grounds for the existence of God or the path to a good life, science resulted in what Weber called the 'disenchantment of the world'. Everything science shed light upon, everything it attempted to study rationally became objective and devoid of meaning. Modern science's aim was therefore not to provide a new value system in and of itself but to provide *clarity*. It seeks to determine which results are likely to be achieved by specific means and how a particular understanding of the world is attained in particular historical contexts. In this way, science can complement politics since it provides the knowledge necessary for the accomplishment of political objectives. Indeed, Weber attaches a lot of significance to science and practical knowledge in the realization of political aims, and in this regard he embraces the disenchantment of the world.

Whereas science needs to be value-neutral, politics is charged with values and personal beliefs. In *Politics as a Vocation*, Weber claims that it is the politician's social function to stand by his principles and to ground his quest for power on a particular conception of the good (a cause), whatever form this may take. In his comparison with the bureaucrat, Weber states that it is the politician's duty to risk his office for the sake of his convictions. As it will later be examined, the politician's aim is in many ways based on a desire to implement new orders, new obligations based on his understanding of the world and what it should be. Therefore, what differentiates the scientist and the politician involves the dichotomy of what is versus what ought

to be. The scientist's objective is to present the world as it is whereas the politician's objective is to implement what he believes should be.

CHAPTER 2

IDEAS, INTERNAL LOGIC AND PERCEIVED INTERESTS

I. Historical Materialism and Interpretive Understanding

In the nineteenth century, there existed a wide gap between the natural sciences and cultural studies. The former benefitted from the advantages of the scientific method while the latter relied on a subjectivist approach. Empirical studies of nature were capable of explaining phenomena by identifying recurring patterns in controlled settings or with controlled observations. The study of history, on the other hand, was concerned with unique events which meant it could not be classified under general laws. For this reason, the study of history and society seemed doomed to unreliable stipulations and the weaknesses of subjectivism. Over fifty years before Weber wrote *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), Marx proposed a theory of social change which revolutionized the way in which history was understood and which later greatly affected Weber's own interpretation of historical causes. Given the influence of Marx in this way, and also the way in which Weber differs from him, it is important in this chapter, as was indicated in the introduction, to set out these matters as the background to analysing later Weber's views about the role of ideas and ethics in politics and history.

Marx believed that the study of history was the study of class conflict and as such could be subsumed under general laws. In modern capitalism, class conflict was embodied in the struggle between the bourgeoisie, the minority of the population who owns society's means of production, and the proletariat, 'the vast majority of the population who own nothing but their labor power which they sell to the bourgeoisie for what Marx believed necessarily exploitative wages'. (Marx, introduction by Cohen and Fermon, 1996, p. 435)

Marx divided society into multiple levels of social interactions and made a clear distinction between the material conditions of society -- the economic order which could be calculated 'with the precision of science' -- and the superstructure which could not be¹. (Marx, 1996a, p. 436) Strong economic determinism maintains that the economic order is the source of social dynamism and the ground from which man and society grow. The superstructure, on the other hand, is viewed as the domain of ideologies, of 'the social consequences of the economic order in which men become conscious of this conflict (class struggle) and fight it out'. (Marx, 1996a, 436) The superstructure includes culture, law and politics. One implication of strong economic determinism is that the development of the superstructure is thereby limited by the state of economic affairs and is essentially seen as a reflection of the economic power relations.

Marx believed that, like clockwork, at pivotal moments in history the forces of production and available technology exceed the potential of an existing system and this causes the collapse of the economic structure. It is the economic breakdown which creates new power relations and creates new conditions in the superstructure. In sum, social change occurs from the ground up.

Marx's model reduced dramatically the role of human agency in social development. As in the natural sciences, history follows laws which exist independently of individual action. The laws of cause and effect present a reliable, predictable world which governs all that takes place within it. As such, Marx viewed values, ideas and beliefs as essentially determined by the social consequences of one's economic role. Indeed, one of Marx's most famous statements underlines

¹ There still exists debate about whether Marx believed economic determinism accounted for all social change or whether he believed the superstructure could also impact the economic foundations of society. The standard view is the former and based on Marx's later works. Others argue for a less strong economic determinism and find justification in Marx's earlier works like *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844). The following account will be based on the standard view.

this by stating that ‘it is not the consciousness of men that determined their being but, on the contrary, their social being which determines their consciousness.’ (Marx, 1996a, p. 436) Though the individual may believe his action to be motivated by his *personal* beliefs and values, the ideas themselves, for Marx, are specific to and a consequence of his socioeconomic class.

Your very ideas are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property, just as your jurisprudence is but the will of your class made into a law for all, a will, whose essential character and direction are determined by the economic conditions of your class. (Marx, 1996b, 459)

Ultimately, human beings and their actions are predictable since they reflect the existing power relations, the dominant rationality. As such, we could not be free unless the power hierarchy based on the private ownership of the means of production was dismantled.

What differentiated Weber’s approach and conclusions from Marx’s is his distinction between ‘causal explanation’, involving laws, and ‘interpretive understanding’, focused on unique events. Weber believed change could occur in two ways. The first way is by cause and effect, where recurring and predictable patterns can be explained by natural or material causes. In the second way, causes are understood as factors which are responsible for changes from an expected course of action. These causes are responsible for *deviations*. This latter way uses a reasoning similar to what one would use to understand the causes of a car crash. (Ringer, 2004, p. 80) For instance, by identifying what prevented the driver from arriving home safely, one can filter out negligible factors and isolate the mediating ones, e.g., alcohol consumption or hours on the road.

These two models present quite dramatically contrasting views of human agency. When history is understood as based on natural causation, all components of human life can be understood as the result of mechanical and rule-based processes. Understanding history is thus not a matter of uncovering the subjective motivations behind actions but of explaining the mode of production in the material world which *conditions* the social, political and intellectual life spheres. Even religion is understood as rooted in class conflict, with Marx declaring that the hidden God of the Puritan expressed the irrationality and anonymity of the market. (Gerth and Mills, 1958, p. 62) On the other hand, Weber's understanding of 'historical causes' presumed a dynamic nature to the world and the unpredictable nature of human actions. And since there are two kinds of causes in the world, natural and historical, Weber claimed there are also two kinds of human actions, those which do not depend on human participation (and are predictable) and those that do (and are unpredictable). Unlike natural events, actions which require human participation can only be understood in terms of the agent's system of meaning. And this, for Weber, could be demonstrated in the study of social history.

Indeed, Weber argued that some existing patterns of behavior, even if presently understood as an outcome of practical rationality, could not be fully explained if ideas were essentially seen as the expression of one's economic position. Unlike Marx's view, Weber's thesis did not rely on a belief that

the specific nature of a religion is a simple 'function' of the social situation of the stratum which appears as its characteristic bearer (...) or that it is a 'reflection' of a stratum's material or ideal interest-situation. (...) However incisive the social influences, economically and politically determined, may have been upon a

religious ethic in a particular case, it receives its stamp primarily (...) from the content of its annunciation and its promise. (Weber, 1958c, pp. 269-270)

For instance, the Hindu beliefs in reincarnation and karma were central to the Indian caste system, arguably another form of class division. There was also the Catholic belief in forgiveness which explained practices such as confession and indulgences. And Weber argued that this relationship between ‘content and annunciation’ could affect material and practical trends *outside* religion as well. One such example was modern capitalism.

II. Modern Capitalism: The Rise of the Rational Economic Order

Capitalism before the Reformation could not have been described as a systemic or rational form of economics. According to Weber, it relied almost exclusively on conquest, adventure and speculation.

Those kinds of entrepreneur figures, capitalist *adventurers*, have existed all over the world. Except when they were engaged in trade or in credit and banking business, their opportunities for profit were essentially wither purely irrational and speculative, or they were centered upon the acquisition of booty by force, whether in the course of waging wars or exacted over time by fiscal means (plundering of subject peoples). (Weber, 2002, p. 361)

However, capitalism was now embodied in a ‘rational capitalist institution’, an establishment based on capital accounting, where ‘income yielding power [is determined] by calculation according to the methods of modern bookkeeping and the striking of a balance.’

(Weber, 1968a, p. 140) Essentially, those driven by a desire for profit were now relying on discipline and science.

According to Weber, Marx's belief that modern capitalism had been caused by the 'unchaining of economic interest' had been historically disproved. In fact, Weber claimed such an unleashing was associated with *irrational* strategies.

Traditional obstructions are not overcome by the economic impulse alone. The notion that our rationalistic and capitalistic age is characterized by a stronger economic interest than other periods is childish; the moving spirits of modern capitalism are not possessed of a stronger economic impulse than, for example, an oriental trader. The unchaining of the economic interest merely as such has produced only irrational results; such men as Cortez and Pizarro, who were perhaps its strongest embodiment, were far from having an idea of a rationalist economic life. (Weber, 1968a, p. 154)

Indeed, even the 'worldly wisdom and utilitarian common sense of an Alberti'² could not have given birth to modern capitalism. (Kalberg, 1980, p. 1170) For such reasons, Weber opposed the claim that modern capitalism had been a by-product of the economic model which existed before the Reformation. Instead of tying one to the other, Weber identified two distinct forms of capitalism -- *adventure capitalism and rational capitalism* -- each dominated by a

² Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) was an Italian philosopher, artist, architect and poet of the 15th century. He is mentioned a few times in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* when Weber addressed Sombart's claim that Benjamin Franklin had been inspired by Alberti's works.

particular set of beliefs and attitudes. And it was this change of ideas which had affected the way profits were gained.

[The] specifically modern form of capitalism as an *inescapable system* ruling the economy (...) [did not include] profits made on the infamous principle that, ‘you can’t make millions without your sleeve brushing against the prison wall’; rather, it is precisely that type of profitability which is achieved by adopting the maxim, ‘honesty is the best policy’. (Weber, 1994b, p.90, italics in original)

As this passage from *Suffrage and Democracy in Germany* underlines, what essentially distinguished modern capitalism from its predecessor was the introduction of morality in economic dealings. Weber had observed a relationship between economic success and moral standing in the works of men he considered instrumental to the development of rational capitalism. This new attitude, which Weber called the ‘spirit of capitalism’, was especially embodied in the works of men like Benjamin Franklin. (Ringer, 2004, p. 115) As such, Weber believed that Franklin’s work had been much more than advice on how to make money.

According to Ringer,

What Franklin conveyed was an “ethically colored maxim” for the “conduct of life”. What he urged, in fact, was the spirit of capitalism. Thus he explicitly prohibited the *enjoyment* of wealth. (...) Citing his father’s biblical injunction against idleness, Franklin clearly saw monetary success as a confirmation of proficiency in one’s calling. (2004, p. 115, italics in original)

This suggested that religion had most probably played a role in the new attitude found in modern capitalism. But how did this association between monetary success and ‘confirmation of calling’ come to be? How had morality incorporated itself into everyday life? Lastly, if interests were the dominating force behind action, how could ideas have been behind the attitude change? The rest of the chapter will examine each of these questions and see how Weber attempts to reconcile values and interests.

III. Subjective Rationality and Psychological Premiums

Weber claims that there are two standpoints for or perspectives on rationality: objective rationality and subjective rationality³. Objective rationality considers events from the standpoint of an all-knowing subject and evaluates the logical coherence of social actions when compared with empirical knowledge. From this vantage point, rituals such as rain dances are considered irrational. Subjective rationality considers events from the point of view of the subject and evaluates the logical coherence of social actions when compared to the subject’s personal knowledge. Rain rituals could in this way be considered rational in spite of the fact they are not empirically justified.

For this reason, Weber believed that an individual’s interaction with the world should be understood as the result of his ‘internal logic’⁴. What the individual perceives to be in his best interest depends on *beliefs and ideas*, on the social group’s unique way of understanding the world. And this is how Weber correlated values with interests. One could therefore claim that all actions were motivated by interest but what was deemed to be in one’s best interest depends

³ This distinction is based on a different concern plan than concerning which yields neighbors for types of rationality which will be discussed in a later chapter, namely instrumental rationality, value rationality, etc.

⁴ Internal logic refers to the rationality attached to a value system or to a set of basic assumptions. Weber did not believe that there existed only one ‘true’ logic (or reason) but rather that there existed countless ‘internal logics’, each dependent on a set of accepted beliefs.

on the individual's beliefs and values. As such, even religious saints who lived in and for the 'beyond' and who compromised material goods such as health, wealth and long life were seeking psychological compensation and gratification in their everyday life. (Baehr and Wells, 2002, p. viii) In other words, they acted in a way they believed to be in their best interest.

