This passion for bureaucracy... is enough to drive one to despair.

Max Weber

Bureaucracy: the organizing principle of modern life

To speak about bureaucracy, as many nowadays love to do, is to engage the central concern of Max Weber. Preoccupied with understanding the distinctively individual or unique character of the present historical phase,1 Weber was convinced that modern bourgeois reality is marked by an unprecedented “passion for bureaucracy.” In no previous country or historical period has existence come to be so absolutely confined within calculating, rationalized forms of organization. Their scope and influence tend to become universal. Everywhere houses of bureaucratic serfdom are being constructed and finished; the advance of bureaucracies seems irreversible.2

Weber was of course aware that the bureaucratization of modern existence was not without precedent. Through a great variety of complex processes, all former civilizations successfully rationalized particular areas of daily life. The rational calculation of architectural stress and arching patterns, for example, was clearly evident in the medieval Gothic vault; rationalized forms of bookkeeping appeared in the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, as well as in India and China; Roman jurisprudence and legal practice were inscribed within rigorous and calculating schemata of argumentation; the beginnings of military discipline, with its prohibition of fighting out of line, were already displayed among the heavily armed Hellenic and Roman foot soldiers; the Renaissance elevation of the rationally calculated experiment to a key principle of scientific inquiry was preceded by the war technology and mathematized astronomy of Hellenic antiquity, the techniques of experimentation in Indian yoga, and the mining operations of the Middle Ages. Moreover, numerous social formations have in the past organized themselves through highly developed and quantitatively large bureaucratic organizations: Egypt during the period of the new Empire; the Roman Catholic Church, especially from the end of the thirteenth century; China from the time of Shi Hwangti; and so on.3 In the face of these
well-known examples Weber nevertheless insisted that modern, occidental processes of bureaucratization are without precedent. Their fundamental novelty lies in the fact that they tend to penetrate and capture all realms of life. The modern civilizing process is virtually identical with the development of calculating, bureaucratic organization. The whole of life falls under the sway of "formal" or purposive rationality – goal-oriented conduct that is guided by the spirit of calculation and abstract-general rules, and that therefore reduces its fields of operation to objects of administration. Under conditions of total bureaucratization, voluntary associations and value-oriented relations of mutual agreement are increasingly subverted and replaced by purposively rational organizations. These strive to realize their respective goals by way of the definition and regulation of all situations as problems, which subsequently can be solved through computation and reckoning. In short, the champions and defenders of bureaucratization struggle to "disenchant" the world, to rid it of all inestimable, mysterious forces. It is assumed that all events and things can be defined, monitored, and controlled through bureaucratic means and calculations.

Weber's account of the unique realities of modern life, it must be emphasized, does not presume that the proliferation of bureaucratic conduct is identical with the modernization process. He insists that his own discussion of the specificity or individuality of modern bourgeois life tends to be one-sided. Like all comparative inquiries, its emphases are selective, structured by judgments about the significance of contemporary bureaucratic domination. These judgments positively determine the goals and methods of inquiry into bureaucratic forms. By way of these judgments, bureaucratic organizations are estimated to be characteristic of the contemporary world, setting it apart from all previous sociohistorical formations. Conversely, these judgments exclude a rich infinity of general and particular aspects of life under modern conditions. This point is of great importance to the following essay. Simply, Weber's analysis does not pose as an exhaustive description of the dynamics of the bureaucratization process. It does not claim to depict or reproduce conceptually the "really real" content and form of modern bureaucratic reality. Its concern to clarify and understand this reality instead systematically relies upon ideal-typical categories. These one-sidedly emphasize and scrutinize certain characteristic features of bureaucracy. Weber continually emphasizes that there can be no presuppositionless representation of bureaucratic processes that somehow allow themselves to be fully disclosed. These processes can be observed, analyzed, or criticized only through methods of inquiry that depend upon a series of conceptual abstractions. His account of bureaucratic rationality is thus avowedly selective, conditioned by the mode of contemporary historical interest in understanding that rationality.

Guided by this premise, Weber analyzes at least four elements common to modern bureaucratic institutions. These elements, to repeat, are by no means expressed in their pure form anywhere within the landscape of modern life. They nevertheless together constitute (in his view) the most highly significant attributes peculiar to all contemporary public and private bureaucratic organizations. In the first place, bureaucracy can be analyzed as an ensemble of consistent, methodically prepared, and precisely executed relations of command
and obedience. Relations between "subjects" within the organizational hierarchy are ordered firmly, and in accordance with the necessary principle of appointment and supervision from above. These subjects are "unswervingly and exclusively set for carrying out the command."6

Bureaucracy constitutes an objective matrix of power, into which officials (and their clients) at all levels are slotted, by which their activity is structured, and according to which they are to be depoliticized and governed anonymously as beings who "need order and nothing but order."7 Within all spheres of the organization, subordinates are expected to rely upon the initiative and problem-solving ability of their superiors. As a system of organized inequality, bureaucratic organization therefore thrives on the suspension of all personal criticism, passive obedience, faith in authority, and attention to directives among the subordinated. Nervous and helpless when severed from their organization, individuals become organization people, whose one ideal in life is to conform. They become single cogs who strive for bigger jobs within an ever-moving and more or less precisely functioning apparatus, whose course, in turn, can be altered only by those (bureaucrats) at the very top. Bureaucratic administration is therefore crucially premised upon the concentration of the means of production, war, and administration in the hands of those who govern. In turn, those who deploy and administer these means consider the world and all that is within it a mere object of their concern. Bureaucracy always subsists and expands through bureaucrats.

These relations of subordination, secondly, are subject to rigorous internal differentiation, that is, are structured in conformity with a usually complex division of tasks or offices. The rules specifying these tasks are typically calculated through empirical observation, guided by such considerations as the minimum of costs, and spelled out in written documents. The skillful, efficient operation of bureaucratic organizations such as the factory or the department store depends upon rational and continuous specialization. Within the bureaucratic apparatus, the activities of speaking, interacting, and laboring staff are subject to continuous administrative dissection from above. Each level and sphere of activity is compartmentalized, governed by particular rules of action. These rules specify the requisite qualifications and duties necessary for staff employed at each level or post within the organization: Those who occupy positions of command, for example, tend to be expertly trained; all are to obtain remuneration and material advantages in accordance with the degree of privilege of their condition of existence within the organization; and so on. Although these rules are to a greater or lesser extent subject to change, an office and its corresponding rules of operation tend to continue in existence beyond the life of its incumbent. The "bearers" and clients of bureaucratic organization are compelled to consider it their duty to act in conformity with these rules.

Bureaucratic forms of organization, thirdly, are marked with a definite impersonality. "Without regard for particular persons and situations" is a watchword of bureaucracy. Bureaucratic relations of power are systems of formal, depersonalized rationality. They are guided by abstract-general regulations, which are applied exhaustively and consistently to every case. All bureaucratic adminis-
The legacy of Max Weber

tration (whether of its internal staff or its external clients) is inscribed within a rule-bound matter-of-factness, a principled rejection of doing business on a case-by-case basis. According to Weber, this principled "impersonalism" implies that these organizations are unswervingly neutral, placing themselves at the disposal of any and every power that claims their businesslike service. Modern bureaucratic organizations tend to abolish the practice (typical in patrimonial institutions) of individuals' assignment of tributes, usufructs, and services to others in return for personal favors. Whereas, for example, ruling groups of the ancient Orient, European feudalism, and the Mongolian and Germanic empires of conquest all systematically depended upon personal trustees, court servants, and table companions, the commanders of modern bureaucratic structures typically discharge their business according to calculable, objective rules. They rule without regard for individual persons. Conversely, the governed objects of bureaucratic administration are not deemed to be the personal servants or property of those who rule.

The more actual bureaucracies approximate this mechanical, depersonalized form, the more their clients and staff are dehumanized, forced into a procrustean bed of general rules and regulations. Bureaucratic domination is the enemy of singularity and impetuousness. Routinized, bureaucratic discipline lays to rest all heroic ecstasy, cults of honor, and spirited and personalized loyalty to leaders: "Love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements" that cannot readily be calculated and administered through abstract-general rules tend to be eliminated. In respect of their mechanical impersonality, modern bureaucracies ensure the submission of all ranks to their superiors, and much more effectively than ancient despotisms. Compared to the nonmodern attempts to organize the enslavement of bodies bureaucratically (for example, the strict, militaristic disciplining of slaves in the Roman latifundia, or the pharaoh-guided Egyptian state bureaucracy), modern bureaucracies effect submission through less personal and more subtle and reliable mechanisms — such as the payment of wages and salaries; the provision of tenure; superannuation; annual vacations; and appeals to objective regulations, careerism, job experience, and the senses of duty and conscientiousness. In exchange for these material guarantees, functionaries and clients at all levels render service not to persons, but to objective and impersonal organizational goals.

Of very great importance, finally, is Weber's insistence that, under modern conditions, formal bureaucratic organizations tend to predominate by virtue of their technical superiority. It is precisely because of their technical competence that bureaucratic institutions can deal with this world's complexities. Irrespective of the goals of ruling groups — goals such as the self-expansion of value or the defense of the nation-state through the deployment of standing armies under conditions of power politics — their reliance upon bureaucratic means is essential. In Egypt, the oldest country of bureaucratic domination, the state regulation of national waterways was unavoidable because of technical economic factors. Under modern state-guided capitalism, analogously, bureaucracy is indispensable because of its purely technical superiority.

Weber persistently speaks of bureaucratic mechanisms through the metaphor
Public life and late capitalism

of the machine. The modern bourgeois world is a calculating, mechanized world. Its dominant, machinelike institutions depend for their functioning and coordination on strictly objective and technical expertise, itself more and more trained within bureaucratically organized scientific research institutes of the universities. Compared with the achievement capacities of other forms of organization (such as patriarchal and patrimonial systems of administration), mechanized, expertly guided bureaucracy—especially in its monocratic form—is unsurpassed. It seeks, in principle, to calculate everything rationally. Typically depending upon specialized knowledge and concrete information relevant to its performance, bureaucracy is qualitatively more precise, unambiguous, flexible, smoothly operating, and cost-efficient than other forms. "Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs... trained bureaucracy is superior on all these points." Under modern conditions, and exactly because of these qualities, bureaucracy ensures its own relentless advance, just as the modern machine irreversibly guarantees its own triumph over various inferior forms of manual production. In comparison with other, less technically efficient forms of organization, bureaucracy is distinguished therefore by its much greater inescapability.