When understood in such a way, it would not have been deemed rational (in his best interest) for the adventure capitalist to work hard and methodically, characteristics which are necessary for the development of rational capitalism. He had his own set of beliefs and values which justified his own set of actions, that is, speculation and booty. Therefore, another group of individuals must have been responsible for the radical break in economic trend.

In his famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), Weber explores the consequences of holding a specific set of beliefs about economic action, particularly in the case of the Calvinist Protestants. Weber was intrigued by this religious group since it was the only one which had designated a word to represent the combination of morality with everyday activities: *Beruf*⁵. After extensive study of religious experiences, Weber proposed that the Calvinist's belief in predestination had a major impact on his practical way of life, in what he considered to be in his interest. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was therefore Weber's way of exploring how the Protestant's worldview could have come to explain *rational* economic behavior.

⁵ 'L'auteur remarque que le mot allemand « Beruf » et le mot anglais « calling » évoquent la représentation d'une tâche imposée par Dieu; dans son sens complet, ce terme signifie à la fois « métier », « profession » (dans une société où règne la division du travail) (...) et « vocation » (au sens éthique et religieux). Or, dans les pays essentiellement catholiques et dans l'antiquité classique il existe des mots qui ont l'une ou l'autre signification, mais aucun ne lie les deux sens; au contraire, les pays à prédominance protestante possèdent tous une expression qui correspond au terme « Beruf ».'

Weber observed that the Protestant Reformation had resulted in a radical change in ideas vis-à-vis claims made by the Catholic Church. According to Weber, three of these ideas had particular influence on the development of the Protestant ethic and what later became known as the 'spirit of capitalism'. First, the Reformation rejected the notion that a third entity or person (the Church, a priest) was required for communication to exist between God and his people. Instead, only an independent relationship with the Creator was possible. **As such, Weber claimed that**

The communion of God with the recipients of his grace can only take place and be consciously experienced by God's *working* in them ("operatur") and by their becoming conscious of this – in other words, when their *actions* arise out of the faith which comes from God's grace, and when the quality of those actions legitimates this faith as truly coming from God. (2002, p. 78, italics in original)

Second was the belief in predestination, which stated that an individual's salvation (or damnation) was predetermined and unchangeable. This meant that the way in which one lived one's life had no effect on the likelihood of being saved. Lastly, one's election could not be confirmed since Calvinists believed that the Divine was inscrutable and transcended human concerns. (Ringer, 2004, p. 118) The only thing the believer could do was have faith in God. Weber claimed that with this particular set of beliefs, the Protestant was presented with a hopeless future, and this worldview had created strong psychological reactions. Additionally, the Calvinist Protestant had no release for his built-up anxiety through the form of either confession or indulgences such as was provided by Lutheranism and Catholicism. (Baehr and

Wells, 2002, p. xxxix) Even the otherworldly practices of the saints and monks could not alleviate his distress⁶.

Weber therefore proposed that the Protestant's inability to find refuge in otherworldly activities incited him to reorient his energy toward the material world and try to discover signs of his election (salvation) in 'worldly outcomes'⁷. And this dissolved the line between everyday morality and the 'ethics of the virtuosi'.

As Eisenstadt observes in 'Max Weber - On Charisma and Institution Building' (1968),

The dropping of the *concordia evangelica* by the Lutheran Reformation meant the disappearance of the dualistic ethics, of the distinction between a universally binding morality and a specifically advantageous code for virtuosi. [In other words] the other worldly asceticism came to an end. The stern religious characters who had previously gone into monasteries had now to practice their religion in the life of the world. (p. 162, italic in original)

Weber believed the reasoning for this reorientation could be explained by the examples of biblical heroes such as Abraham and Moses who had received confirmation of their sanctity in worldly actions. In other words, an elect status *manifested* itself and revealed itself in the world.

⁶ Weber distinguished between two forms of asceticism which Parsons translated as 'worldly' and 'otherworldly'. Otherworldly asceticism was practiced by people who withdrew from the world in order to live an ascetic life. This category includes monks who lived in monasteries.

⁷ 'The exclusion of 'magic' from the world of religion deprived most men of psychological relief, even by way of repentance. (...) The only hope of ordinary mortals lay in whatever *objective symptoms* their efforts were truly 'efficacious''. (Ringer, 2004, p. 120, italics in original)

As noted by Weyembergh,

À l'opposé du luthéranisme, qui recherchait l'union mystique avec Dieu, le calvinisme proscrit le mysticisme : le divin ne peut pénétrer dans l'âme humaine. La communauté de Dieu et des élus ne se manifeste que dans le fait que Dieu agit en eux. (...) En comparant son état d'âme à celui des élus de la Bible et en sentant son comportement est non seulement voulu, mais surtout «agi» par Dieu, l'individu accède à la certitude de sa grâce. (1972, p. 457)

This meant that objective outcomes, such as economic success, could be assigned moral significance. And this, according to Weber, explained hard and methodic work: it was in the believer's *best interest* to hope for his efforts to have objective results. Indeed, 'a religious value was placed on ceaseless, constant, systematic labor in a secular calling as the very highest ascetic path and at the same time the surest and most visible proof of regeneration and the genuineness of faith.' (Weber, 2002, p. 116)

Therefore, unlike Marx who claimed that modern capitalism had been caused by an unleashing of economic impulses, Weber argued that the radical break in economic trend would not have been rational unless caused by a distinct set of beliefs. As such, Weber concluded that rational economic behavior had been favored by: (i) the Protestant's total isolation from God and (ii) the dramatically reduced importance of magic and otherworldly practices in his everyday life.

Conclusion

Weber had been able to show that a moral backbone had been at the core of the spirit of capitalism and that this in turn had provided an environment which favored the development of

rational capitalism. This is why Weber claimed that a historically meaningful event like an economic break could not have its root in the dominant rationality. The Reformation had created a radical change in ideas, which justified a new internal logic. Only in such conditions could new material consequences be rationally justified.

CHAPTER 3

POWER, POLITICS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Weber's understanding of social change is in many ways rooted in the power struggle which exists between men, which is not to say (given what was just argued in the last chapter) rooted essentially or purely in economic interests as Marx supposed. Indeed, according to Parsons,

Before Weber and still today, 'a certain utopianism' which tends to minimize the significance of authority, coercive power, and physical force in human affairs has been a conspicuous feature of a large part of modern social and perhaps particularly economic thought. One of the most striking features of Weber's sociological work is his continual and intense concern with the problems of this field. (1964, p. 56)

Weber accepted (and favored) uneven power relations⁸ and believed social change necessarily benefitted some at the detriment of others. Indeed, he claimed that only ideas which had high 'elective affinity' with interest-groups could incorporate themselves in the 'objective world'. This can be seen as a partial agreement with or concession to Marx; but the differences already identified remain. It was only once the practical benefits were observable that ideas and beliefs could be adapted and used in the struggle for power. But the radical change in material and social conditions created by the rise of modern capitalism was not due to the simple fact that another social group had adopted the Protestant's idea but that the idea had been *adapted* to

⁸ This ties in with Nietzsche's understanding of power relations, another philosopher who greatly influenced Weber's thought.

further the material ambitions of power groups. It was a dynamic relationship between ideas and interests which accounted for ‘deviations’ in historical developments. In order to appreciate the role of ideas in systems of power, let us consider the relationship between the Protestant Ethic and modern capitalism.

I. The Changing Shades of Meaning

Though Weber had identified hard work and discipline as psychological rewards for the Protestant’s anxiety towards salvation, he claimed that modern capitalism was no longer rooted in an individual’s metaphysical need for the world to make sense. Indeed, Weber observed a qualitative difference between these externally similar actions, claiming that: ‘The Puritans *wanted* to be men of calling – we, on the other hand, *must be*.’ (Weber, 2002, p. 120, italics in original) Of the original idea, all that remained was ‘the spectre of the former religious beliefs’. (Ringer, 2004, p. 123) As such, somewhere along the way, the ideas which had fulfilled the metaphysical need had been included in the material world to justify the social conditions lived by the masses.

According to Dusza, Weber would have deemed power structures to be ‘entities’, systems which resulted from the combination of ‘unit acts’. These actions are organized according to the standards of the *dominant rationality*.

From the combination of “unit acts” there emerge ever more complicated structures, the complexity of which at one point reaches a degree where they appear as an objective, external bond standing over against the acting agents. (...) By virtue of coercion, legitimacy and objectified systems of meaning, particular actions

are integrated into organized complexes, collective units. While embodied in the action of concrete individuals, these entities exist as more or less stable formations amid the transitory individual manifestations. (1999, p. 73)

The main difference between the dominant rationality and the belief-system of the Protestant is that the former had been adapted to favor the interests of specific social groups. And so the originally metaphysical belief-system became the background for a highly efficient form of domination. This change in meaning is also noted by Kalberg.

The Calvinist work ethic [which had] contributed to patterns of action and entire ways of life thought to exemplify the highest peaks of civilization (...) came to enslave individuals in the 20th century within an impersonal “iron cage” saturated by formal, theoretical and practical rationalization processes. (1980, p. 1173)

As such we are talking about two distinct ideas which serve two different purposes. In the first instance, ‘meaning’ is infused into the world and thereby creates a distinct set of perceived interests. This is what rationally justifies the execution of acts which are not justified by the standard internal logic (dominant rationality). In the second instance, ‘material interests’ become ‘infused’ into ideas and thereby create a distinct type of idea. The idea comes to ‘reflect’ the existing power order when accepted by the masses. In their introduction to ‘From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology’ (1958), Gerth and Mills recount Weber’s ability to account for an idea’s ‘changing shades of meaning.’

Ideas, selected and reinterpreted from the original doctrine, do gain affinity with the interests of certain members of special strata. (...)

Thus, by distinguishing the phases of the personal and charismatic origin of ideas and their routinization and social impact, Weber is able to take into account a number of complications, which are reflected in the changing shades of meaning. Both the ideas and their publics are seen as independent; by a selective process elements in both find their affinities. (p. 63)

II. Dominant Rationality and the Existing Power Orders

Like Marx, Weber believed that (i) the historical vitality of ideas was found in their role in justifying economic interests, and that (ii) ideas become material forces as soon as they took hold of the masses. (Gerth and Mills, 1958, p. 62) The dominant rationality, the ‘objective’ conditions imposed on the masses, included ‘adapted’ ideas which favor the existing power groups and perpetuate the transfer of wealth (power). Weber provides such an example when discussing the relationship between the banking institution and the individual.

Any large central bank or credit institution, for instance, exercises a ‘dominating’ influence on the capital market by virtue of its monopolistic position. It can impose upon its potential debtors conditions for the granting of credit, thus influencing to a marked degree their economic behaviour for the sake of the liquidity of its own resources. The potential debtors, if they really need the credit, must in their own interest submit to these conditions and must even guarantee this submission by supplying collateral security. (Weber, 2005, p. 182)

And it was by accepting the dominant rationality that a specific social group gained the monopoly on the means and profited from their privileged position. Those who accept the existing power order also accept the dominant rationality. And in this sense, Marx was right. Social organizations which accept the dominant rationality are indeed acting in a way which favors specific social groups to the detriment of all other groups. But whereas strong economic determinism could explain the existing power order, it is unable to account for trends of behavior which are not predictable.

Weber, on the other hand, was able to account for both of these tendencies by acknowledging that though all rational actions are predictable in the sense that they have been done because it was believed to be in one's best interest, one could not predict what the individual considered to be in his best interest. And what created unpredictability within social spheres and society at large were actions which were not justifiable by the dominant rationality.

One such example had been the case of the Protestant whose metaphysical need for the world to make sense justified hard work and discipline. However, a form of authority was also considered responsible for the creation of deviations within the power orders. Did power also depend on an individual's perceived set of interests? And how did this relate to the dominant rationality? In order to answer these questions, let us consider Weber's three types of authority and the social arena at the heart of the struggle for the distribution, maintenance and transfer of power: the political sphere.

III. Weber's Three Types of Legitimate Authority

Central to Weber's understanding of authority was legitimate power, a power system which is believed to be valid by a particular social group. (Weber, 1968a, p. 31) Three distinct

types are possible, each greatly affected by the kind of belief which legitimized its validity. The power groups which will be of greatest interest for our present purposes are those which rely on the legitimate authority of either inherited tradition or consciously formulated rules. Though we will be treating each form separately, it is worth noting that Weber believed traditional and rational-legal authority could be mutually reinforcing.

In general, it should be kept clearly in mind that the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a *belief*, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige. The composition of this belief is seldom altogether simple. In the case of 'legal authority', it is never purely legal. [For instance] the belief in legality comes to be established and habitual, and this means it is partly traditional. (Weber, 1964, 382, italic in original)

The first type of authority rested on 'an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them.' (Weber, 1968a, p. 215) This type Weber called *traditional* authority. Its most popular and frequently encountered form was patrimonialism which included both monarchies and aristocracies. (Freund, 1968, p. 203) In the pure form of this type, new laws don't exist per se. Indeed, Weber claimed that even actual innovations are justified by the fiction that they were once in force and had fallen into disuse and only now been brought back to their rightful position of authority. (Weber, 1964, p. 131)

Traditional authority was not a systematic way of ruling. For instance, it lacked (i) a clearly defined sphere of competence subject to impersonal rules, (ii) a rational ordering of power relations within a hierarchy and (iii) a systematic way of getting appointments and

promotions. (Weber, 1964, p. 343) Due to these reasons, the traditional authority figure was not restricted to having specific powers but was in a position to demand the performance of unspecified obligations and services as his legitimate right. In such cases, ‘obedience is owed to the *person* of the chief who occupies the traditionally sanctioned position of authority.’ (Weber, 1964, 328, italics in original) Indeed, one of traditional authority’s most distinguishing features is the fact that there is no clear-cut separation between the individual’s private capacity and his authority. (Parsons, 1964, p. 61) However, Weber was quick to mention that the traditional power holder was also bound by tradition within his own sphere. (Weber, 1964, p. 328) This limited the execution of arbitrary power since a decision’s *enforcement* depended on the cooperation of persons whose status and functions were also traditionally fixed. (Parsons, 1964, p. 62) For this reason, we can consider this holder of authority as more of a sage or a wise man than an ‘executive’. (Parsons, 1964, p. 62)

The second type of authority for Weber rests on ‘a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands.’ (Weber, 1968a, p. 215) It involves the ‘readiness to conform with rules which are formally correct and have been imposed by accepted procedure.’ (Weber, 1964, p. 131) This is rational-legal authority and is considered a form of ruling that provides normative rules for the division of power. Indeed, in his article “Max Weber’s Conception of the State” (1989), Karl Duszka maintained that, ‘The constitutional state represents a gigantic historical experiment in transforming the brute facticity of force, inherent in political rule, into a normatively founded and regulated relationship of domination.’ (p. 98) Unlike traditional authority, the rational-legal order divided function from personality. As such,

The fundamental source of authority in this type is the authority of the impersonal order itself. It [power] extends to individuals only in so far as they occupy a specifically legitimized status under the rules, an 'office', and even then their powers are limited to a 'sphere of competence' as defined in the order. Outside this sphere they are treated as 'private individuals' with no more authority than anybody else. (Parsons, 1964, p. 58)

Power is therefore divided amongst different branches and authority is limited by jurisdiction. Each branch is designated a share of the organization's activities, each of which requires specialized knowledge. A long period of formalized training was usually a condition of eligibility. (Parsons, 1964, p. 58)

Weber deemed bureaucracy to be the most systematic way of such ruling. Its highly regulated activities made it possible to reach the highest levels of precision, stability and reliability (Weber, 1964, p. 337) while its calculable outcomes allowed for maximum proficiency. This contrasts sharply with the means of administration available to the traditional figure. The ruler in a system based on tradition lacks objective and rational means for the execution of his arbitrary will. On the other hand, the ruler in a rational-legal order has no personal authority, which means no freedom of choice; however, he can execute commands with a high degree of efficiency. Indeed, the bureaucrat's specific purpose is to carry out the *formal* authority, that is, the institutionalized rules. He is to fulfill the duties assigned to his position and respect the orders from people higher in command. In return for his compliance and the execution of his duties, the bureaucrat is rewarded with privileges such as a secure salary, pension and promotion based on clearly defined standards.

The third type of authority for Weber rested on ‘devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him (leader)’. (Weber, 1968a, p. 215) Unlike the other forms of authority, an individual’s source of power was rooted in his person. Charismatic personalities tended to be strong and evocative speakers and demonstrated unusually high levels of confidence, assertiveness, authenticity and focus. These figures usually gained the trust of the masses by invoking strong emotions and, as a result, they were personally recognized as the innerly ‘called’ leaders of men. (Weber, 1958a, p. 79) However, their power was conditional on their producing results through exceptional means. Such exceptional means include challenging and rejecting the legitimacy of existing power orders. As such, Weber claimed that charismatic authority was the polar opposite of formal and traditional bonds. (Weber, 1958d, p. 250) Indeed, charisma was as ‘free in the face of the sanctity of tradition as it was in the face of any rationalist deductions from abstract concepts.’(Weber, 1958d, p. 250) For Weber, this dichotomy between objectified spirit (maintenance of power) and charisma (disruption of power) is crucial to the explanation of social dynamics and arguably history. As Gerth and Mills point out, ‘The ‘philosophical’ element in Weber’s construction of history is this antinomic balance of charismatic movements (leaders and ideas) with rational routinization (enduring institutions and material interests).’ (1958, p.55)

According to Weber, what is distinctive to charisma has nothing to do with specific psychological traits or physical characteristics. As Ralph Peters comments,

It could be assigned by beauty or physical stature, by an incisive intelligence or special talent, but was as likely to manifest itself in a figure of no special physical appeal and lacking a first rate

intellect. Nor was it necessary that a figure be ‘good’, likable or generous in spirit. (2010, 517)

What is present in all cases, however, is an *opposition* to the established power order. The charismatic leader introduces a new obligation, challenging accepted beliefs by ultimately commanding: ‘[So] it is written ... but I say unto you’. (Weber, 1964, p. 361) As such, his success requires the *transfer of power* from one social group to another.

Indeed, all forms of charisma require that power be gained *at the expense* of another social group. ‘Acosmic’ charismatic figures like prophets were considered a type of personality with ‘innate’ charisma, charisma in its ‘purest’ form. These individuals would presumably be considered to possess autocratic charisma which refuses to submit (rejects) numerous power orders. On the other hand, I will later explain that, for Weber, there now exists a non-autocratic form of charisma, one which does not need to reject all forms of authority to disrupt the existing power order. This non-autocratic form is facilitated by the dominance of the rational-legal order in present society and within the political arena. To gain power and implement vision requires less grave transgressions and is thereby less dangerous. Non-autocratic charisma will be considered a rational or restrained form of charisma.

Hence we can see that if charismatic authority produces disruptions, it is by taking power away from an existing power order, whether it be the rules of parliament or the market. This change of power results in the redistribution of advantage and disadvantage.

IV. Political Vocation and its Relationship to Social Change

Unlike Marx who saw the superstructure as a reflection of the economic order, Weber emphasized the notion of human freedom and portrayed all individuals as capable of ‘acting’ on

the world. He believed this freedom **did not necessarily require a new economic order** (as Marx suggested) but claimed it could be achieved by *connecting* our truly personal and human character with pre-established orders. Indeed, Weber's essays on vocation (*Politics as a Vocation* and *Science as a Vocation*) relied on the assumption that our basic human need for meaning could be fulfilled, or at least its likelihood increased, if individuals sought out the social spheres which encouraged the expression and actualization of their personal affinities. As Steven Seidman explains in 'Modernity, Meaning, and Cultural Pessimism in Max Weber' (1983), individuals need to seek the 'institutionalized' values which best cater to their ambitions⁹. (p. 276) As such, the individual who prizes truth should go into the sciences and the one who seeks self-affirmation in politics. If the individual chooses his vocation based on his personal preferences, the rules specific to his social sphere should correspond to his natural tendencies. Personality and vocation should, figuratively speaking, be 'drawn' together, the result of an elective affinity. Indeed, Weber claimed that 'while we are born persons or individuals, we must become personalities, and we become personalities by systematic devotion to a cause, a value, which we serve in a calling.' (as found in Starr, 1999, p. 414) And since charisma is at the heart of the political vocation, it is necessary to consider the possible correlation between *political* personality and power.

According to Weber, individuals with a high affinity for politics had what he called 'a will to power for a cause.'¹⁰ The need for this is especially evident when we consider that the social role assigned to the politician is to stand by his convictions and be guided by them through one's

⁹ Kalberg also argues this point. As such, he claims that 'At least one identifiable point of view rooted in a value postulate exists in every realm of life. The 'rationality' and potential rationalization processes within a given arena refer back to these value postulates. Life-spheres, in a sense, defend their own value-postulates as 'rational' and label those of other life-spheres 'irrational''. (1980, p. 1156)

¹⁰ 'The 'power instinct' belongs (...) indeed to his normal qualities. The sin against the lofty spirit of his vocation however begins where the striving for power ceases to be objective and becomes purely personal intoxication, instead of exclusively entering the service of 'the cause''. (Weber, 1958a, p. 107)

struggle for the distribution, transfer or maintenance of power. However, Weber recognized that politics was a sphere which also attracted those with a will to powerlessness¹¹. But what do those terms mean in relation to systems of power and the existing social and material conditions?

According to Weber, power (*Macht*) is the ‘probability that one actor within a social relationship will be able to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the back on which this probability may rest.’ (1968a, p. 15) Since a will to power involves the desire to impose one’s will on specific social groups, I will argue that politicians with a will to power want to dominate ‘charismatically’ (in a way subjectively experienced), and those with a will to powerlessness want to dominate externally (illusion of power). Since actions are chosen based on the individual’s belief of what is in his best interest, each type would have its own internal logic and its own set of perceived interests. To differentiate the one from the other will be a matter of reverting back to subjective meaning and understanding each set of perceived interests.

Weber maintained there was a distinction between the motives which justified the *attribution* of legitimacy and those which justified its *maintenance*. (Parsons, 1964, footnote 56, p. 126) According to Weber, those who desire the maintenance of a particular order are divided into two general groups: those who have a personal interest in it and those who do not.¹² (Weber, 1964, pp. 126-127)

When commenting on this passage, Parsons seems to disregard the possibility that a desire for the maintenance of a power order could be self-serving. Instead, he interprets self-

¹¹ ‘Les caractères des fonctionnaires conservateurs, à la place de Bismarck, administraient au lieu de gouverner; et ce qui prévalait aux yeux de Weber, c’était qu’ils leur manquaient la conscience de responsabilité, jointe à une volonté de puissance passionnée, animant selon lui le vrai politique.’ (Mommsen, 1985, p. 218)

¹² ‘The legitimacy of an order may be guaranteed or upheld in two principle ways: (1) from purely disinterested motives, which in turn may be (a) purely affectual, consisting in an emotionally determined loyalty; or (b) may derive from a rational belief in the absolute validity of the order as an expression of ultimate values, whether they be moral, esthetic, or of any other type; or (c) may originate in religious attitudes, through the belief in the dependence of some condition of religious salvation on conformity with the order; (2) also or entirely by self-interest, that is, through expectations of specific ulterior consequences, but consequences which are, to be sure, of a particular kind.’ (Weber, 1964, pp.126-127)

interest as a motive found in those who are *excluded* from privileged positions. As such, ‘It is quite possible, for instance, for irreligious groups to support the doctrine of the divine right of kings, because they feel that the breakdown of an order which depends on this would have undesirable consequences.’ (Parsons, 1964, footnote 51, pp. 126-127) However, this seems extremely unlikely, especially when considered in the sphere of politics. Those who are not opposed to the existing power order are most likely the bearers of many rights and privileges which they wish to retain.

Based on our previous discussions about internal logic, it seems reasonable to suggest that politicians with an interest in the maintenance of the existing power order are those who have their motivation rooted in material and practical interests. And this is arguably in accord with the dominant rationality, making it much less likely that it could rationally coincide with components necessary for charismatic power. Since their power is limited to the external order, including the power assigned to their office, their internal logic as such could not warrant actions which compromise the existing conditions. Indeed, ‘low affinity’ politicians would be comparable to the adventure capitalist whose internal logic could not justify a dramatic change in economic behaviour. It was only when their material interests were compromised that they were then willing to act against the rulers.