Modern capitalism

The subtle depth and exactness of Weber's discussion of bureaucratic rationality undergo something of a dissipation in the foregoing introduction. The claims of his discussion must be analyzed in considerably more detail, and with particular reference to the modern spheres of society and state. To begin with, it is only under modern conditions, Weber insists, that there have emerged highly specialized, bureaucratic capitalist enterprises that deploy fixed capital and "free" labor power. Large capitalist enterprises have become the historically unequaled model of the bureaucratic mode of organization. Interlocking networks of these organizations form an immense, and apparently unshakable, cosmos, an institutionally differentiated market economy in accordance with whose rules of action individuals are pressured to conform: In the struggle for the satisfaction of desires for "utilities," those who do not follow suit either go out of business or are flung into the ranks of the unemployed. Breaking down traditional habits of life, subjecting the whole world to its bureaucratic administration, the capitalist mode of production constitutes itself as "that force in modern life which has most influence on our destinies."

Under these conditions dictated by the capitalist market economy, Weber stresses, the single corporation is compelled to discharge its official business continuously, precisely, unambiguously, and with as much speed and cost efficiency as possible. In respect of its permanently rationalizing tendencies, the capitalist mode of production is not synonymous with irrational speculation, with the reckless and unscrupulous pursuit of profit. Weber rejects the association (proposed by Simmel's Philosophie des Geldes, for example) of acquisition through a money economy with capitalism. In the first place, from a technical point of
view the reliance upon money entails the most rational means of orienting economic activity. Moreover, the uncontrolled release of impulses greedy for gold may well be as old as the history of the species. Such daredevil acquisitiveness has often appeared, indeed, as the underside of strongly traditional societies: "The inner attitude of the adventurer, which laughs at all ethical limitations, has been universal." At any rate, entrepreneurial adventurers have for ages and in all parts of the world operated as speculators and financiers in wars, piracy, and contracts of all kinds. Absolute unscrupulousness and avarice bear little resemblance to modern capitalism, and brigands, pirates, usurers, and large merchants bear still less to its spirit.

Under modern conditions, it is true, reckless avarice and speculation continue. Modern capitalism by no means eradicates what Weber calls "speculative" calculations - those oriented to possibilities whose realization is more or less fortuitous, and therefore in a certain sense incalculable. Modern capitalist firms, for example, heedlessly consume natural resources, for which there are often no substitutes. Those directing or sharing in the fortunes of profit-making enterprises also continue to be motivated by risk taking, ambition, and opportunities for large income from profitable undertakings. And the monopolistic struggle for economic gain through territorial annexations - imperialist capitalism - continues to play a crucial and destabilizing role in modern life. As a consequence of all these factors, capitalist firms, monopolies, and trusts are necessarily institutions of limited duration. Weber was nevertheless convinced that modern capitalism tends to tame or moderate the backward irrationality of speculative ventures. Although the dangers of economic crisis have by no means disappeared, their relative importance has diminished, precisely because of continuing capitalist attempts to rationalize production, prices, turnover, and sources of credit.

Inasmuch as its activities are bureaucratically organized on the basis of rigorous foresight and continuous calculation, the modern capitalist enterprise also overcomes the privileged traditionalism of the guild craftsman, the hand-to-mouth mode of life of the peasant, and the occasional capital accounting made by precapitalist traveling merchants (such as the commenda). Under capitalist economic conditions, Weber emphasizes, private enterprises are subject to the more generalized imperatives of bureaucratic rationalization. In order to avoid going under in the market struggle, corporations must avoid operating in accordance with the reckless and unmediated logic of profitability. Unlike the infamous Dutch sea captain who was prepared to scorch his sails in hell just for the sake of gain, capitalist entrepreneurs must rather conduct their operations in accordance with the greater foresight and caution associated with the bureaucratic, rationally calculated pursuit of profit. Industrial capitalist enterprises systematically pursue profit through relations of exchange and by means of ongoing calculations that have monopolistic effects. Under contemporary conditions, the organizing principle of the social exchange with outer nature is "capital calculations" in monetary terms. These calculations are associated with corporate attempts to plan and administer nature, material goods, and labor power bureaucratically as means of profitable acquisition. The corporate orientation to
capital accounting takes the form of continuous ex ante calculations of the probable risks and chances of profit, supplemented by continuous ex post calculations to verify the actual resulting profit or loss. The final (or periodically estimated) revenues generated by the capitalist firm are supposed to exceed its capital, that is, the estimated value of its fixed means of profit making (buildings, machinery, raw materials, products, reserves of cash, and so on).

This tendency for the limited-liability enterprise to adhere to the logic of continuous rational capital accounting - a rare and usually discontinuous achievement outside the modern Occident - is contingent upon the fulfillment of several crucial conditions. It is appropriate to mention at least four such conditions within this context. First, and most obviously, autonomous, share-granting capitalist enterprises tend to enhance their calculated expectations of profit by striving to exercise exclusive control over the utilized physical means of production. Typically, capitalist enterprises' central organization of these means have entailed the spatial separation of households from the site of production or commerce. Although this development is not without precedent (Weber mentions the case of the oriental bazaar), this spatial concentration of the forces of production provides a radical contrast with the nonmodern situation. Formerly, commercial or productive enterprises were constituted as part of the wider oikos, or household, of the prince or landowner or town (as in the ergasteria of the Piraeus). Consequent upon the legal detachment of corporate from personal wealth, by contrast, the corporate monopoly and spatial segregation of productive capital has come to prevail completely in modern economic life.

Weber insists, secondly, that this corporate monopoly and geographic concentration of the physical means of production depends upon a market system of formally free, but actually dominated, labor power. In contrast, say, to the feudal socage system or the slave plantations of antiquity, the modern bureaucratic corporation operates on the basis of the selection of its labor power. This implies that the capitalist mode of production tends to minimize workers' appropriation of jobs and of opportunities for earning; conversely, this mode of production minimizes the legal appropriation of workers by owners. Through its powers of hiring and firing, and under pressure from competition with other employers, the modern capitalist enterprise seeks to organize free labor power in accordance with its rationally calculated pursuit of profit. "Exact calculation," Weber adds, "is only possible on a basis of free labor." Under conditions in which entrepreneurs enjoy freedom to hire and fire workers, and in which workers are employed for wages and salaries, operational efficiency through capital accounting tends to be maximized. Under these conditions, capital investment in the labor force of the enterprise is relatively lessened (compared, say, with former practices of purchasing and maintaining slaves and their dependents).

Moreover, according to Weber, the institution of nominally free conditions of labor enhances the power of management to select its labor power according to labor's ability and willingness to work. As a consequence, strict capital accounting establishes a novel and less visible "system of domination [Herrschaftsverhältniss]." The bureaucratic enterprise strives to effect the permanent enslavement of work-
ers individually and collectively to the machine by securing their peaceful and permanent separation from their tools of labor. Military discipline is the ideal model for the modern capitalist factory; like Cromwell's rationally disciplined Ironsides, modern workers become the objects of cunning capitalist strategies aimed at having "everyone regimented, ordered about, constructed." Not only do all material means of production become fixed or working capital, but all workers are transformed into mere "hands." Weber typically argues that this expropriation of workers' (potential) control over the means of production by managerial capitalists is determined by purely technical factors. Only if the profit-making firm wrests exclusive control of the means of production can it function efficiently as an organized, internally differentiated, and continuously supervised workshop. Only through its monopoly over the means of production can it rationally exploit its sources of power, maximize control over the speed of work, standardize the quality of its products, and secure their consumption through aggressive marketing strategies that awaken and direct consumer wants.

This corporate shutting out of labor power has the unintended effect — inadequately analyzed by Weber — of generating class struggles, especially between the big industrial entrepreneur and the free wage laborer. This means that the profitability-accounting processes of firms must be continually oriented to expectations of estimated changes in costs and prices caused by competition with other corporate bureaucracies and the bargaining and struggles of labor. According to Weber, such expectations are not necessarily undermined by a uniform trend to proletarianization and uncompromising class struggle. Struggles against the lifeless machinery of capitalist industry are not synonymous with its inability to function efficiently. Indeed, bureaucratic control over the free labor power of the "negatively privileged classes" is facilitated by a range of conditions: the fact that laborers, in varying degrees, subjectively value their work as a mode of life; their recognition that they also run the permanent risk of going entirely without provisions for themselves and their dependents; the establishment (in the case of manual laborers, at least) of common working discipline that is spatially concentrated on the shop floor; continual managerial attempts to manage scientifically, "de-skill," and discipline living labor power through the uneven deployment of labor-saving machinery; and, perhaps most important, the institution of new strata of specialized and commercially or technically trained officials (such as clerks and administrators at all levels), whose sensed interests are by no means identical with those of the people trained to attend and handle machinery.

This proliferation of strata of expertly trained, technical officials directly promotes modern corporations' fulfillment of a third condition of rational capital accounting — the reliance upon "mechanically rational technology." The corporate drive to calculate and compare income with expenditure, Weber urges, tends to become more and more dependent upon forms of exact guesswork, reckoning, and prediction. Rationalized bookkeeping is only one example of this more general corporate dependence upon rational technical means that are mechanized to the greatest degree. Weber also stresses the growing merger of the capitalist enterprise, machine technology, and the "mathematically and ex-
perimentally exact natural sciences — a scientization process that, as it were, builds a decisive “meta-calculability” into an already calculating production and distribution process. These and other examples of mechanically rational technology indicate that, under modern conditions, technical progress has come to be largely oriented to the furtherance of bureaucratically calculated profit making. Conversely, these examples indicate that profit-making enterprises become progressively more reliant upon mechanized sources of power, machinery, and administration. From a technical point of view, Weber argues, this mechanization process is understandable. Rational technical means are highly productive. They also serve to discipline (and save on) labor power and, in general, to maximize the uniformity and calculability of performance of the bureaucratic organization.

Weber proposes, finally, that the modern corporation’s achievement of the highest possible degree of efficient capital accounting is dependent upon an ensemble of politico-legal conditions that, in principle, are estimable with at least some degree of certainty. The problem of whether the modern bureaucratic state could — or even should — satisfy this certainty condition is of great concern to Weber.

The bureaucratic nation-state

Weber’s well-known emphasis upon the modern state as a specific form of bureaucratic domination complements his general insistence that the bureaucratization of the modern world was not a simple consequence of capitalist activity. The emergence and triumph of rational capitalistic enterprises cannot be explained through economic reasoning alone. The processes of bureaucratization that now grip modern life by no means have a uniform, singular history or logic of development. Weber thus insists that modern forms of state cannot be analyzed as “superstructural” vis-à-vis the primary determinations of economic conduct. He radically rejects the view that state institutions are parasites engendered by internal contradictions of social power. State bureaucracy is not the result of the division of modern society into classes and class struggles. Nor is its function simply that of securing the formal acceptance of the rules of a configuration of social (that is, class) power. Nor, finally, would the abolition of the real historical agents — classes in struggle — signal its necessary disappearance.

Certainly, the modern bureaucratic state is compelled to engage in what Weber calls “economically oriented action.” And it is no less evident, especially in his political writings, that Weber insists on analyzing the conditions of social power and conflict within which contemporary states are always and already embedded. Weber nevertheless reasons against the modern “over-estimation of the ‘economic,’” which represents — falsely — the nation-state as a mere parasitic superstructure, as the political organization of the dominant classes. The break with the tradition of classical Marxism is strongly evident at this point. Against Hegel, Bauer, and Ruge, for example, Marx had consistently defended the thesis that the modern state was bound to the unfettered logic and power of civil society. The modern bourgeois state was seen as without historical precedent, inasmuch as it was restricted to mere “formal” and “negative” activities. Its powers
The legacy of Max Weber

ceased where the depoliticized hustle and bustle of commodity production and exchange processes commenced. Emancipated from the yoke of politics, the capital-dominated civil society became the natural foundation upon which the modern state rested and to which it had to react. Precisely because the bourgeoisie was the leading source of revenues from taxation and loans, the liberal bourgeois state had become nothing more than the form of organization that this class adopted for the purposes of guaranteeing its property and interests. This state was an insurance pact of the bourgeoisie both against the proletariat and against itself, that is, against the persistent anarchy of individual capitalist interests. As the most famous (and, in Weber's time, still influential) 1848 formulation had it, this state was “but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”

According to Weber, this kind of singular emphasis upon the determining power of the economic is not without some justification. The strictly economic explanations proposed by historical materialism successfully produce insights into the unique importance of economic activity within those events that constitute modern life. Historical materialism's monist type of thinking, its attempt to provide one-sidedly economic explanations of the modern state, nevertheless produces a host of embarrassing difficulties. For example, historico-political events that cannot be explained through recourse to economic hypotheses are dismissed as accidental or insignificant; occasionally, the concept of “the economic” is defined so broadly that all questions of political organization and power are falsely subsumed under that definition; at other times, the magisterial primacy of the economic factor is falsely preserved through the claim that political institutions are creations (and also functional defenders of the interests) of identifiable class groupings. These difficulties, Weber proposes, are generated by historical materialism's fetish of the economic, which results, in turn, from its failure to respect the self-imposed limits of ideal-typical analysis. Any empirical science of concrete reality (Wirklichkeitswissenschaft) must rely upon ideal-typical categories that aid the selection and meaningful analysis of an infinite multiplicity of ever-changing social and political phenomena that can never be known in toto. The confident will to totalized knowledge displayed among both the defenders and the critics of historical materialism disregards this decisive methodological point. Conversely, the materialist conception of history forgets that its knowledge of the modern capitalist economy constructs this reality through definite and simplifying categorical forms: “The distinction between 'economic' and 'noneconomic' determinants of events is invariably a product of conceptual analysis.”

Consistent with this rejection of unreflective and one-sidedly “economistic” accounts of modern life, Weber denies that capitalism somehow created ex nihilo a bureaucratic state system dominated by specialist officials, jurists, and politicians. The modern bureaucratic state is not a necessary effect of modern capitalism. The formation of this state, rather, has been compelled more by the need of emerging power blocs to create, within a context of power politics, standing armies disciplined and administered through law and funded by a regularized system of public finance.
Public life and late capitalism

self-equipment and self-provisioning of those who fought (for example, the armed citizenry of ancient cities, the militias of the early medieval cities and feudalism) were typical. Under modern conditions, by contrast, the warfare generated by domestic disturbances and distant enemies has compelled the formation of permanent, centralized, and technically efficient magazines. In opposition to the nonmodern principle of self-equipped, privately managed armies, the commanders of the modern state concentrate the material means of violence in their own hands. This process was initiated (for example) in the Italian cities and seignories, among the monarchies, and in the state of the Norman conquerors. In each case, modern standing armies came into being with the establishment of princely households. These households maneuvered to expropriate the tools of war from the hands of all those (self-providing and self-equipping soldiers, officers, and limited-share companies, such as the “Maonen” of the Middle Ages) who had hitherto managed warfare in private ways.

This expropriation of the means of violence by centralizing state elites was combined with similar developments in the realms of law and administration. Again, the decisive step in each case was taken by princes, who maneuvered to expropriate the legal and administrative powers of formerly autonomous groups: the clergy, the humanistically educated literati, trained jurists, the court nobility and gentry, and so on. Within the field of law, these expropriations effected an increasing dependence of the emerging modern state and its administration upon a legal system dominated by jurists with specialized training in rational, calculable law. This was a highly complex and heterogeneous process. The sources of this bureaucratized law, for example, extended as far back as Roman jurisprudence, itself uniquely implicated within a city-state structure that had developed into an imperial power. Roman legal practice, Weber argues, decisively placed the trial procedure under the jurisdiction of bureaucratically trained experts. This early rationalization of legal procedure at the same time weakened modes of adjudication bound to sacred tradition; such modes had often been supplemented (with respect to single case disputes, as in the Athenian courts) by “charismatic” justice (for example, oracles, prophetic dicta) and various types of informal judgments. In place of this particularism of traditional justice, law became systematized and calculable. After the defeat of Rome, rationalized legal procedures were preserved by the medieval church. Its administration continued to rely upon fixed rules for the discipline of both its own members and the laity. Through the princely expropriation of this rationalized “legal” administration, the emerging modern state became increasingly dependent upon bureaucratized justice. The alliance between this state and formal, calculable jurisprudence was also indirectly favorable to the growth of capitalism. The new system in which capitalistic entrepreneurs engaged in the rationally calculated pursuit of profit was thoroughly incompatible with commercial claims and transactions decided by a competition in reciting formulas (as was the case in China, for example). In other words, bourgeois transactions thrived upon a technical, calculable body of legal rules, whose predictability was in principle no less than that of a machine.

By the sixteenth century, this mechanization of justice was complemented by the bureaucratic reorganization of administration. The ascendance of princely
The legacy of Max Weber

absolutism over the estates, or so Weber argues, definitely depended upon the simultaneous formation of an expert, bureaucratic officialdom comprising the administrator of finances, the military officer, the trained jurist. In this centralizing process, the officials of the feudal era, usually self-financing vassals invested with high judicial and administrative rank, were stripped of their former possession of the tools of administration. In their place, the princes appointed salaried officials, now fully separated from the tools of their trade. This bureaucratization of administration, Weber points out, is directly analogous to the capitalist expropriation of independent forms of production. The modern state does not monopolize the means of production – this is the unique historical achievement of the differentiated capitalist corporation within the sphere of civil society. Rather, within a given territory the bureaucratic state comes to monopolize the material means of organization (violence, law, and administration). From the standpoint of state governors, all independent sites of violent, legal, and administrative power must be wiped out. In this unprecedented centralizing process, the bureaucratic nation-state necessarily separates its military, legal, and administrative workers from the material means of administrative organization. Waged and salaried state employees are proletarianized. They neither own nor personally control the state’s means of violence, law, and administration. The state, Weber concludes, “has combined the material means of organization in the hands of its leaders, and it has expropriated all autonomous functionaries of estates who formerly controlled these means in their own right. The state has taken their positions and now stands in the top place.”

As a consequence of this expropriation process, the activity of politics becomes more and more synonymous with the organized and trained struggle for power within and between bureaucratic nation-state apparatuses. Under modern conditions, political action cannot be identified as the striving for a good ethical life: The meaning of politics, rather, tends to become identical with the struggle for control over the state, understood as a territorially delimited and compulsory system of continuously administered power. Those who strive for mastery over this system seek to represent themselves as its legitimate bearers and, therefore, to monopolize wholly its special means of operation, particularly violence. Especially in the contemporary period of formal democracy and the mass franchise, struggles for legitimate command over the state take place through strategies designed to woo, organize, and strictly discipline the masses. This bureaucratization of public life is facilitated by the growing interdependence of the capitalist press and the state, and by the expansion of machine politics guided by professionally trained politicians and party officials. Formal democratic political life is increasingly structured by unprincipled bureaucratic parties, whose function (in addition to that of providing jobs for their own staff) is to direct the process of “vote grabbing” under the tutelage of party bosses and professional politicians.

The growing influence of the bureaucratic political party – technically superior in its capacity to organize the apathy and “consent” of the legally enfranchised masses – also signals the decline of legislatures as the originating points of state policy making. With the exception of cabinet members and a few insurgents, members of legislatures become yes-people, who are expected to cast their votes
without committing party treason. Professional party-political organizers outside
the legislative arena begin to monopolize the policy-making powers once exer-
cised by notables and parliamentary members. In Weber's eyes, this decline of
legislatures is hastened by the growing importance of specialist state officials in
matters of public policy making. No doubt, the official is present within many
nonmodern civilizations. Modern occidental nation-states, however, qualitatively
expand the role and power of civil services staffed by commercially, technically,
and legally informed and expert officialdom. These civil services, in collaboration
with the military, courts of law, and bureaucratic political parties, come more
and more to influence the daily existence of the whole population of modern
capitalist countries. These populations become the generalized object of a con-
titutionally defined state guarded by its monopoly of the means of violence, a
state that rationally formulates, administers, and adjudicates laws by means of
highly trained specialist officials who obey strictly formulated rules. Modern
democracies, Weber insists, are everywhere being transformed into highly or-
dered, bureaucratic state regimes. Under the sway of bureaucratic imperatives,
the governance of the population by legal, military, administrative, and party-
political experts and officials now appears to be inevitable.