At no time in the last fifty years have the Prussian conservatives shown any political *character* in the service of great political or ideal goals. (...) If you examine what happened, you will find that *only* when there was any threat to their financial interests or their monopoly of the prebends of office and patronage of office or (...) to their electoral privileges, did their local electoral machine begin

to operate ruthlessly, and then it did so even against the king.

(Weber, 1994a, 137, italics in original)

And this would correspond with Marx's understanding of politics as a *reflection* of the economic order.

Inversely, those who do not want to maintain the existing power order must also perceive the stance (and ensuing actions) to be in their best interest. As such, to disrupt or attempt to disrupt the existing power order requires additional meaning since the dominant rationality cannot account for the chosen actions. And this brings us to an aspect of charisma which is not frequently discussed and that is its subjective meaning. For its actions to be rational, charisma requires *distinct beliefs*, in other words, different value-propositions or logical axioms. What is required is that the individual feel devotion, that he feels 'vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced.' (Frankfurt, 1988, p. 83) And in the case of charisma, what is perceived to be in one's best interest is the imposition of *new obligations* associated with new values.

Substantive change can therefore be understood as the result of an opposition to accepted beliefs and of seeing reward beyond the material advantages which can be predictably achieved.

Concluding remarks:

Weber's distinction between types of politicians makes it logically possible for multiple power orders to co-exist in the political arena. Political actions can at once be understood as the reflection of the existing economic order and the expression of a will to power. In both cases, perceived interests can in part account for the maintenance and dismantlement of power orders.

It was only by incorporating both the role of ideas in ‘psychic reactions’ and the role of material interests in the struggle for power that Weber could account for the dynamic and yet predictable nature of social development. According to Gerth and Mills, Weber’s strategy could be understood as an attempt to incorporate the point of view of both Marx and Nietzsche.

With Marx, he shares the sociological approach to ideas: they are powerless in history, unless they are fused with material interests. And with Nietzsche, he is deeply concerned with the importance of ideas for psychic reactions. Yet, in contrast to both Nietzsche and Marx, Weber refuses to conceive of ideas as being ‘mere’ reflections of psychic or social interests. (...) Where Marx and Nietzsche are quick to see a correspondence between ideas and interests, Weber is also eager to state possible tensions between ideas and interests, (...) between internal demands and external demands. (1958, p. 62)

V. The Rationalization of Charisma

The second part of this chapter will concentrate on the question of charisma within a rationalized society, restrained by an abstract order which can no longer be done without. The objective will be to discover how charisma, whose pure form involves the rejection of all accepted social impositions, is capable of creating change 'from within', from inside the system itself. I will argue that while rationalization reduces the power of ‘pure charisma’, this is arguably for the best. The result can indeed be seen as combining restrained charismatic leadership with the efficiency, predictability and precision of a rational-legal order. Moreover, I

will argue that the rationalization of politics favoured a new form of charisma, different from the older sort exhibited by magicians, prophets, and religious leaders, for example; the new form being one which embraces practical rationality and makes use of scientific knowledge.

Many scholars have described rationalization and the issue of individual freedom in an increasingly rational society as the main theme in Weber's writings. Rationalization results from society's increasing dependence on specialized knowledge and on the division of labour, creating what is now known as spheres of competence. This had been the case in Europe, where an increasing number of issues were classified as affairs of the state, once the political leader's lack of specialized knowledge became more problematic. (Weber, 1958a, p. 88) Even the political order itself became a formal institution, assigning official duties and responsibilities to elected officials. And this process created the abstract order known as the State, a development which had a dramatic impact on human expression and arbitrary will. **Indeed, as noted by Dusza,**

The separateness of the ruler and the state not only undermined the monarchical conception of the absorptive-representative character of the ruler, but implied the subjection to legal-normative legitimation and regulation on the exercise of the powers of rulership (Thoma, 1926, p.749; H.J. Wolff, 1933, vol. 1, pp.2-3) (1989, p.84)

As was mentioned earlier, the state, as a rational-legal order, involves the absolute separation of person from function.¹³ (Dusza, 1989, pp. 84-87) This separation occurs because rational-legal authority is a regulating mechanism for the distribution of power. It is because the

¹³ This was at the heart of Weber's description of bureaucracy, an organization which he claimed required the 'objectification of the spirit'. It was compared to a human machine.

action in no way depends on the person executing the act that predictable and reliable results are achieved. We can therefore argue that the effect of rationalization on society amounts to a greater distinction between external power and internal power. But as such, rationalization does not result in the eradication of charismatic authority. Indeed, Weber argued that when faced with domination and objectification, charisma ‘hardens into lasting institutions’. (Gerth and Mills, 1958, p. 39) Though there is no official consensus as to what Weber might have meant by this, I will suggest this refers to the ‘rational’ form charisma can take within the rational-legal order. Indeed, many of Weber’s critics noted that Weber rarely described charismatic figures as great prophets who represent the ‘beyond’. (Kalberg, 1980; Parsons, 1964) Rational society requires a ‘creature from the system’ (Peters, 2010, p. 519), requires individuals who deal with the world *as it is*. And the rationalization of politics encourages the creation of such leaders. For one, the formalization of politics subjects the politician to structure and boundaries. Since his external power as a political official, as a member of parliament, depends on the completion of his official duties and his respect for procedure, the number of ways in which he can accomplish his vision is significantly decreased. Indeed, it was because of parliament’s ability to ‘harness’ power that Weber promoted this rational-legal structure. As Scaff notes in his article ‘Max Weber’s Politics and Political Education’ (1973), Weber defends parliament on pragmatic grounds only.

As Weber acknowledged, any political arrangement -Parliament included- were potentially alterable to conform with national needs and interests. Such an admission understandably raises questions about Weber's attitudes toward constitutional democracy. Parliamentary institutions, we discover, are defended on pragmatic

grounds; their ultimate worth depends upon performance or utility,
not intrinsic merit. (p. 138)

Specifically, the following activities worked to counter-balance charismatic authority:
(i) the right of inquiry; (ii) parliamentary accountability of leaders in government; (iii) regulation of the state administration by parliamentary committees and (iv) unrestricted access to 'official information'. (Scaff, 1973, p. 137) As such, the political machine forces the politician to distinguish himself and prove himself in tasks which require intelligence and strategy. This also served to differentiate mere demagogues from political leaders.

The highly developed system of committee work in the English Parliament makes it possible and compelling for every politician who counts on a share in leadership to cooperate in committee work. All important ministers of recent decades have this very real and effective work-training as a background. The practice of committee reports and public criticism of these deliberations is a condition for training, for really selecting leaders and eliminating mere demagogues. (Weber, 1958a, p. 107)

While charismatic authority always depended on results of some sort or other, including even apparent miracles, rational charisma depends specifically on *objective results*. Politicians by vocation need to be both committed to innovative ideas (or a cause) and must be harnessed to reality. Charismatic leadership in this way is forced back into the world, in a way analogous to what the Protestant had experienced¹⁴. Charisma can be understood as transformed into its most

¹⁴ It would be comparable to the claim that Protestantism was the closest example of a 'rational' religion, meaning the closest relationship religion can have with a practical understanding of the world while preserving its distinct

rational expression, a form of charisma which takes into account the objective limitations and strengths of the world *as it is*.

Though charisma can now be understood within the context of rational politics, we have not yet tackled the issue of it creating disruptions in the social order, the most important task of a charismatic leader. But as had been the case when the Protestant chose to work in a way that made subjective rationality resemble 'objective' rationality, the more 'objective' subjective rationality, the more one could take advantage of practical knowledge.

VI. Power Change in a Rational-Legal Order

Kalberg claims **that our disenchanted world** has no social carrier rooted in the **existing** institutions capable of replacing religious social groups. (1980) However, I will argue that Weber saw the politician as the social role which can best disrupt the existing power orders. Indeed, while the politician's 'official' position requires him to work within the system, the rationalization of power in and out of the political order allows him to make changes to the very system which assigned him external power.

With the explosion of scientific advancement and technical progress, society increasingly rationalized itself into social spheres, each dominated by its own internal logic and specialized function. Not unlike ideas and beliefs which 'stamped' the material interests and practical concerns of social communities, the ultimate ends of each social sphere influenced its social relations and specific action patterns. Each sphere became complex, developed its own language and demanded specific roles (functions) from groups of individuals.

psychological rewards. Using Weber's terms, it forces charismatic authority back *into the world*, creating the logically closest combination of 'faith' and practical rationality.

While rationalization had dramatically changed social organization, power relations still depended on a belief in legitimacy, on groups accepting the beliefs which justified domination. And far from being intangible structures, Weber believed that the objective system of rules was capable of undergoing significant changes. According to Eisenstadt, who has done extensive research on Weber's use of charisma in institution building, substantive change is possible even in highly rationalized social orders.

Weber indicated, even if often only implicitly, that modern societies are characterized not only by certain structural characteristics such as growing differentiation and specialization (...) but also by far-reaching changes in the structure of the social centers, in the pattern of participation in them, and of access to them. (Eisenstadt, 1968b, p. liv)

Changing the rules meant creating new organizational pressures and constrictions, affecting the conditions which stabilized the monopoly of privileges. And this seems likely when we consider that Weber saw the state not as 'an embodiment of the united will of the people, but as an instrument of power in which people are more objects than subjects. (1968a, p. 645)

Substantive change in politics is thus still possible since the formalization of society involved separating power from a person or persons and transferring it to an abstract order of rules. As such, it was the abstract order (the rules) which represented the 'manifested will of the ruler', which influenced the conduct of other people (the ruled). (Weber, 2005, pp. 184-185) This meant that in some way privileged groups *depended* on the rational-legal order. Therefore, the more they depend on it, the more powerful are the means at the disposal of the politician.

Indeed, the rationalization of society had provided one advantage to the political sphere which it had not provided to any other social sphere: exclusive access to the legislative order, the system by which rules for society are established. As such, elected officials became the only social group which was formally responsible for the creation of new law. And as physical power (violence) was once the means which made the State the most powerful organization of all, in a rationalized society, access to the control of law is the modern equivalent. **This rational *legal* order has the same benefits as the rational *economic* order. Power relations are formalized and law comes to reflect the manifestations of power in the society with greater precision. As Dusza claims,**

By virtue of its technical attributes law lends persistence and continuity in time to the ‘evanescent and ever-changing manifestations of power’ (Heller, 1931, p. 304) and transforms the empirical constellation of powers into a normatively structured whole, into a hypothetically gapless system. (1989, p. 90)

VII. The Rational Means to Power

According to Dusza, modern law is considered ‘rational’ since

It is planned and is created intentionally, and is therefore determinate in its meaning, calculable in its impact and infinite in its applicability. It thus makes possible the most precise and practical guidance and regulation of political activity, the least fallible weighing and balancing which constitutes and activates political power. (Heller, 1931, p. 304) (1989, p. 90)

Formalization provided a standard by which all social domains could be evaluated. As Freund observed, '[L'État] s'appuie sur une administration rationnelle fondée sur des règlements explicites, qui lui permettent d'intervenir dans les domaines les plus divers, depuis l'éducation jusqu'à la santé, l'économie et même la culture (...).' (1968, p. 191)

With such benefits, charismatic power does not need to be autocratic¹⁵ since it can follow the rules of the rational-legal order and still accomplish its desired end: disrupting the existing social order. A high affinity politician can disrupt the existing power orders through the creation of new law (or the modification of old laws). And if legislative power is considered the rational equivalent of physical power, then it is reasonable to assume that dramatic changes in the legislative system could *also* favour the development of new material trends.

It can therefore be concluded that: (i) the formalization of society has *increased* the power of those who control the legislature, and (ii) the political leader is both limited and supported by the political machine.

Conclusion:

Weber described characters such as Jesus and Mohamed as 'good' and 'saintly' and they were deemed worthy of high reverence. But Weber's discussions about the future evolution of the human race did not predict such a return. The problem, arguably, was that whether charismatic figures in the past wanted to accept it or not, their actions have consequences on the world. And since observation and experience show us that 'what is true is not always beautiful or good' (Weber, 1958b, p. 148), charismatic figures who are not rooted enough in the world 'as

¹⁵ Autocracy as the refusal of all power orders.

it is' are more likely to be dangerous politicians. And this would be especially true in a world of rationalized politics, where the state is the only social structure with legitimate access to violent and physical means.