The merger of corporate and state bureaucracy

These political developments, to repeat, are not viewed by Weber as the simple
consequences or effects of the capitalist accumulation process. Weber in fact
proposes that in the contemporary period the rational capital accounting of the
profit-seeking enterprise becomes increasingly dependent upon calculable and
predictable state administration. Nowadays, if only for their mutual survival, the
bureaucratic state and corporate capitalism have become interdependent in their
patterns of reproduction and growth. "The significance of the state apparatus
for the economy," Weber observes, "has been steadily rising, especially with
increasing socialization, and its significance will be further augmented."55

There are several reasons for this development. From the viewpoint of the
capitalist economy, so to speak, this growing interpenetration of state and econ-
omy is generated by the increasing dependence of the fixed-capital, rationally
calculated capitalist enterprise upon a calculable monetary system and a strict
and stable administrative, legal, and military framework. Contemporary capi-
talism thrives best under the guidance of formally rational systems of admin-
istration and law, conditions in which the mode of operation of state policy is
to a great degree calculable.56 The corporate dependence upon the state's military
means is also decisive, especially in a world of intensifying economic competition;
equally, the state's quest to secure itself militarily within a hostile nation-state
system intensifies its dependence upon a permanently expansive and rational
system of private capitalist production.57 For these reasons, bureaucratic state
administration more and more becomes a sine qua non of the orderly corporate
pursuit of profit. This growing dependence of capital upon the state leads,
conversely, to the increasing dependence of the state upon capital. This process
of reciprocity derives from the fact that modern corporate capitalism (according
The legacy of Max Weber

to Weber) is the most dynamic and fecund system of production ever, and that it can therefore readily supply the requisite financial resources for a stable system of bureaucratic administration. The modern bureaucratic state becomes a “taxation state,” upon whose stability the whole political economy depends. It is increasingly dependent upon money contributions (that is, taxes) that are collected by its own staff and that are generated primarily from within the capitalist order. This growing importance of money taxation means that the state has become both the largest single receiver and the largest single maker of payments in contemporary capitalist society. To be sure, the development of a money economy has not always been decisive for the secure expansion of bureaucratic state administration. The organized subsistence economies governed by the bureaucracies of the Roman Empire and the new Empire of Egypt are cases in point. Developed capitalist money economies nevertheless facilitate the predictable generation of revenues through taxation (of wages, salaries, and private profit). Weber contrasts the fiscal buoyancy of the modern state with its Roman counterpart. By virtue of the Roman state’s attempt to organize large Continental areas politically by means of a salaried bureaucracy and professional armies, it incurred enormous expenditures. But as commerce, cities, and labor supplies declined, and as society relapsed into a natural economy, rural districts were less and less able to raise the constantly increasing sums of money demanded by the tax system. By contrast, the capitalist economy indirectly promotes the formulation of regularized, systematic state budgets. It therefore also facilitates the overcoming of the uncertain, hand-to-mouth mode of operation typical of early states such as Rome, the intermittent payments in kind (fees, customs excises, and sales taxes) common throughout the Middle Ages, and the compulsory obligations to personal service (labor in mines, the maintenance of roads and bridges) typical of such corvée states as the New Kingdom of ancient Egypt.

Weber insists that the growing interdependence of society and state also derives from the fact that the successful and precise functioning of the modern bureaucratic state — and, correspondingly, of the modern corporation — is more and more conditional upon its centralized control of efficient systems of telecommunication and transportation. The collective form of these means of communication (such as the railway) has increased the need for their centralized state deployment. In turn, their proliferation (and the corresponding rise in the rate and quantity of information transmission) has tended to improve the technical efficiency of state reactions toward various situations, including the field of capitalist accumulation. This technological interdependence of state and economy is only accelerated by the fact that the precise tools of these communication systems are typically developed and marketed by dynamic capitalist corporations.

Finally, Weber observes that the erosion of the boundaries of state and civil society is promoted by the growth of demands upon the state from the sphere of civil society itself. Unfortunately, Weber by no means analyzes this development and its implications in any depth. He merely notes, for example, that the state’s social welfare policies have come to play a crucial role under contemporary capitalist conditions. These welfare strategies have been fostered by both the
Public life and late capitalism

pressure of organized interests on the state and, in turn, the state’s usurping of social policy formation to enhance its own power and legitimacy.64

These examples of the growing interpenetration of state and civil society are of immense significance, Weber argues, inasmuch as they reveal the growing convergence of the bureaucratic means of operation of the state and the modern corporation. Under contemporary conditions, the bureaucratic control of the wage laborer is contingent upon the same form of rational, calculable domination within the state sector. State organization, the specifically political form of modern bureaucratic domination, is more and more the indispensable medium of bureaucratic corporate domination. The separation of workers from their means of production is not restricted to the industrial capitalist factory or office. The separation of the worker from the material means of production, destruction, administration, academic research, and finance in general is the common basis of the modern state, in its political, cultural, and military sphere, and of the private capitalist economy. In both cases, the disposition of these means is in the hands of that power whom the bureaucratic apparatus...directly obeys or to whom it is available in case of need. This apparatus is nowadays equally typical of all those organizations; its existence and function are inseparably cause and effect of this concentration of means of operation – in fact, the apparatus is its very form.65

Everywhere, and in all spheres of conduct, from the factory to the university, the means of operation are concentrated in the hands of those who control machinelike bureaucracies. Marx's depiction of the complete separation of laborers from all ownership of the means by which they can realize their labor is but one instance of a more universal bureaucratization process.

The indispensability – and limits – of bureaucratic domination

It is precisely this bureaucratic concentration of the means of operation which makes the present phase of modern life so problematic for Weber. Consuming and replacing other forms of life, bourgeois rationalization processes tend to become an end in themselves. Under their monopolistic sway, contemporary capitalist societies knit themselves into a self-enslaving “iron cage” of bondage. All spheres of daily life tend to become chronically dependent upon disciplined hierarchy, rational specialization, and the continuous deployment of impersonal systems of abstract-general rules. Bureaucratic domination is the fate of the present, whose future is likely to be more of the same. A “polar night of icy darkness and hardness” is the specter that haunts the modern world.

It is worth emphasizing in this context that Weber does not mean to imply that the evolution toward a fully mechanized, predictable, and clocklike system of command is necessarily desirable. Though this bureaucratization process is fundamentally irreversible, Weber nevertheless remains concerned to emphasize – in explicit opposition to Schmoller, Wagner, and other defenders of bureaucracy within the Verein für Sozialpolitik66 – that contemporary bureaucratic organizations systematically produce irrational effects. He is concerned to “challenge the unquestioning idolization of bureaucracy,”67 to call into question the modern,
bureaucratic presumption that all mysterious incalculable forces have been banished forever, that modern rulers can, in principle, master all situations by calculation and command. This arrogant presumption is in fact an unreal and unrealizable reverie. In opposition to this metaphysical reverie, Weber soberly insists that the irrational effects generated by organized capitalist societies are necessary, because symptomatic of a developing imbalance, under contemporary conditions at least, between the requirements of formal and those of substantive modes of rationality. This imbalance within the bureaucratization process is a key source at once of the unique achievements and of the limitations of modern civilization.

Weber discusses several instances of this disequilibrium; these are cited and analyzed further in the following three sections. At this point, it is necessary only to affirm his central thesis. Irrespective of the standards of value by which substantively rational action is judged, its requirements or conditions of realization, or so Weber wants to argue, are always in principle nonidentical with the exigencies of formal, bureaucratic rationality. The degree of formal rationality of any type of action, he recalls, consists in the degree to which it can be and actually is structured by a reliance upon quantitative calculation. Formally rational activity is goal-oriented, rational calculation guided by the most technically suitable methods at hand. By contrast, the substantive rationality of action does not refer to the degree to which it is structured by means based upon rational calculability. Rather, action and its outcomes are substantively rational inasmuch as they are oriented and judged by ultimate values that, in principle, are highly variable in content and number.

*Production, administration, and the suppression of particularity*

Weber's first example of the disequilibrium between the requirements of formal and substantive rationality concerns the abstract-general mode of operation that is typical of all efficient bureaucratic organizations. With respect to particular individuals, cases, and events, Weber demonstrates, bureaucracies chronically produce definite obstacles to the coordinated discharge of their functions. From the standpoint of substantively rational criteria (that is, various and competing conceptions of human needs), bureaucracies' fetishism of standardized and general calculation contradicts the plurality or particularity that typically attends the definition of those needs. This contradiction marks both private and public bureaucratic organizations. With respect to modern capitalist forms of production, for example, Weber comes very close to conceding the Marxian critique of capitalism as an abstract and calculating system of production for exchange, a system whose ability to satisfy a plurality of concrete human needs is erratic and, at most, unintentional. Typically, the bureaucratic mode of operation of capitalist corporations contradicts both the possibility of worker control over production and the simple interest of workers in the maintenance of their jobs. The substantive irrationality of the bourgeois mode of production derives from the fact that its compulsion to systematize and rationally perfect the calculating pursuit of profit is contingent upon the domination of workers by entrepreneurs.
In Weber's eyes, the contemporary socialist movement's criticism of the "domination of things over humanity" under bourgeois conditions is not unfounded. This criticism accurately depicts the anonymous subjection of living labor power to the rationally calculated discipline of the bureaucratized factory and office. This contradiction between the corporation's formally rational calculation of profitability and particular substantive goals within the sphere of production is duplicated within the sphere of consumption. Profit-oriented capitalist production, Weber admits, can serve only those consumers who have sufficient income and therefore power to demand certain goods and not others effectively. The orientation of capitalist production to money prices and profits (and also to production opportunities provided by state power, as under colonialism) therefore means that certain expressed needs - those which are not backed by the means of consumption - may fail to be satisfied. "Profitability is indeed formally a rational category," Weber remarks, "but for that very reason it is indifferent with respect to substantive postulates unless these can make themselves felt in the market in the form of sufficient purchasing power." This irrationality is further exacerbated by the power of capitalist corporations to determine the type, quantity, and degree of technical proficiency of production, a power that again derives from its control over the means of production. The corporate drive to profitability, that is, is not automatically or even necessarily identical with the optimum use of available productive resources for the satisfaction of a plurality of consumer needs.

Within the sphere of state action, the bureaucratic rejection of doing business from case to case also directly presupposes the quashing or denial of the needs of particular individuals and groups. Weber was convinced that this suppression of particularity was already evident within modern state capitalist systems and would become especially problematic under conditions of state socialism. This conviction placed him at considerable odds with the naïve statism of many of his socialist contemporaries. In his view, their "camp following" and simple-minded belief in historical progress through state planning was thoroughly misguided. The contemporary socialist movement too frequently believed that its victories were a matter of course, its defeats a symptom of backwardness, its failures a temporary rebellion against the judgment of history. This movement wrongly assumed that history, of whose knowledge Marxism was the privileged bearer, somehow expresses its animosity toward all complications and unintended effects that stand in its way. As a consequence of its evolutionism, the contemporary socialist movement suppressed the point that there are no historical guarantees against the substantively irrational effects of bureaucratization. Peace, freedom, and the uncomplicated satisfaction of various needs do not necessarily lie hidden in the lap of a future guided by bureaucratic state planning.

This anti-evolutionist conviction stands behind Weber's bitter criticism of the Bolshevik (and Kautskyite) hopes of reconciling the goal of freedom from all forms of hierarchic domination with that of the abolition of the rule of private property through efficient, bureaucratically planned production for human needs. Weber typically projects at least two complementary arguments in defense of his thesis that these hopes are radically at odds with themselves. In a
more speculative vein, he proposes that a rationally planned, communist economy would in practice be impossible. This allegation follows largely from his presumption (derived in turn from arguments within the Second International) that the transition to communist society would entail the abolition of money, monetary accounting, and monetary categories—and therefore the possibility of rational capital accounting. Under communist conditions of production, regulation, and accounting in kind, the provision for mass demand would therefore be seriously impaired. At best, questions about the location, types, and quantities of production in postcapitalist economies would be soluble only in terms of very crude estimates; inevitably, there would be a reduction in the degree of formal, calculating rationality. At worst, decisions about production and consumption would be forced to fall back into a reliance upon either traditional rules or strategies of dictatorial regulation, which arbitrarily decreed patterns of production, consumption, and obedience. The likelihood of dictatorial discipline would be increased, in Weber's estimation, because communist economies would exhaust that innovating, risk-taking, and "free struggle for economic existence" currently waged by capitalist entrepreneurs. Hierarchical discipline would also result from the communist tendency to weaken the incentive to labor that derives (under capitalist conditions) from either opportunities for personal gain or the risk of going entirely without provisions. Conversely, such discipline would likely entail limitations on the formal rationalization of production. This is because the free recruitment of labor power in conformity with its technical competence would be considerably restricted.

By virtue of these probable inefficiencies, Weber considered it most likely that the attempt to realize communist ideals (universal material abundance and emancipation from domination) would necessitate an increased reliance upon bureaucratic administration. His second objection to the revolutionary hopes of his contemporaries took the form of a prediction: The socialist movement, he urged, would be forced to abandon its vision of general emancipation from hierarchical domination. In the here and now, it was clear to Weber that the communist movement was already being compelled to adopt efficient bureaucratic organizations in the struggle against "bourgeois" bureaucracies. Resembling the bureaucratic capitalist state to which it was avowedly opposed, the revolutionary movement had created an army of officials, hierarchies of offices, and a following interested in advancement.

In addition, Weber considered that the efficient administration of production would be among the primary imperatives with which all future socialist governments would have to deal. Consequently, the management of socialist factories and offices would have to depend upon calculation, technical schooling, market research, and expert knowledge of demand. These factors alone would necessitate the expansion of a strata of highly specialized and lengthily trained administrators. Their rational, calculating activities—Weber extrapolated from the example of the Prussian state-owned mines—would in turn rest upon the strict disciplining and control of the labor force. Bureaucratically organized socialist economies, thus, would at the same time preserve the (capitalist) expropriation of all workers from control over the means of production and bring
Public life and late capitalism

this expropriation process to completion, by substituting state officials for private capitalists. In sum, the struggle for socialism would extend the continuum of modern bureaucratic domination and its substantively irrational effects. Socialist society would assume the abstract-general form of bureaucratic, dictatorial socialism; it would appear as only a higher and more concentrated form of development of bourgeois society itself.

Weber was convinced from the beginning that the Bolshevik dictatorship of the proletariat provided evidence for these two arguments. Confidently armed with denunciations of the anarchy of capitalist production and proposals for the militarization of labor through standardized planning, the Bolsheviks, predictably enough, had already preserved or reintroduced practices formerly denounced as bourgeois: the secret police, the Taylor system, hierarchical discipline within the factory and military. The Bolshevik struggle to abolish private capitalism, Weber anticipated, would weaken – indeed, destroy – the last remaining resistance to totalized bureaucratic command and its abstractionist effects. The lingering competition, under capitalist conditions, between private and public bureaucratic organizations – and the possibility of curbing the power of each through a process of “countervailing influence” – would be replaced by a centralizing state administration that controlled the whole of life without regard for particular needs. Existence would come to be as stifling and servile as that of the New Kingdom of Egypt. Bureaucratic socialism would more effectively achieve precisely what the capitalist world was striving for – a bureaucratic dictatorship over the proletariat!

Nihilism: the fetishism of technique

The chronic incapacity of modern bureaucratic organizations to justify their raison d’être to themselves and others constitutes a second instance of the disequilibrium between the requirements of formal and those of substantive rationality under contemporary capitalist conditions. Modern bureaucratic life, Weber proposes, is marked by definite nihilistic tendencies. These must be viewed as the substantively irrational effect generated by the adoration of technical proficiency in all spheres of contemporary life. Precisely because of this fetishism of technical, that is, means-oriented considerations, the modern bureaucratic world is more and more often confronted with a loss of a sense of purpose. It unwittingly produces a bewildering and infinite morass of competing evaluative attitudes. Under these conditions of technical efficiency and ethical nihilism, Weber complains, value judgments tend everywhere to be made in a spontaneous and dangerously nonchalant way. This development is paradoxical, Weber explains, when it is considered that the formal rationalization of the early modern political economy was in part a consequence of a religious movement – Protestantism – marked by its fervent defense of substantive goals. The emergence of a capitalist culture, and with it the possibility of bureaucratic capitalism as an economic system, was not the product of mechanical financial transactions alone. The bureaucratization of the modern world was in part an effect of the prior rationalization of religious
conduct itself. Especially among the rising strata of the lower middle classes, according to Weber's still controversial thesis, Protestant asceticism stimulated the growth of an ethos that greatly facilitated that rational, bureaucratic organization of capital and labor which is peculiar to the modern bourgeois order.86

Weber stresses that the Reformation was not synonymous with the elimination of the church's control over daily life. Indeed, from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, the new Protestant movements (Pietism, Methodism, Baptism, and, above all, Calvinism) effected new and more earnestly enforced modes of religious discipline, which penetrated deeply into their believers' personal and social lives.87 These movements' self-rationalizing activities were guided by an unquestionably new substantive principle: the religious evaluation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form of ethical activity of which individuals could partake. According to the defenders of this principle, living acceptably to God was not to be equated with the suppression of worldly morality in monastic ascetism. From this point on, all individual Christians were to act like monks at all times and in the whole of life; they were duty bound to fulfill the obligations imposed upon them by their position in the world. It was precisely these obligations to serve the glory of God which constituted their "calling," the object of which was the world and all that is within it. Individuals were at all times obligated to prove themselves, to deepen their "inner isolation" even while they developed to the maximum their powers toward the external world.88 Typically, the Protestant movements specified the content of these obligations through the appeal to labor as an approved calling. It was insisted that one does not work in order to live (that is, in accordance with what Weber calls the "natural relationship").89 Rather, one was to live for the sake of one's work in the service of "impersonal" social utility. Restless, continuous, and systematic labor thereby became in itself the prime end of earthly life, the ascetic means of future salvation, the most certain sigh of rebirth and genuine faith.

Upon this basis, and in opposition to what it described as the vanity and ostentatiousness of ruling feudal culture, Protestant asceticism sought to check and regulate the spontaneous enjoyment of possessions, especially luxury goods. Only the sober, calculating acquisition of goods was seen to be justified. The faithful Christian, it was urged, had to heed the divine call by taking advantage of the opportunities provided. The pursuit of wealth and profitable gain through labor was thus seen to be ethically dubious only if it served as a temptation to living carelessly. Otherwise, the ascetic compulsion to save and the strict performance of duties in a fixed and rationally planned calling were equally morally permissible and necessary, because commanded. Self-assured in its convictions, the new Protestantism also attacked the "sordid elegance" of aristocratic household life. In its place, the ascetics proselytized on behalf of the ideal of the clean, sober, and well-regulated middle-class home. Precisely because the spontaneous enjoyment of life was seen to lead away from both religion and work in a calling, Protestantism instituted new conceptions of time, new forms of patriarchal domination over women, and an unprecedented governance of the body.90 The waste of time through idle talk, luxury, and sexual indulgence was to be ethically
condemned. The calculating, shrewd, and properly self-disciplined men of Prot­
estantism insisted that every hour squandered could have been an hour of labor
to the glory of God. Equally, the frill and spontaneity of the ballroom and
seigneurial sports event, the drunken laughter of commoners in the public house,
became the enemies of rational asceticism. All idle temptations of the flesh were
viewed as mere distractions from the hard, calculating pursuit of a righteous
life.