Nowadays, there is much less opportunity for 'irrational' charisma, that is, charisma rooted in a distinct and perhaps **fundamentally** opposite value system to that of the dominant rationality. But these relatively 'ordinary' charismatic leaders nowadays must be more 'adapted' to the way of the world and they are less likely to abuse the power at hand. This was a positive change since this form of charisma was much less dangerous than its alternatives: pure charisma or official charisma. Indeed, as Peters describes it,

The fatal sins of the leader born with innate charisma tend to be sins of commission, while those of the leader dependent on the charisma of the office most often are sins of omission: The bull in the china shop vs. the deer in the headlights. (...) The least damage tends to be done by those in the middle, who have acquired a patina of charisma through achievement. As creatures of the system, they know how the system works – and, vitally, they understand its limitations. (2010, p. 519)

And we can tie this in to what Bernard Williams claimed was the best indicator of 'safe' political leadership in his essay 'Politics and Moral Character' (1978). According to Williams, the ideal politician is one who is not naturally inclined to engage in dirty deeds, even though politics may require at times getting one's hands dirty; for such a person is less likely to use such means when it is not necessary. 'The point (...) is that only those who are reluctant or disinclined

to do the morally disagreeable when it is really necessary have much less chance of not doing it when it is not necessary.' (Williams, 1978, p. 64)

Chapter IV

THE MORAL DIMENSIONS OF *POLITICS AS A VOCATION*

As we recall, the objective of my thesis is to account for the two distinct messages Weber conveys in *Politics as a Vocation*. The first message, in a key passage, claims that there is an absolute opposition between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility. (Weber, 1958a, p. 120) The second claims that an ideal politician (and ‘mature man’) needs to act by both conviction and responsibility. (Weber, 1958a, p. 127) The accepted interpretation –which I have observed in my literature review- of this apparent contradiction assumes that: (i) the ethic of conviction is incomplete and inappropriate for politics and (ii) the ethic of responsibility is the superior moral stance. In Schluchter’s interpretation of Weber’s ethics, the ethic of conviction is portrayed as an inferior stage of morality which denies the value of instrumental knowledge. (1996) In comparison, the ethic of responsibility *incorporates* the commitment to ultimate values while accepting non-ethical values as possible guides to action. As such,

The denial of ethical relevance to success value is not the case for an ethic of responsibility. (...) This does not mean that success values are ethical values but it does mean that the demands arising from success values ought to be acknowledged. (...) Whereas the advent of an ethic of conviction takes on, as it were, a single responsibility, namely, for the convictional value of his action, the adherent of an ethic of responsibility has to carry a double responsibility, namely, for the convictional value *and* for its relationship to other values, especially success values, in an

ethically irrational world. (Schluchter, 1996, p. 88, italics in original)

Though Brubaker acknowledges that the ethics are two 'modes of rationality' (1984, p.107), he denies that both the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility are humanly meaningful¹⁶. In similar terms, Brubaker understands the ethic of responsibility 'as Weber's attempt to integrate *Wertrationalität* and *Zweckrationalität*, the passionate commitment to ultimate values with the dispassionate analysis of alternative means of pursuing them.' (1984, 108) Even Starr, whose article "The Structure of Max Weber's Ethic of Responsibility" (1999) connects the limitation of the ethic of conviction to its world-view, deems the ethic of responsibility the true ethical stance for the politician, relevant 'whenever values and strategies are brought together.' (p. 430) In all these cases, the ethic of responsibility is considered the completed ethic, comprising the benefits of what is deemed to be Weber's 'combined ethic'. The conclusions of these interpreters, therefore, conflict with Weber's conclusion that neither the ethic of conviction nor the ethic of responsibility taken separately is ideal for politics as a vocation. And this limitation was specifically recognized by both Schluchter and Starr. While Schluchter decides to dismiss the importance of the issue, Starr considers it problematic since the object of his article is to be able to account for both. As such, he attempts to reconcile his explanation with Weber's second passage by claiming that,

It is at least feasible to suggest that in the passages quoted above,
Weber has shifted the meaning of his terms 'ethic of conviction'
and 'ethic of responsibility' using the terms now to refer not to the

¹⁶ 'Only by integrating the wertrational and zweckrational orientations, by joining reason in an anthropological sense to scientific rationality, can an individual live a truly human life *within* a modern rationalized world.' (Brubaker, 1984, p. 109, italics in original)

clashing 'ultimate Weltanschauungen,' as he had previously used them, but to his two types of value-rational and instrumental-rational social action. (Starr, 1999, p. 427)

I. Two Ethical Maxims, One Conception of 'Good'

We can perhaps account for the mistaken thought that the ethic of responsibility was meant to be considered by Weber as the 'combined' ethic. This mistake can arise from Weber's key statement regarding the political personality: 'To be sure, mere passion, however genuinely felt, is not enough' (1958a, p. 115), in conjunction with his further point that though passion can create a political inclination, responsibility for a cause is also needed. This interdependence resonates with what the second of the contradictory passages was conveying, that a man with a true calling for politics needed a combination of conviction and responsibility. In fact, however, while there are some commonalities between, on the one hand, passion and conviction, and on the other hand, political and ethical responsibility, to think of the one thing as the other creates the illusion that an act of responsibility necessarily requires a commitment to ultimate values. But I will argue that the assumption that both ethics require a commitment to ultimate values is what creates the logical contradiction between the two passages. As such, passion and responsibility (traits of the political personality) should be considered distinct from the two ultimate ethical maxims. By mistaking personality and decision model, the ethic of responsibility is considered able to justify actions made by the ethic of conviction (except the absolute ethic of the Sermon on the Mount).

The problem with using the same moral standard for the evaluation of the two kinds of ethical actions is that it implies that the ethic of responsibility combines a feeling of responsibility with a commitment to one's ultimate values. But how can this interpretation be reconciled with Weber's claim that the ethic of responsibility cannot be considered the ideal ethic, and that the ideal requires that it be combined with the ethic of conviction? For instance, by not treating the ethics as two distinct moral codes, Starr was able to conclude that acts of conviction could be done by both the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility.

Value-rationality and instrumental-rationality are combined in both worldviews in various constellations. There are strategies in both. There are, in both, "demands" by which one must measure one's conduct. In both, individuals may reach a point where all that can be said is "Here I stand; I can do no other." Both are moral stances, and both involve a sense of obligation to values. (1999, p. 424)

And this interpretation becomes especially problematic when considering violent actions¹⁷. The problem of confusing the two moral goods is also illustrated in Arthur Koestler's work, *Le zéro et l'infini* (1945), and it skillfully highlights the logical contradictions associated with this form of thinking. For this reason, I will exhibit the limitations of the interpretation of Weber that is in question through the philosophical debate which takes place between the two main characters in Koestler's work.

¹⁷ If a sense of responsibility for the consequences of one's actions is considered synonymous with a feeling of responsibility for the accomplishment of one's cause, then efficiency is still in relation to what one feels duty towards. A commitment to the cause is therefore implied in acts of responsibility and this ultimately results in a deflection of responsibility. What would then differentiate an act of responsibility which includes dubious means from an act of conviction which includes dubious means?

Set in the period of the Moscow ‘processes’ and purges, Koestler claims his book represents the experiences of many of his friends who had originally had faith in the ‘sanctity’ of logic (the ‘march’ of history). As such, he claims that Roubachof, his protagonist, is the synthesis of the lives of many people Koestler personally knew. The story culminates on the question of morality and the absolute opposition between utilitarianism and deontology. As Weber had done in *Politics as a Vocation*, the debate begins when Roubachof considers the case of Raskolnikof in Dostoevsky’s *Crime et Châtiment*¹⁸.

Roubachof comes to question the ‘objective order’ which he had followed to decide all of his moral dilemmas, an order which had ‘justified’ the death of his girlfriend and the betrayal of a friend. He cannot reconcile the objective results of the order and its claimed ‘infallibility’. According to Ivanof, his old college friend and now persecutor, the politician’s duty toward ‘responsibility’ prevents him from choosing acts of conviction because of the objective consequences of always holding human life sacred¹⁹. However, Ivanof’s reasoning is flawed since it confuses the two moral dimensions and requires the ethic of responsibility also be founded in a commitment to ultimate values. Indeed, according to Ivanof,

Tom Raskolnikof est néanmoins un imbécile et un criminel; non pas qu’il agisse de façon illogique en tuant la vieille femme, mais parce qu’il le fait dans son intérêt personnel. (...) Si Raskolnikof avait assassiné la vieille par ordre du Parti – par exemple, pour augmenter les fonds de grève ou pour monter une imprimerie

¹⁸ ‘For those of you who know Dostoyevsky will remember the scene of the ‘Grand Inquisitor,’ where the problem is poignantly unfolded.’ (Weber, 1958a, p. 122)

¹⁹ ‘Et que nous ne devons pas traiter des vies humaines selon les règles de l’arithmétique (...) [c]ela voudrait dire qu’un chef de bataillon ne peut sacrifier une patrouille pour sauver un régiment. Que nous ne pourrions pas sacrifier des imbéciles comme Bogrof, et que nous devons courir le risque de laisser bombarder nos villes côtières.’ (Koestler, 1945, pp. 190-191)

illégal- alors l'équation collerait, et le roman (Crime et Châtiment) avec son problème trompeur, n'aurait jamais été écrit (...). (Koestler, 1945, p. 191)

'For the sake of the party' or for 'for the sake of the group' is a conviction. It assumes that there is such a thing as 'absolute' good (for the sake of the group) and 'absolute' evil (for the sake of the individual). And so this 'infallible approach' provides the illusion of certainty since the logic presumes the absolute necessity of commitment for actions to be considered ethical. This makes the ethic of responsibility bound to the moral dimension specific to the ethic of conviction. This makes some ethical acts, in specific, the acts of responsibility, logically impossible since 'acts of responsibility' must be seen as rooted in an ethic of conviction. And this was the reason why Weber feared most acts of conviction, since they were done by individuals with 'no real feeling of responsibility for the consequences of their actions'.

Oui, [nous sommes] si logiques que dans l'intérêt d'une juste répartition de la terre nous avons délibérément laissé mourir en une seule année environ cinq millions de paysans avec leurs familles. Nous avons poussé si loin la logique dans la libération des êtres humains des entraves de l'exploitation industrielle, que nous avons envoyé environ dix millions de personnes aux travaux forcés (...). Nous avons poussé la logique si loin, que pour régler une divergence d'opinions nous ne connaissons qu'un seul argument: la mort (...). Nous menons à coups de fouet les masses gémissantes vers un bonheur futur et théorique que nous sommes les seuls à entrevoir. (Koestler, 1945, p. 194)

And this was why an ethic of responsibility was required, for moments when one chooses to use dubious means, or as I will believe it is clearer to say: for going against one's personal convictions.

II. Ethics and Vocation?

Another problem with the accepted interpretation –which to repeat, assumes that the ethic of responsibility is, after all, the ideal of complete combination of the two types of ethics, or anyway the one to definitely choose-- is that we must also acknowledge as this interpretation seems not to do, that human beings are generally capable of making ethical decisions. For granting Weber's main claim that all ethical action is either rooted in conviction or responsibility, we have to assume that people outside politics –and not just people within politics whom Weber is then speaking about, also act according to either an ethic of conviction or an ethic of responsibility. We also have to assume that politicians who do not have a calling are still at times ethical agents, even if their non-political acts are reduced in overall significance. Lastly, recall Weber's claim that 'One cannot prescribe to anyone whether he should follow an ethic of absolute ends or an ethic of responsibility, or when the one and when the other.' (1958a, p. 127) Now, if no one can tell an individual which ethic to choose, why would the ethic of responsibility always be considered the ideal ethic for political vocation? Why would the politician's special qualities be needed for acts of responsibility outside the political order? Surely, individuals with qualities suited to their professional vocation which is other than politics could also foster acts of responsibility. For instance, *Science as a Vocation* underlines the teacher's duty to present material neutrally and impartially. In cases where the teacher feels conflicted with the desire to express his personal opinions, his choice to remain without bias is

an act of responsibility. (Weber, 1958b, p. 152) Also, we could consider that when a scientist admits the limitations of his research and identifies his underlying assumptions, he is acting according to an ethic of responsibility.

III. The Two Ultimate Ethical Worldviews

When Weber spoke of the two ethics, he described them as absolute opposites (1958a, p. 120), as the two options available when making ‘ultimate decisions’. (1958a, p. 117) By doing so, Weber is acknowledging the fact that a decision made by compromising personal beliefs can and should still be deemed ethical if it is done out of a feeling of responsibility. Each ethical stand should therefore be understood as implying *Weltanschauungen*, as whole modes of conduct, which is what Starr did in “The Structure of Max Weber’s Ethic of Responsibility”. The ethic of conviction requires a *feeling of duty* towards one’s values, which would make its non-accomplishment a moral error. Its principles rely on the assumption that there is an objective value order which overarches our social realities. (Starr, 1999, p. 409) The ethic of responsibility requires a feeling of responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions. Its principles rely on the assumption that there is no objective value system and the world is deemed an arena full of conflicting values which cannot be reconciled. However, Starr’s arguments put in question the absoluteness of the ethic of responsibility, that is, he fails to see this absolutist characteristic of the ethic of responsibility as a worldview, when he acknowledges only one of the two moral stances.

To explore matters further, we must add a new option to our considerations, as follows. A combined ethic, the combination of the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility, could mean one of two things: Either the ethics are combined in one action or the ethics are

combined in the overall life and decisions of the political personality. Since the ethics combined in one action could not account for both passages, I will argue that the political calling requires both the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility equally, and that the two actions need to be combined in the overall life. This is an important new departure in our analysis.

I will argue that acts of conviction and acts of responsibility should be considered the result of a *unique set of beliefs*. As such, each ethic has its own internal logic and its own conception of ‘good’. This creates the distinction between, on the one hand, beliefs and a notion of ‘good’ as a commitment to values, and, on the one hand, interests and a notion of ‘good’ not-committed to ultimate values.

As such, the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility will be regarded as distinct moral stands, as opposed maxims. The ethic of responsibility will therefore exclude a commitment to ultimate values. And so, when Schluchter distinguished the ethic of responsibility as ‘accepting non-ethical values as possible guides to action’, we should wonder instead if the non-ethical values are, in the case of the ethic of responsibility, the ethical values (axioms, beliefs). What differentiates the non-committed ethical action from non-committed practical action is the fact that the ethical is the result of an ultimate decision. The notion of ‘responsible means’ must be distinguished from practical rationality in general, since what is sought and calculated as ‘efficiency’ is not necessarily a matter of seeking the most material advantage for the least material cost. Instead, the objective is to gain the most good for the least evil²⁰. For this reason, I maintain that anything that goes *against* one’s personal convictions should be deemed acts of responsibility.

²⁰ There exists a relationship between beliefs (subjective rationality) and ‘good’ (ethic of conviction) in the same way there exists a relationship between interests (material-practical rationality) and ‘good’ (ethic of conviction).

IV. Rational Actions and the Two Ethics

It is now necessary to spell out Weber's account of four types of rationality and explain how these relate to the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility. This is especially important since it will preview the irreconcilable clash between actions focused on intentions and actions focused on consequences.

According to Weber, a social action is an act which takes into consideration the actions of other individuals (one or more). As such, it is considered to be *meaningfully* oriented and directed in its course. As we saw at the beginning of our study, distinguishing actions based on meaningfulness is at the core of Weber's sociology, as a study of social behaviour which uniquely takes into account subjective meaning. According to Weber, social interaction must be understood from the standpoint of the agents themselves, irrespective in many cases of the objective reality of a situation. Socially meaningful action is then divided by Weber into four categories, each associated with a particular kind of subjective meaning, a particular kind of rationality or way of attributing sense to what one is doing.

Instrumentally-rational actions are actions which are taken because they are considered to be the most efficient means of accomplishing a particular end. Such rationality is often-times associated with cost-benefit calculations and utility measures. The act is therefore not chosen because it is considered to have intrinsic value but because it is the most appropriate considering the particularities of the situation. Examples of instrumentally-rational actions include acts of collaboration or team work for the sake of accomplishing something as well as individually goal-oriented actions.

The first coupling sees meaning (worth) in actions that the standard internal logic would not recognize. The second coupling is rooted in the world as it is and seeks 'objective' results. The ethical actions however result from 'ultimate decisions', from choosing one of two forms of 'good'.

Value-rational actions are actions which are taken because the act is considered to have inherent value in and of itself. Such actions do not take into consideration the consequences which may ensue nor do they consider the appropriateness of the means chosen. According to Weber, such actions are often the result of what the individual believes are unconditional demands and are associated with a feeling of duty or reverence. Examples of value-rational actions include acts of worship.

Emotional actions are actions which are taken because of one's feelings; they are an expression of personal feeling determined by a social context. According to Weber, emotional actions are at the borderline of what is meaningfully oriented, in other words, they can at times be considered social actions, but at other times be considered mere behaviour. Examples of emotional actions include cheering at a sport's event, crying at a funeral and laughing at a comedy show. Insofar as they are meaningful –and not just cases of reflexive behaviour- such emotionally based actions are, in their way rational, they have a sensible point (for the agent).

Traditional actions are actions which are taken because of habituation, routine, or customs. They are often-times symbolic and at one time or another might have been a value-rational action. For instance, for some individuals, communion is done because it has inherent meaning and for others, it is done out of habit. Examples of traditional actions include standing for the national anthem, military salutes and wearing a white bridal gown.

When we consider Weber's distinction between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility, it is easy to understand why so many of Weber's critics have associated the former with value-rational action and the latter with instrumentally-rational action. The ethic of conviction is best characterized by the absolute ethic of the Sermon of the Mount, an ethical

standpoint which applies unconditional demands regardless of circumstance. Following the law of God is deemed to have value in and of itself, and the individual is faced with a feeling of obligation toward what he believes to be an objective order of value. Weber also attaches to the ethic of conviction a lack of consideration toward the consequences of the action, something he attributes to value-rational action as well.

When comparing them to the standard of instrumental-rationality, Weber claims that acts of conviction 'are quite irrational deeds, judged in view of their possible success.' (1994c. p. 360) To stand by one's principles is often detrimental to what is deemed practically advantageous and, as Weber argues, is often detrimental to what the individual seeks to safeguard through his action. Just as value-based actions are thus often deemed irrational from the standpoint of instrumental rationality, so are acts of conviction regarded as not really rational from the standpoint of acts of responsibility.

The ethic of responsibility, on the other hand, takes into account precisely the average deficiencies of people (Weber, 1994c, p.360) and rejects the notion that there exists an objective and sacred order of things where acts have intrinsic value in and of themselves. According to Weber, the ethic of responsibility arises from a deep feeling of responsibility for the consequences of the actions and, unlike the ethic of conviction, is based on the notion that the means depend upon the ends. Still, the relation of the ethic of responsibility to instrumental-rational actions is less obvious than the relationship which exists between value-rationality actions and the ethic of conviction. The ethic of responsibility involves a calculation and a consideration of multiple means which the ethic of conviction excludes by definition. The ethic of responsibility can therefore make compromises and indeed, requires compromises in its definition of 'good'. As Weber argues in *Politics as a Vocation*, for the individual following an

ethic of responsibility, not to 'raise the sword' in response to violence entails being responsible for the ensuing bloodshed. (1994c, p. 358)

The ethic of responsibility also bases the appropriateness of an action on the conditions particular to the situation at hand. The act which will be chosen will therefore depend on the consequences that the individual believes will follow from a specific context. Such is also the case with instrumental-rationality. The act is to be understood in relation to the variables at hand, and which is why it is not considered to have inherent value. For example, in the case of collaboration and cooperation, the specific agents at play and the specific demands of the situation will establish the most appropriate action.

Ethical actions, whether of conviction or of responsibility, can therefore be classified as social actions since they are meaningfully oriented, although it is more obviously so in the case of the ethic of responsibility that consideration of the actions of other individuals is involved.

V. The Importance of Internal Logic and Social Context

Like all other actions, ethical actions are chosen because the individual believes them to be in his best interest is based on the notion of rationality that the individual accepts or is presently applying. This explains why the ethic of conviction could not account for violent means. Understood as absolute maxims, the ethic of conviction cannot account for violent means since its internal logic requires actions which are absolutely bound to a belief in its inherent value. (Weber, 1958a, p. 122) But by the same token, since the ethic of responsibility was founded on the belief that the consequences of an act determine whether an action is good or not, its internal logic also cannot rationally justify actions which do not take into account the

actual consequences which follow. And so as acts of violence breaks the ethic of conviction ‘to pieces’ so do acts of conviction for the ethic of responsibility.

Such uniqueness also applied in the case of science and religion. Religion’s assumption of the inherent meaningfulness of the world and science’s denial of this created two distinct rationalities, two distinct set of logical conclusions. One could not have the advantage of both at the same time. As put forth by Nietzsche: ‘How’s that? You’ve chosen virtue and the puffed up chest, but at the same time you look askance at the advantages of those who have no scruples? – But when one embraces virtue, one *renounces* “advantages” (...)’ (1997, p. 7, italics in original)

If in fact the ethic of responsibility is limited by its worldview and cannot account for acts of devotion, then the examples provided in *Politics as a Vocation* can be understood in a new light. The ethic of responsibility was taken to have special value and worth for the political calling because the ethic of conviction fell to pieces when it tried to account for violent and dubious means. But similarly, the ethic of responsibility in turn cannot account for any action which goes against *its conception of good*: the consequences of one’s actions. An act of devotion can therefore not result from a maxim based on responsibility. To reach a point where one says, ‘Here I stand; I can do no other’ or ‘In spite of it all!’ are indeed acts of conviction. And since Weber had claimed that these heroic actions could happen at least once in an individual’s life, the ethic of conviction can also be considered valuable and worthwhile in a political vocation – in its special time, when the moment for it arises.

This interpretation that I am offering for how the apparently opposed ethics can be coherently combined, and can need to be combined, that is, within the whole of a worthy political life, accords with key statements of Weber’s in *Politics as a Vocation*. Though the

majority of the time, Weber is highly critical of acts of conviction in politics, Weber on occasion reserved his greatest praise for acts of symbolic value. Indeed, Weber's examples of notable political leaders include individuals who risked or jeopardized their office for the sake of conviction.

The leading *politician* must publicly *refuse* to accept responsibility for political actions if they conflict with his own convictions; his duty to sacrifice his office to his convictions. (Weber, 1994a, p. 204, italics in original)

Also, and most importantly, acts of conviction could occur at the high points of a man's life and in fact *needed* to be combined with acts of responsibility if a man has a true calling for politics²¹. There must therefore exist different 'types' of subjective meaning for two externally-similar act of conviction.

VI. Reconsidering the Limits of the Ethic of Conviction and the Ethic of Responsibility

I will now argue that while it is clear that the ultimate maxims were at the heart of Weber's evaluation of ethical actions, it is subjective meaning which was at the source of praise or criticism by him. Although values are *normative* by nature and hence contrary to what we classify as facts, they need to be understood as embodied in actions within social institutions,

²¹ The two examples in *Politics as a Vocation* to depict the man with a true calling for politics are acts of conviction. In the first case, Weber concludes that the mature politician, 'with all the responsibility found in the ethic of responsibility', ultimately reaches a point where he must say: 'Here I stand; I can do no other.' (1958a, p. 127) The second example is Weber's portrayal of political courage, a man who in spite of the dark and icy night, faced with the 'crumbling of all hope', can still say 'In spite of [it] all!' (1958a, p. 128)

within social contexts. Subjective rationality and social context are therefore crucial *reference points* which we need to judge whether the outcomes are positive or negative.