Through the successful deployment of such claims, Weber argues, Protes­
tantism made far-reaching contributions to the emergence of bureaucratic cap­
italism. Even before the emergence of the classical bourgeois ideologies of the
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the worldly asceticism of Protestant­
ism functioned to legitimate the new (and highly unequal) patterns of distribution
of wealth and power as the work of divine providence. It was said that both
sexes of the propertyless classes could withstand the temptations (of idleness,
the flesh, conspicuous consumption) that go hand in hand with wealth only by
virtue of their generalized poverty. Obedience to God was contingent upon low
wages, earthly frugality, and – if necessary – incarceration within the system of
bureaucratic workhouses for the unemployed. Further, and to the extent that
it penetrated into the lower ranks of society, religious asceticism also provided
the emerging order with conscientious, punctual, sober, and highly industrious
workers. These “self-rationalized” workers identified with their bureaucrati­
ized work life as if it had been willed by God.\textsuperscript{91}

Weber’s most far-reaching suggestion, however, is that the full economic ef­
teffects of the Protestant movements generally appeared only after their ethical
enthusiasm receded. Gradually, the intensity of the ascetic search for the king­
dom of God eroded, giving way (among the rising propertied strata, at least) to
comfortable and disciplined bourgeois lives, marked by a utilitarian worldliness
supplemented only by a “good conscience.”\textsuperscript{92} The labors of the Protestant re­
formers produced unforeseen, and even unwished-for, effects. In this uninten­
tended development, there is a deep irony. Under pressure from the temptations
of wealth – temptations that it had itself stimulated – Protestant asceticism suc­
cumbed increasingly to a secular consumerism and attempted self-renewals (such
as the great revival of Methodism prior to the English Industrial Revolution).
Under the “iron cage” conditions of contemporary capitalism, Weber argues,
the spirit of religious asceticism has almost completely faded. The relentless
pursuit of wealth through formal rationalization has become uncoupled from
the old religious supports in whose name it once proceeded. Indeed, attempts
of organized religion to influence the conduct of economic life are more and
more deemed unjustified.

The upshot of this development is highly nihilistic. Immersing the whole of
life in the icy waters of bureaucratic calculation, the fully developed capitalism
of the present day continuously generates legitimacy problems. Money making,
with its attendant bureaucratization, destroys its own meaningfulness. Whereas
those formerly steeped in the Protestant ethic wanted, on ethical grounds, to
work and engage in business, we are more and more compelled\textsuperscript{93} to do so: “The
idea of duty in one’s calling,” Weber concludes, “prowls about in our lives like
the ghost of dead religious beliefs.” Not only do the proponents of technical
The legacy of Max Weber

efficiency continuously challenge and enervate religion; having also undermined
the legitimating power of magic and the norms of tradition, these “sensualists
without heart” and “specialists without spirit” bracket questions concerning
whether it makes sense to master life bureaucratically. The value of the capacity
to master the whole of life through technical means and calculations remains
thoroughly unclear. This is also why the advance of bureaucratization is syn-
onymous with the irreversible growth of subjective and this-worldly forms of
ethical reason. In bureaucratic societies, as it were, reality becomes confusing
and heterogeneous. It is openly marked by an “infinite richness of events” and
an inexhaustible “store of possible meanings.”

Weber is adamant that this is not altogether a regressive development. The
advance of bureaucratization destroys, once and for all, the myth that it is possible
for individuals to apprehend unambiguously the whole of reality. The disen-
chantment of the modern world contributes to the final erosion of claims upon
universal knowledge of an objective totality. All spheres of conduct, especially
those of scientific inquiry itself, have entered an unprecedented phase of spe-
cialization that, most likely, will forever continue. Knowledge of reality there-
fore comes to be understood as fragmented, subjective knowledge constituted
in accordance with knowers’ one-sided, specialized points of view. It becomes
eydent that the populations of bureaucratic capitalist societies are fated to live
without knowledge that can dispense sacred values and reveal the true meaning
of the universe. Under conditions marked by bureaucratic efficiency and a this-
worldly ethical nihilism, individuals are compelled to choose from among a
bewildering array of competing cultural values; sensing the precariousness of
the meaning of their existence, they must from here on select their own gods.

In defense of objectivity

Weber emphasizes that salvation from the ethical nihilism generated by processes
of bureaucratization is not to be found through an uncritical reliance upon
empirical-analytic science. He was constantly in opposition to scientistic, “realistic-
empirical” (Menger) forms of thinking – and their defenders within the Meth-
odenstreit of his time – and his metatheoretical writings must be interpreted as a
crucial dimension of his more general concern with the limits of bureaucratic
rationality. Their tortuous, often maundering quality is by no means an index
of their insignificance to Weber’s political project. From the time of his earliest
polemic against Roscher and Knies, all of Weber’s methodological and epis-
temological struggles can be seen as urgent, disciplined attempts at understand-
ing the meaning of a form of social inquiry that refused the temptations of
scientific discourses would only increase the likelihood that bureaucratic, capitalist
societies would further lose their way in a twilight of normlessness.

This conviction forms the substance of his neo-Kantian arguments concerning
the unique logic of the cultural sciences. Weber proposes – and not always self-
consistently – that at least three arguments can be adduced against uncritical
attempts at universalizing the methodology of the natural sciences. In the first
instance, the logics of the cultural and natural sciences are in principle distinct. Although, certainly, the concerns of both are grounded within historico-cultural processes, the natural sciences seek universally valid knowledge. They analyze natural realities in terms of generalizing concepts, which guide the formulation of laws confirmed by empirical analysis and rational experimentation. By contrast with this emphasis upon the quantitative, exact, and universal aspects of natural phenomena, the inquiries of the cultural sciences bear decisively upon the qualitative aspects of social life, that is, upon this life as it is manifested in all its particular or historically specific configurations. According to the young Max Weber at least, cultural-scientific analysis (of bureaucracy, for instance) avoids the explanatory subsumption of particular events as representative cases of general, that is, universally valid, processes; unlike the nomothetic natural sciences, the cultural sciences are preoccupied with the concrete individuality (or historicity) of phenomena. This means that the cultural sciences cannot attain knowledge of general laws. Their empirical knowledge is instead uniquely generated through the imputation of particular constellations of events (events that are reckoned to be of general significance for modern life) as the consequence of concrete causal relationships.

Secondly, whereas outer nature is typically a domain of meaninglessness, Weber stresses that the cultural sciences are singularly concerned with psychological and intellectual (geistig) phenomena. These understanding of these phenomena presents problems specifically different from those encountered within the exact natural sciences, which are concerned with observing and explaining the laws of events. To be sure, social action chronically shares with natural events a certain dependence upon accidental disturbances and blind, nonrational prejudice. Unlike natural phenomena, cultural beings are nevertheless also endowed with the capacity to live in accordance with practical norms. Capable of representing themselves to themselves, they can therefore adopt a deliberative disposition toward themselves and their worlds. Typically, these beings subjectively ascribe “meaning [Bedeutung]” or “significance [Sinn]” to their own institutionally situated activities. Methodologically speaking, this point is of considerable consequence for the sociocultural sciences. These sciences cannot systematically ignore the problem of understanding the meanings actors attribute to their own conduct. Within the cultural sciences, “realistic-empirical” inquiries ignore such meanings and are therefore bound to produce results that are conceptually and empirically misleading. Such realistic-empirical inquiries deceptively avoid a series of vital epistemological questions: Whose knowledge is under consideration here? Is it the ideas of investigators who, from the standpoint of various problematics, regard actors as objects of knowledge? Or is it the ideas of actors themselves?

Positivist efforts to assimilate the cultural and the natural sciences are criticized by Weber, thirdly, for their false claims to “value-freedom.” This criticism is double-edged. In the first instance, efforts to cast cultural-scientific inquiries in the mold of the natural sciences are necessarily plagued by nihilistic outcomes. Ethical ideals can never be the final product or effect of the accumulation of lawlike empirical data. The days have finally passed, or so Weber contends, when the exact, quantifying sciences could be expected to discover the path to God
The legacy of Max Weber

by physically grasping his works. It has become evident that the natural sciences are both fundamentally irreligious and incapable of generating substitute ethical rules of conduct. Whether it makes sense to live within the modern bureaucratic world cannot be decided through reference to the empirical-analytic sciences. Weber quotes Tolstoi with strong approval: “Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important to us: ‘What shall we do and how shall we live?’”

Furthermore, and secondly, Weber insists that efforts to exorcise ethical values from the cultural sciences are fraudulent, because impossible. “Human, all too human” ethical principles always guide the selection of data. He repeats the insight of Goethe: Theoretical principles are always involved in “the facts.”

These principles or “evaluative ideas [Wertideen]” are not the products or conclusions of empirical investigations—as if the definition of the objects of cultural-scientific study could be separated from the evaluation of their significance. From the outset, these principles divine their empirical objects of investigation, investing them with a certain “value-relevance [Wertbeziehung]”; they serve as the presuppositions that render sociocultural reality an object of subjective theoretical inquiry. There is nothing within these objects themselves that sets them apart as deserving of recognition, attention, and analysis. A disposition of ethical indifference is thus by no means either appropriate or possible within the cultural sciences: Their problematics are always constituted (in the Kantian sense) by an ensemble of historically tainted practical questions. These questions serve as something like one-sided vantage points, from which—consciously or unconsciously, expressly or tacitly—social and natural reality is reckoned to be worthy of being classified, analyzed, understood, explained, and evaluated. Ideal-typical analysis, of which Weber’s concern with modern bureaucratic domination and its irrationality is a key instance, is only an explicitly recognized form of these unavoidable processes of conceptual mediation. Confronted with an infinite reality of ever-changing events, Weber’s ideal-typical inquiries seek to analyze a finite portion of this reality as important, as in certain respects significant and crucial to the fate of those who live within the present. With a certain (but never absolute) degree of exactitude, ideal-typical analyses bring about an ordering and clarification of the chaos immanent within the stream of contemporary life processes.