Indeed, Weber's unique method for the social sciences took into account man as 'living in the world', as living in a society in which he has not chosen the existing conditions. According to Weber, much about the world and society now provided ways to 'objectively' evaluate the value or worth of actions. For instance, Weber observes that the social contexts of bureaucracy and of politics have two distinct honour codes which influence the way in which moral actions can be interpreted. For the bureaucratic official, his honour depends on his ability to follow orders even when he disagrees with them. (Weber, 2005, p. 203) This feeling of duty, according to Weber, is essential since it is demanded by the 'spirit of the office'. (1994a, p. 161) On the other hand, if this sort of decision had been made by a politician, he would be held 'worthy of contempt'. (Weber, 2005, p. 203) Specifically, Weber believed that 'It is in the nature of officials of high moral standing to be poor politicians, and above all, in the political sense of the word, to be irresponsible politicians. In this sense, they are politicians of low moral standing. (...)' (1958a, p. 95) This is because the nature of politics makes many of the behaviours which have worth outside politics appear irrational and irresponsible. For instance, truth and pacifism, which are honourable in many value-spheres, lead to adverse consequences in the realm of politics. (Weber, 1958a, pp. 119-120)

VII. Rational Deliberation and Free Choice

Though we can now understand how the same act of conviction can have different evaluations based on the social context, this will still not answer fully why within the same social

sphere such as politics, two externally-identical acts (i.e., ‘Refusing to lie’) can have two different subjective meanings. Specifically, how can there be a greater or superior act of conviction if all acts of conviction are blind to consequences?

In spite of the fact that the ethic of conviction and responsibility are contrasted such that with the latter the decision depends on the consequences of the action while with the former it does not, acts of conviction and also acts of responsibility can be preceded by thought and deliberation²². It seems reasonable to assume that the same tools which are at one’s disposal when making a practical decision can help an individual, in this case the politician, make a more rational moral decision. Wasn’t this why Weber believed that the advances of science were of direct benefit to the politician’s decision-making²³?

It is not because they are ultimate decisions that these are necessarily blind choices. As Aron claimed in his introduction to *Le savant et le politique* (1963),

Les choix auxquels est effectivement condamné l’homme historique, parce que la science est limitée, l’avenir imprévisible et que les valeurs sont, à courte échéance, contradictoires, ne sont pas démontrables. Mais la nécessité de choix historiques [choix non-

²² It is worth noting, however, that some of my secondary resources denied this possibility. Though Hennis believed our ability to think and deliberate is what differentiated us from ‘mere events of nature’, he too refused to consider the possibility for an act of conviction to be preceded by reflection. ‘On a note de longue date que “l’éthique de responsabilité” serait mieux définie comme éthique d’une évaluation responsable des conséquences. Son centre est la faculté de juger dont l’adepte de l’éthique de conviction peut se dispenser- puisqu’il obéit qu’à sa conscience.’ (1996, p. 244) A similar reasoning is found in Starr as well. ‘While both forms of rational action [acts of conviction and acts of responsibility] involve a demand, they locate the demand differently in the order of deliberation. In instrumental-rational action, the demand emerges *after* rational consideration of the options leads the agent to the most efficient set of ends, means, and results. *This is the way you must go* if you are to be instrumentally-rational. By contrast it is precisely this consideration that value-rational action excludes: I have no alternative but to obey the value demands, before any rational deliberation. (Levine, 1981, p.19)’ (1999, p. 411, italics in original)

²³ Even if science was incorporated in ethical decisions, the action is still the result of an ethical decision.

justifié] n'implique pas que la pensée soit suspendue à des décisions essentiellement irrationnelles et que l'existence s'accomplisse dans une liberté qui refuserait de se soumettre même à la Vérité. (pp. 68-69)

Acts of conviction and acts of responsibility are the result of decision-making, are the result of a choice which 'makes one the God and the other the Devil.' (Weber, 1958b) As we remember, 'The ultimately possible attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion. Thus it is necessary to make a decisive choice.' (Weber, 1958b, p. 152) The absoluteness of the internal logic applies only once the choice to abide by an ethic of conviction has been made. This means that a deflection of responsibility is a result of the choice, the result of standing firm on one's principles. And, similarly for the ethic of responsibility, the lack of commitment to ultimate values is the result of a choice, the result of taking full accountability for the consequences of one's actions. The advantage of this interpretation I am proposing is that it still respects the fact that the 'leap', the jump from what is to what ought to be, cannot be fully accounted by 'objective' rationality. As such, the action is still of a kind where one is 'free' to choose the conditions which will rationally justify one's moral decision. For this reason, I maintain that the decision to act according to conviction *after* rational consideration is still an act of conviction.

VIII. The Heroic Ethic and the Ethic of the Mean

Up to this point, understanding the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility as both rooted in absolute maxims allows us to account for the first contradictory passage which

focused on the exclusive nature of each ethic. Further, our decision to interpret the ethic of responsibility as a distinct and limited ethic prevents us from having to ask in disbelief why Weber would have claimed that a combination of the two ethics would be ideal.

If the ethic of responsibility is not superior in and of itself, what distinguishes a humanly meaningful act? I will suggest that we apply the same consideration we have observed up to now, which is that externally-similar actions can have distinct subjective meanings. And it is by tying in another distinction which Weber makes between ethical actions that we can realize that human meaningfulness depends on the individual and his orientation of meaning and not the act as such, in itself.

In 'Max Weber: Selections in Translation' (1978), we find an interesting passage that connects Weber's view or views as so far discussed to another view on ethical positions.

All systems of ethics, no matter their substantive content, can be divided into two main groups. There is the 'heroic' ethic, which imposes on men demands of principle to which they are generally *not* able to do justice, except at the high point of their lives, but which serves as signposts pointing the way for man's endless *striving*. Or there is the 'ethic of the mean', which is content to accept man's everyday 'nature' as setting a maximum for the demands which can be made. (pp. 385-386, italics in original)

In spite of its philosophical appeal, it was difficult to put this passage in the context of *Politics as a Vocation* since it did not make reference to the ultimate maxims. But if we acknowledge that two externally identical acts of conviction can have two distinct subjective

meaning, it is possible to attach both the notion of being heroic and that of being 'ordinary' not to the maxims themselves but to the different subjective meanings which justify the act. As such, the 'ethic of the mean' represents the passive stance and the 'heroic ethic' the active stance which strives to go beyond the limits set by nature. (Brubaker, 1984, 97) Understood in this way, I claim that both the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility are capable of constituting distinctive humanly meaningful actions.

IX. Humanly Meaningful Ethical Actions

If we acknowledge that the ethics of conviction and responsibility must be evaluated according to two different moral dimensions, the ethic of conviction has the possibility of also being a source of what is humanly meaningful. And this once again falls in line with our previous observations that externally identical actions can have distinct subjective meanings. And it also explains why Weber at once claimed that the ethic of conviction could only be considered to have purely symbolic value in the field of politics and yet conclude that acts of convictions were often done at the high moments of one's life and were therefore a necessary moral stance for the political calling or vocation.

Though the absolute division between the two moral stances is favorable to acts of conviction, allowing some to distinguish themselves as 'humanly meaningful', the ethic of responsibility can no longer rely on a combination of both 'goods' to justify its usefulness for the vocation of politics. Does this mean that all acts of violence are equal in worth? I will argue that this is hardly the case.

The idea of a principled politician acting according to an ethic of responsibility usually invokes the image of a man who compromises his belief in the ‘good’ and, for example, accepts full responsibility for an act of violence. However, if we understand ethical actions as the product of subjective meaning, this is but a fragment of the whole picture. Indeed, understood as maxims of conduct, the ethic of conviction does not need to have a religious (“Sermon on the Mount”) connotation and the ethic of responsibility does not have to imply violent means.

Choosing an ethic of responsibility is a matter of accepting the absurdity of the world, in the sense of the absence of absolute objective values, and hence, the fact that good does not always come from good or evil from evil²⁴. It is a matter of accepting, for instance, that ‘Les pays gouvernés démocratiquement, avec des fonctionnaires en partie corrompus sans aucun doute, ont obtenu beaucoup plus de succès dans le monde que notre bureaucratie hautement morale.’ (Mommsen, 1985, p. 218)

Since violence can ‘legitimately’ be used by those in power and the ethic of conviction cannot justify committing immoral acts for the sake of an end, Weber concludes that ‘He who seeks the salvation of the soul, of his own and of others, should not seek it along the avenue of politics, for the quite different tasks in politics can only be solved by violence.’ (1958a, p. 126) But that did not imply that principled individuals could not act violently. All Weber says is that if an individual is to use violent means, he cannot claim his convictions ‘forced’ him to do so. For it to be logically conceivable, the individual must admit that the consequences of the action justified the decision. And this is why Weber specifically states that it is ‘political action

²⁴ ‘And since Nietzsche, we realize that something can be beautiful, not only in spite of the aspect in which it is not good, but rather in that very aspect. (...) It is commonplace to observe that something may be true although it is not beautiful, and not holy and not good. Indeed, it may be true in precisely these aspects.’ (Weber, 1958b, p. 148)

operating with violent means and following an ethic of responsibility which endangers the 'salvation of the soul'. (1958a, p. 126) In other words, an individual who believes in salvation and acts violently based on an ethic of responsibility 'stains' his soul since he cannot admit that his convictions justified his actions. And when an individual who 'truly fears the wrath of God' and yet chooses to act according to an ethic of responsibility, that is when he is acting 'heroically'. Indeed, the act of responsibility Weber considered humanly meaningful was based on an example of individuals disobeying their principles for the sake of future consequences.

Time and again the papal interdict was placed upon Florence and at that time it meant a far more robust power for men and their salvation of soul than (to speak with Fichte) the 'cool approbation' of the Kantian ethical judgment. The burghers, however, fought the church-state. And it is with reference to such situations that Machiavelli in a beautiful passage (...) of the *History of Florence* has one of his heroes praise those citizens who deemed the greatness of their native city higher than the salvation of their souls. (Weber, 1958a, p. 126)

Understood in this way, we can also recognize that the human meaningfulness of the two acts of conviction provided by Weber implied actions which had been done by individuals who had 'truly felt responsible for the consequences of their actions' and *still* choose to stand by principle. According to Frankfurt in 'The Importance of What We Care About' (1988),

A person who is subject to volitional necessity finds that he must act as he does. For this reason it may seem appropriate to regard situations which involve volitional necessity as providing instances

of passivity. But a person in a situation of this kind generally does not construe the fact that he is subject to volitional necessity as entailing that he is passive at all. People are generally quite far from considering that volitional necessity renders them helpless bystanders to their own behavior. Indeed, they may even tend to regard it as actually enhancing both their autonomy and strength of will. (p. 87)

An example of volitional necessity provided by Frankfurt was Luther's declaration 'Here I stand; I can do no other.' (1988, p. 86)

Conclusion

According to Weber, the qualitative difference which exists between externally similar actions by subjective meaning is a specifically human component of action which needs to be understood when looking at past (and arguably present) events. So, acts of conviction and acts of responsibility can be done by the same individual in multiple social spheres and have different interpretations based on the fact that the social world is indeed an arena of conflicting and irreconcilable values. The true nature of acts of conviction and acts of responsibility, or their 'objective appropriateness', can only be determined when context and subjective meaning are considered. They are, as such, only reference points. And this was why the appropriateness of the act could not be inferred without knowing the particular conditions of the event.

So we see why and how it is that Weber believed a man with a true calling for politics needs to combine both acts of conviction and acts of responsibility since only together could there to be a genuine man. (Weber, 1958a, p. 127)

While Weber's emphasis on violence and its moral risks in *Politics as a Vocation* clearly indicates that the ethic of responsibility is crucial to the political arena, Weber recognized the importance of acting by principle and conviction. And it is for this reason that politicians who are usually oriented toward an ethic of responsibility and yet choose to act by conviction can be considered humanly meaningful. And it is because the internal logic of the ethics remains intact but the qualitative difference of the actions can differ, that the two passages can be seen as complementary to one another²⁵.

²⁵ I think Starr wanted to convey a similar idea but instead of identifying subjective meaning as the reason to give both an act of conviction and an act of responsibility a chance to be considered humanly meaningful, Starr compromises the absoluteness of the ethics in order to make sense of the ethic of responsibility within a morality based on a commitment to ultimate values. This compromise allowed him to conclude that a Luther-like declaration could be explained by both an act of conviction and an act of responsibility.