It is precisely through their capacity to analyze and clarify aspects of modern bureaucratic life that Weber’s cultural-scientific analyses claim to achieve a form of objectivity. Motivated by a concern with the problems attending bureaucratic domination within the spheres of state and society, Weber’s inquiries, it is true, openly deny that their status is equivalent to value-free, objective knowledge in the positivist sense. Their “objectivity [Sachlichkeit]” is of a rather different, and very special form. Weber’s inquiries self-reflexively acknowledge that their knowledge is constituted in and through categories that are marked by a definite subjectivity. Objective, sachlich knowledge of bureaucratic organization admits its dependence upon concepts and presuppositions, including the belief that this knowledge is indeed of value to those who live and act within the contemporary world.
In respect of this admitted subjectivity, Weber repeats, the objectivity of his accounts of modern bureaucratic domination cannot transcend the latter's nihilistic tendencies. His insights are incapable of formulating ultimate — in the sense of unambiguous and incontrovertible — norms that could in turn crystallize and guarantee political obligations. Simply stated, his discussions of bureaucracy admit their own irrelevance to those for whom inquiries into bureaucracy have no value. Weber's inquiries thus cast themselves in the role of advocate. Their belief that objective knowledge of the bureaucratization process is worth attaining necessarily presents itself in the form of recommendations.106

Despite their acknowledged dependence upon the interest and concern of others, Weber considers his inquiries to be of great potential importance to the contemporary world. This potential derives from the capacity of these inquiries to clarify, for themselves and for others concerned, the significance of the processes of bureaucratization in accordance with which our actions are increasingly structured. It is Weber's conviction that the cultural-scientific task of clarifying the significance of bureaucratic rationality is made urgent by the growing fetish of technical calculation and the corresponding reliance upon common sense as the arbiter of ethical commitment. Contradicting this technicity and ethical ignorance, cultural-scientific inquiry serves as a "critique of concept formation and conceptual schemes."107 Above all, it is concerned with the more ambitious task of educating judgment concerning bureaucracy and its irrational consequences. In an age confident of its capacity to administer all situations bureaucratically, cultural-scientific knowledge is concerned with generating "inconvenient insights."108 Its strategy of clarification and defiance relies upon a fundamental analytic distinction, that between the categories "means" and "ends." Weber proposes that actors struggle either for goals that are valued for their own sake or for goals that are desired as a means of achieving other, more highly valued goals.109

Under the influence of this categorical distinction, it is true that Weber's objective inquiries claim to eschew passing judgment upon those who pursue certain goals desired for their own sake. The choice and pursuit of such goals, Weber typically declares, is ultimately the responsibility of actors themselves.110 Granting this caveat, the scientific analysis of modern bureaucracy can nevertheless clarify the appropriateness of bureaucratic means for the realization of various desired ends.111 Weber's discussion of the substantively irrational consequences of bureaucratic domination are of course precise examples of this clarification process at work. As we have seen, these discussions propose informed estimates of the probability of successfully realizing various goals (communism, particular needs within capitalist society) given the (indispensable) reliance upon the presently available bureaucratic means. The utilized bureaucratic means, in other words, are judged to be appropriate or insufficient for the attainment of these goals. Conversely, such goals are themselves indirectly criticized or defended by Weber as capable of realization, that is, as practicable given the choice to utilize bureaucratic means. On scientific grounds, Weber's discussions disavow any capacity to indicate what actors should do. They are nevertheless capable of making explicit the ultimate axioms or value standards.
The legacy of Max Weber

(for example, those of Protestant asceticism) for which actors strive. In addition, these analyses are capable of clarifying the likelihood that actors can or cannot achieve these value standards and, therefore, the degree to which these standards are internally consistent. Finally, and in accordance with these means–ends analyses, Weber’s theses on bureaucracy speculate about the range of possible consequences ( nihilism, abstractionism) attending the utilization of bureaucratic means. Those concerned are thus provided with greater objective insight into the desirable and undesirable outcomes that necessarily attend the decision to depend upon rational bureaucratic means.

The fate of democracy

Despite his anxiety about the substantively irrational consequences of bureaucracy, Weber is in general convinced of its indispensability. This conviction that bureaucracy is necessary forms one of the most striking features of his analyses. He is persuaded that, once established, bureaucratic domination cannot easily be shattered. By virtue of its indispensability as a technical means, “bureaucracy is among those social structures which are the hardest to destroy.”112 Weber does of course admit that the generalized substitution of democratic, decentralized, and less formally rational organization for bureaucracy is thinkable. Yet such a rupture with the continuum of modern bureaucratic domination would in his view assume the form of a regression: Within the spheres of state and society, it would result in a drastic reduction of technical efficiency and, therefore, of current levels of material prosperity, legal order, and administrative capacity. The renunciation of the visionary struggle for democratic public life therefore becomes imperative. The governed cannot nowadays dispense with bureaucratic apparatuses and their rational, calculating mode of operation. The reliance of the governed upon the strictly organized, virtuosolike mastery of complex problems and situations makes the revolutionary creation of entirely new and democratic forms of power impossible. “More and more,” Weber maintains, “the material fate of the masses depends upon the steady and correct functioning of the increasingly bureaucratic organization of private capitalism. The idea of eliminating these organizations becomes more and more utopian.”115 Indeed, the hierarchical division of labor and power within both private and public bureaucracies is beyond reconstruction. Even for brief periods, Weber emphasizes, the industrial entrepreneur has come to be as little dispensable as the medical doctor.114

In view of this “iron necessity” of bureaucratic command, Weber recommends that its irrational effects be tempered or overcome through the expansion and principled deployment of nation-state power. In respect of this admonition, Löwith’s claim that Weber offers only a resigned diagnosis of contemporary events is misleading.115 Weber continually argues that an immense “labour of political education [politische Erziehungsarbeit]” is to be performed in the face of the present. Convinced of the necessity of impersonal, task-oriented bureaucratic organization, Weber urges that such organization is now in need of direction by the struggle to defend and enhance the sovereignty of the nation and its power.
The fundamental political problem posed by bureaucratic organization is how to subordinate, restrict, and harness its technical expertise and proficiency. Weber's response to this challenge is to advocate an ultimate and definite value: the power position of the nation in the world. The primary and decisive voice within the affairs of state and society should be the interests of the nation-state, understood as a community of sentiments secured by military strength and economic interests. Especially in a world of nation-states bristling with arms, this is what political maturity means: the ability of state leadership to place existing social and political bureaucracies under the sign of the nation's power. This would make possible the preservation of the nation's external integrity; within the domestic sphere, such leadership would facilitate the protection, embourgeoisement, and acculturation of the laboring masses and the continuous expansion of efficient capitalist production. For Weber, the permanent diplomatic and economic (and military?) struggle of nation-states against one another is not only unavoidable; it also serves as a fundamental source of political vigor, of inspired governance. The mobilization of the nation through competent leadership might also weaken the problems of legitimation experienced within all modern capitalist societies. Within the context of the permanent struggle between "power states" and "outwardly small nations," the administrative redeployment of the language, customs, and political memories common to a group - leaders' appeal to the "honor" of the nation - can compensate for the loss of faith in religion and all objectively justified values. Weber's defense of the principle of national power politics is at the same time a justification of strong-willed, passionate political leadership. Within the realm of corporate and state bureaucracy, Weber urges against Schmoller and others, "genuine officials" must not engage in politics but, rather, must restrict themselves to "impartial administration." He is in principle opposed to Beamtenherrschaft, the dominating rule of senior civil servants without a calling, precisely because their authority, in his view, must (and can only) be limited to the conscientious execution of the orders of political leadership. The expertise of technically trained officials has no rightful place in politicians' ultimate decisions about political goals and strategies. For the same reasons, a "leaderless democracy" - the rule of civil servants supplemented with the rule of professional politicians without either a calling or charismatic qualities - is equally to be despised.

Against the general encroachment of bureaucratic organization, what is now required is the securing of the primacy of politics over bureaucracy by way of genuine political leadership. Such leadership must demonstrate a highly developed and nontransferable sense of personal responsibility for the acts it performs: In an otherwise suffocating age of general and overwhelming bureaucratization, only a very few can realize the old Renaissance and classical bourgeois ideal of individuation. The ideal-typical leader, Weber recommends, must embody at least three decisive qualities. First, genuine leadership necessitates a passionate devotion to a cause. The devotion to political leadership must be unconditional. The will to make history, to set new values for others, can only be born and
nourished from feeling. Here Weber's ethical relativism resurfaces (and jeopardizes his insistence on the primacy of the goals of the nation-state): The inner strength necessary for the serving of a cause can only be based on faith. Though leaders may serve "national, humanitarian, social, ethical, cultural, worldly, or religious ends," they must choose and faithfully pursue one or more of these.

Nevertheless, secondly, passion must not succumb to "sterile excitation" (Weber invokes Simmel’s expression). Authentic leaders must cultivate a sense of their objective responsibilities. Their goal-structured strivings for the means of power must avoid "self-intoxication," seeking in all matters, on the contrary, to further the cause responsibly. Their struggle for power must be synonymous with the servicing of a definite goal, for whose realization, effects, and unintended consequences they are personally accountable. Acting on their own convictions, leaders are to bear the sole responsibility for their actions; they are not the mandated representatives of their masters, the electors. 

In turn (and thirdly), this presupposes that leaders' actions must embody a "cool sense of proportion": the ability to grant due weight to realities, to take them soberly and calmly into account. Weber’s recommendations display a quasi-positivist deference to realities. Genuine, passionate, and experienced leaders, he urges, must be relentless in "viewing the realities of life," and must have "the ability to face such realities and . . . measure up to them inwardly." Effective leadership is synonymous with neither mere demagoguery nor the worship of power for its own sake. Passionate and responsible leaders will shun any uncompromising ethic of ultimate ends. Those who rely upon this ethic are blind to the chronic tensions between means and ends; such blindness, he notes sarcastically, "does rightly and leaves the results with the Lord." Political infancy is in fact synonymous with the untrammeled pursuit of ultimate values; such infan tilism forgets that, however the content of these concept pairs is understood, evil is not necessarily a product of evil alone, and that good does not follow only from good. Prudent and mature leaders, by contrast, must be guided by an ethic of responsibility. Recognizing the average deficiencies of people, they must continually strive to take account of the foreseeable effects of particular actions that aim to realize particular goals through the reliance upon particular means. They must engage in action in which both means and ends are adjusted and coordinated responsibly in accordance with their possible outcomes and unintended consequences. Ethically responsible leaders must therefore incorporate into their actions an anguishing fact: in numerous situations, they must acknowledge that the attainment of good ends is dependent upon (and therefore jeopardized by) the use of ethically doubtful or (in the case of violence) even dangerous means.