CONCLUSION

The objective as set out in the introduction –that of reconciling the two contradictory passages in *Politics as a Vocation* - was indeed achieved, but only by dividing the problem by the various themes it evoked and treating each as an independent object of study. Combined together, the last three chapters analyzed subjective meaning through three different lenses, first that of values and interests, second that of power and third that of ethics. The second chapter attempted to differentiate Weber from his forerunner, Karl Marx, who served both as an influence and an object of criticism. Though Marx believed human history could be studied like ‘any other natural event’, Weber underlined through his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that it is exactly what differentiates us from the natural world that distinguished us as human beings. Though material forces are strong and seemingly inflexible, Weber maintained that human beings could consciously act on the world without having motives which are reducible to the economic platform. For Weber, not only are we material beings, we are also *cultural* beings who can take stands and add meaning to our lives. (1949, p. 27) According to Weber, there is therefore not a one way relationship but a two-way relationship between what Marx had referred as the superstructure and the material base, the economy.

In the third chapter, it was argued that social change cannot be limited to either the cultural way of life (as a mere reflection of ideas) or the practical way of life (as a mere reflection of material interests). For Weber, there are ‘changing shades of meaning’ which need to be taken into account and these unequivocally involve some social groups gaining relative power over other social groups. So we needed to understand that for Weber, it is by uniting the struggle for power with subjective rationality that social change occurs, since change is not just a matter of time, but a matter of will. This view in Weber had ultimately allowed him to account

for both the dynamic and the predictable nature of social development. Also, by identifying the politician's social role (to stand by his convictions) and its rational implication (a rejection of the dominant rationality), Weber was led to conclude that politics by vocation depended on charismatic authority. Having claimed that charisma was ultimately responsible for disruptions in the power order, Weber regarded the political personality as a bearer of social change.

In the last chapter, it was concluded that the absolute nature of the ethical maxims created the logical impossibility of referring all ethical actions to the same moral conception of 'goodness'. As with rational conduct more generally, the appropriateness of ethical conduct *also* depends on its reference points -- its social context and subjective meaning -- thereby creating the possibility for externally similar actions to have distinct subjective meanings and distinct evaluations of 'appropriateness'. As such, it was concluded that both acts of conviction and acts of responsibility can create powerful human moments, as Luther and Machiavelli's protestors had done.

Reconciling the two passages in *Politics as a Vocation* required seeing that conviction and responsibility are not to be considered as 'combined' in one action but rather as combined in a political personality's overall life. Since this meant that conviction and responsibility could not be the 'necessary' components for the ethic of responsibility, the two ethics were considered two distinct moral dimensions with two distinct conceptions of 'good'. As ultimate *Weltanschauungen*, the internal logic of each is what determines the appropriateness of ethical actions in their respective conceptions. And this is how we came to explain that each ethic was limited by its set of perceived interests. Acting (wholly) against what one perceives as 'good' is as logically impossible as it is for an individual to rationally justify acting (*wholly*) *against* what he or she believes to be in his or her best interest. The evaluation of an ethical action therefore

depends upon which standard the action is based on. For instance, since an individual's violent overturn of government cannot be logically explained by the ethic of conviction, his revolt needs to be evaluated according to the principles of an ethic of responsibility. If the foreseeable objective consequences do not create 'the most good for the least amount of evil', the decision to overturn the government can be considered 'wrong', the normative equivalent of 'irrational'.

Seen in this light, the 'worth' of the ethic of responsibility in politics was explained by its ability to account for actions which are necessary in a political vocation and, most importantly, which are logically impossible for, contrary to the very nature of, the ethic of conviction. It therefore followed that if the ethic of conviction is also to have worth in politics, it would be on this same ground, on its own terms. So we arrived at the conclusion that just as the ethic of responsibility can be valued for its ability to rationally justify the use of violence, the ethic of conviction can also be valued but for its ability to rationally justify acts of devotion. Understood in such a way, there is no reason why there should be a contradiction for a politician who feels 'a true feeling of responsibility for the consequences of his actions', and thereby usually chooses to act by responsibility, to choose at times to act by conviction. Indeed, these acts are especially humanly meaningful *because* of the internal tension this choice produces, for the same reason the resisters in Florence had been held in high esteem by both Machiavelli and Weber. And so let us finish by recalling Weber's description of a man who has a true calling for politics, a man who could, like the Hellenic man, offer sacrifices to both Apollo and Aphrodite²⁶.

²⁶ 'We live as did the ancients when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons, only we live in a different sense. As Hellenic man at times sacrifices to Aphrodite and at other times to Apollo, and above all, as everyone sacrificed to the gods of his city, so do we still nowadays, only the bearing of man has been disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity.' (Weber, 1958b, p. 148)

It is immensely moving when a *mature* man – no matter whether old or young in years -- is aware of a responsibility for the consequences of his conduct and really feels such responsibility with heart and soul. He then acts by following an ethic of responsibility and somewhere he reaches the point where he says: ‘Here I stand; I can do no other’ [Luther, 1521]. That is something genuinely human and moving. And every one of us who is not spiritually dead must realize the possibility of finding himself at some point in that position. In so far as this is true, an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine man -- a man who *can* have the ‘calling for politics’.

(1958a, p. 127, italics in original)

ADDENDUM

THESIS DEFENSE

Max Weber's essay *Politics as a Vocation* (1919) is one of his most well-known and most debated works, addressing topics such as the development of the state, the multiple roles within the political system and, most notably, the ideal ethical stance for a man who chooses politics as his vocation. What is especially interesting and has caused much dispute is a division Weber creates between an "ethic of conviction" and an "ethic of responsibility". Indeed, the opposition between the two ethics is emphasized by Weber on multiple occasions, also, notably, in *Science as a Vocation* (which, like the former essay, was initially a speech he gave in the last years of his life). Almost always, the two ethics are said to be rooted in, as Weber says, "distinct and irreconcilable principles". This fundamental divide between the two ethics is apparently reinforced by the facts that the ethic of conviction resembles a Kantian ethic, prioritizing duty and intention, while the ethic of responsibility places particular importance on feeling responsible for the consequences of our actions, and so is in line with utilitarianism.

So what is Weber's position after all? Throughout *Politics as a Vocation*, the ethic of responsibility appears to be the one Weber endorses as suited for political life. Yet, Weber concludes his essay by claiming that a combined ethic is ideal for a political vocation. After citing Martin Luther's famous pronouncement, "Here I stand; I can do no other", Weber asserts:

That is something genuinely human and moving. And every one of us who is not spiritually dead must realize the possibility of finding himself at some point in that position. In so far as this is true, an ethic of conviction and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison

constitute a genuine man - a man who *can* have the “calling for politics”. (Weber, 1958a, p. 127, italics in original)

So, Weber’s position appears contradictory: the ethics are opposites but somehow to be combined. Commentators have mostly concluded that, for Weber, the ethic of responsibility is the ideal ethic for politics (Brubaker, 1984, p. 108; Schluchter, 1996, p. 88). That appears further in accord with the fact that a key concern of the speech in its historical context was to warn political students of the dangers associated with an ethic of conviction. Weber, as a realist, was especially critical of a stance that disregarded the corrupted nature of the world, which the ethic of responsibility alone seems to accept. Politicians with single-minded convictions were responsible for Germany’s political stalemate, supporting the fact that the ethic of conviction should not be deemed acceptable in politics.

And yet there is much this position neglects by opting for only one of the two ethics, by concluding that only the ethic of responsibility is appropriate for political vocation. My thesis offers something different; something I admit is ambitious. What I propose is the synthesis of the opposition, of finding a way to combine the two irreconcilably opposed ethics.

It was because of a graduate course on Weber that I first became engaged by this problematic and became concerned with: (i) the contradiction in Weber’s essay; (ii) the unconvincing nature of the standard responses to it; and (iii) the need to come up with a better answer that also connected the essay to major themes in Weber’s overall work.

A central intuition I came upon early was that although the nature of politics and of the flawed world require the politician to act for the most part from an ethic of responsibility, it is when a politician chooses to act by principle in very specific circumstance that one can confirm that this individual truly does have a political calling. That is because a commitment to ultimate

values is what differentiates the politician who has a true calling for politics from one who does not, from the individual who on each and every occasion considers only consequences and never ultimate values.

These acts of conviction are especially valuable for political vocation since they confirm what Weber called 'faith', a passion to a cause. Such faith assumes a distinct set of beliefs, and that was important if the dominant rationality was to be challenged or the politician was to be an agent of change, two things Weber believes are possible and necessary, in ways, interestingly, that Marx did not.

Let me now briefly present my essential ideas more systematically and also by reference to their development of the argument in the thesis.

For the life of a politician as a whole, Weber rejects both irresponsibility for consequences and also unprincipled opportunism. Unprincipled opportunism would be the equivalent of *Realpolitik*, something for which Weber so harshly criticized Bismarck. The ethic of responsibility is not unprincipled opportunism and is indeed an ethic because it bases decisions on trying to insure a greater proportion of good consequences than bad. But this balancing act is not rooted in a set of clear, fixed beliefs or in a commitment to ultimate values. However, Catherine Colliot-Thélène, in her reading of Weber, concludes that a commitment to a cause, understood as the commitment to ultimate values, is actually required for genuine responsibility. Indeed, she claims that that if this was not the case, the ethic of responsibility would not be different from *Realpolitik*. I disagree, if cause means firm values. I maintain that a commitment to these belongs not with the ethic of responsibility but with the ethic of conviction, and that the ethic of responsibility has a wholly different notion of 'good', a kind of utilitarian one. If this is true, the relevance of the ethic of conviction is revealed since Weber believes only

where there is also a faith can the individual be said to have a true calling for politics. This fundamental attachment to ultimate values, which is revealed in acts of conviction, is attached to an individual's will to power, making it rational for the politician to make changes to the power system, even if it appears irrational to the dominant rationality.

I therefore emphasize, with Weber, that the two ethics are each limited by their respective understanding of reality, which means by their differing views of what is rational, of what is a sensible and ultimately, of what is 'good'. So how *can* the two ethics be combined?

The notion of "combining" the ethics does not apply to specific acts; the two ethics are to be combined in the overall career, through the multiple ethical decisions, which the politician must face. Most of the time, the politician needs to act according to the ethic of responsibility but in some cases, a commitment to ultimate values is required. In such circumstances, the ethic of conviction should be deemed appropriate and essential for a political vocation.

Let me remind you of how the chapters unfold the argument. The first chapter provides the historical context in which Weber presented his two famous lectures, *Politics as a Vocation* and *Science as a Vocation*. It included a comparison which highlighted the relevance of passion in both scientific and political callings. The second chapter emphasizes the importance of values and ideas in Weber's understanding of historical causation by comparing it with Marx's historical materialism. This comparison or rather contrast is important. For if Weber had accepted Marx's view about ideas being driven by interests, as being purely "ideological", it would not have made sense for Weber to write *Politics as a Vocation* in the first place, since the essay explores, in a way at a philosophical level, the intellectual essence and merits of ideas and values, ideas and values which cannot be reduced to material or economic interests. Weber claims that politics is a domain where man can put his hand on the "wheel of history", a man

who has passion for a cause, a man with vision. For Marx, for whom politics is at core the result of the existing economic conditions (however much this claim may be nuanced), that would make no sense. So my second chapter, comparing and contrasting Marx and Weber on these fundamentals, is a foundation for my ensuing arguments, for showing the historical relevance of beliefs and personal vision in social progress.

The third chapter explores Weber's schema of different types of authority –traditional, rational-legal and charismatic – emphasizing how they each depend on a distinct set of beliefs, which in turn explains the kind of power the individual holds. Each set of beliefs has a specific relation with the existing power order. Those who rely on traditional or rational-legal authority will want to maintain or strengthen the existing power relations. Those who rely on charismatic authority will want to disrupt them. Since politics concerns itself with the distribution, maintenance and transfer of power, it is an ideal vocation for an individual who wants to say to the masses 'So it is written, but I say unto you.' This link between charisma and politics further supports the claim that the ideal politician, one with a true calling for politics, requires a distinct set of beliefs, a commitment to ultimate values.

The fourth chapter specifically deals with the question of the two ethics, their distinct set of beliefs and their distinct notion of 'what is good'. The chapter incorporates many of the conclusions drawn in the second and third chapters and shows the importance of the connection between a kind of faith and the ethic of conviction *because* it is the only ethic whose 'notion of good' includes a commitment to ultimate values. It is in these ways that that some acts of conviction can be deemed necessary for a true political calling, and are so deemed by Weber.

I now thank the examiners for their detailed comments and look forward to the discussion.

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