According to Weber’s last writings, the demand for ethically responsible leadership is no idle hope. Certainly, charismatic leadership has emerged in all places and in every historical epoch. Under contemporary conditions, however, the possibility of mature leadership is systematically confirmed by the Caesarist, charismatic elements that more and more attend the increasing power of bureaucratic party-political organizations vis-à-vis legislatures. This development, which Weber thought to be most clearly evident under the U.S. presidential system, increases the likelihood that leaderless party machines will follow, even
Public life and late capitalism

over the heads of legislatures, a charismatic leader. Party machines will submit to this leadership, in return for certain benefits. Amid electoral battles, for example, the competent leader (the "dictator of the battlefield of elections" who fights with the spoken word) could actually enhance the legitimacy of the party and therefore the career prospects of individual party members. In turn, the party machines would become the means facilitating leaders' seduction of the masses. Paradoxically, then, bureaucratization within the sphere of the state would facilitate the emergence of committed, responsible, and experienced individuals who could put their shoulders to the wheels of the present; plebiscitarian leader democracy would thereby in part compensate, or so Weber insisted, for the substantive irrationalism of bureaucratic domination. Even as Caesarist leadership would restrain and guide the routinizing forces of bureaucracy, efficient, technically rational bureaucratic organizations would moderate and rationalize the creative forces of individual leadership.

The forward progress of bureaucracy?

It is a commonplace among liberal scholars that one of the central difficulties of Weber's political theory is his failure to distinguish between two forms of leadership: the genuine charisma of responsible democratic leaders (such as Gladstone or Roosevelt) and the pernicious charismatic domination effected through the crafty and ruthless demagogues (such as Hitler, Mussolini, or Stalin) who rose to power after his death. To be sure, Weber was aware that already in his time the political process within industrial capitalist countries increasingly resembled a "dictatorship resting on the exploitation of mass emotionality." This administrative deployment of demagogic speech and action, he also recognized, differed from (for example) Cobden's intellectualist mode of discourse or Gladstone's consistent resort to "letting sober facts speak for themselves." Weber proposed, furthermore, that political orders could be evaluated according to the type of leadership that they generated. He recognized, finally, that even authentic leaders could succumb to vanity. The genuine leader is "constantly in danger of becoming an actor as well as taking lightly the responsibility for the outcome of his actions and of being concerned merely with the 'impression' he makes." In spite of these various observations, Weber is nevertheless charged with unwittingly holding to the naïve assumption that charismatic leadership in its various forms could resist these dangers and would always therefore be the repository of political understanding, maturity, and wisdom. It is alleged, not incorrectly, that he seriously conflated different types of charismatic leadership − the elected warlord, the great demagogue, the plebiscitarian ruler, the modern political party leader whose career is made in party bureaucracies.

This form of indictment of Weber is nevertheless highly incomplete, if only because it remains ensnared within the limited boundaries of the so-called elitist theory of equilibrium democracy. Viewed from beyond these restrictive boundaries, Weber's legacy is in fact much more profound. It consists in a challenge to all dissident political thought in general and, in particular, a censure of the possibility of a democratic, socialist theory of bureaucratic domination.
The legacy of Max Weber

This challenge is summarized by Weber in a well-known 1908 letter to Robert Michels: "Such concepts as 'will of the people', 'genuine will of the people'," he remarks, "have long since ceased to exist for me; they are fictitious. All ideas aiming at abolishing the dominance of humans over others are 'Utopian.'"\(^{135}\)

It should be emphasized that to speak in this way of the legacy of Weber's challenge is to avoid a positivist critique of his theses. It has become almost customary, for example, to stress that Weber's account of bureaucracy is descriptively inaccurate, that it must be rejected – or at least amended – because it is out of tune with the actual realities of bureaucratic organization, and so on. Precisely because of their descriptivist assumptions, such allegations expose themselves to an obvious countercharge: Weber's account of modern bureaucratic organization and its irrational effects is ideal-typical. Weber persistently (and correctly) emphasized that descriptive analyses of the elements of modern bureaucratic reality can never be exhaustive. Everywhere and always the quantitative and qualitative influences upon the events that constitute this reality are infinite. Accordingly, attempts at capturing the concrete reality of bureaucratic organization exhaustively are disingenuous, because impossible. Definitive and exhaustive scientific knowledge of the "laws of motion" of bureaucratic processes is unachievable. All knowledge of the stream of historically cultural events, Weber rightly insists, is knowledge from particular points of view. Such knowledge is conditioned by judgments about which aspects of these events are of general significance; in turn, these judgments or evaluative ideas are those which dominate or inform the historical period in which investigators conduct their inquiries.\(^{136}\)

Weber's account of bureaucratic domination thus takes the form of avowedly one-sided or dogmatic accentuations of certain of its highly diffuse and discrete aspects by means of ideal-typical concepts. Inasmuch as they exclude an infinity of events that for the purposes of inquiry are deemed irrelevant, these concepts are not mere descriptions of a preexistent bureaucratic reality. They are not identical, true, and faithful reproductions of the empirical characteristics of bureaucracy. These concepts necessarily and explicitly exclude consideration of a rich variety of both particular and general aspects of bureaucratic organization. Weber's theorems on bureaucracy take the form of a series of conceptual reconstructions of aspects of modern life that, in ideal, pure form, are seldom, if ever, to be found within this historical reality. These reconstructions are derived from experience that is intensified and condensed through imaginative processes of thought, in order to facilitate further analyses of the empirical manifold.\(^{137}\) These analyses, in short, never exhaust the objective meaning of bureaucracy; incompleteness is a logical property of the methodology of Weber's inquiries into bureaucracy. By virtue of the fact that concepts and objects of concepts are in a perpetual state of flux, these inquiries are necessarily provisional, "endowed with eternal youth."\(^{138}\) They are continuously the objects of their own stated concern not to "make compromises nor cloak any 'nonsense.'"\(^{139}\)

It is precisely in respect of their admitted failure to encircle their object – an admission typically overlooked by Weber's positivist critics – that Weber's ideal-typical descriptions can be analyzed and immanently criticized as utopian.\(^{140}\) Unable to construct a closed and universally valid system of categories that would
Public life and late capitalism

somehow express the essence of bureaucratic reality, Weber's ideal-typical discussion of bureaucracy leaves itself permanently open to further interrogation and supersession. This discussion unavoidably provokes novel questions (about other limitations of bureaucratic organization, for example) that it has failed to address or even anticipate.

Weber's lack of concern with such questions was again consistent with his thesis that only certain dimensions of any infinitely complex and changing reality are ever worth knowing — specifically, those to which is attributed "a general cultural significance."141 This presupposition, however, provokes the standard retort: significance for whom? This retort suggests the presence of a self-destructive weakness within Weber's defense of the imperative of bureaucracy. When it is considered that the concept of rational bureaucracy was a solecism in the language of nineteenth-century theoretical discussion,142 it is curious indeed that Weber took for granted that his account of bureaucracy was somehow expressive of the value interests of his time. This confident presumption, which suppressed a whole century's theoretical controversy and political and social struggle over bureaucracy, was arguably reinforced by his reliance upon an inverted evolutionism. The resulting comparisons of the present, ancient Egypt, and Rome in its decline; commentaries upon the "forward progress" of bureaucratic mechanization; exhortations to abandon false hopes — these and other claims provide hints that Weber's ideal-typical defense of bureaucracy sustained itself on prior, tacit, and pessimistic assumptions about the regressive character of the contemporary phase of the world historical process.143

These assumptions are contradicted, however, by Weber's other thesis that the points of view from which processes of bureaucratization become objects of inquiry cannot be fixed indefinitely. This indeterminancy thesis contains an important implication: so long as these processes of bureaucratization change, it must be admitted that new "facts," problematics, and interpretations concerning these processes will come to be deemed important. This admission is of decisive importance under late capitalist conditions, precisely because bureaucracy is widely criticized and opposed as undemocratic (see Essay 1). From the vantage point of such struggles for autonomous public life, it becomes evident, indeed, that Weber's theses are heavily committed to the defense of bureaucratic organization. Weber arrogantly presumed the redundancy of further questions about bureaucratic domination. He took it for granted, conversely, that the repression of autonomous public life was more and more necessary. These presumptions form the legacy of his account of bureaucracy, an account that functions to silence further discussion about the authoritarian, self-contradictory, and therefore contingent qualities of all bureaucracy.

There are at least three interrelated instances of this silencing effect. In the first place, and most obviously, Weber considerably overestimated the technical efficiency of both "public" and "private" bureaucratic organization. It will be recalled that he considered that the restless advance of bureaucratic organization was a consequence of its technical superiority. By virtue of its speed, precision, cost efficiency, unambiguity, and hierarchical unity, only bureaucracy is able to cope adequately and efficiently with the complexities of modern life. This ideal-
typical valuation (as Essay 3 argues at length) fails to consider a number of chronically inefficient, that is, technically irrational, aspects of the bureaucratic form. Two of these aspects can here be mentioned. First, Weber failed to analyze sufficiently the extent to which the horizontal or lateral relations among different bureaucratic organizations would continually generate turbulence within and between the spheres of civil society and the state. This is a curious oversight, inasmuch as one of his key defenses of modern capitalism concerns its capacity to secure the differentiation of social and political bureaucracies. He thus acknowledged that the logic of operation, means of financing, and goals of capitalist enterprises were by no means identical with those of state administration. He noted, for example, that the substance of state policy may frequently be oriented to noneconomic ends, which thereby limit the capitalist, rational, calculating pursuit of profit. He also understood that modern capitalist processes of bureaucratization have consistently been marked by unevenness.

These insights could never have been systematically developed by Weber, precisely because they would have seriously jeopardized his claims on behalf of the formally rational character of bureaucratic administration. It is in part because public and private bureaucracies cannot automatically or bureaucratically coordinate their relations with one another that their respective internal modes of operation are systematically prevented from achieving a machinelike technical competence. Under continuous pressure to act with or against other (corporate, church, trade union, state) bureaucracies within their often uncertain and always changing and conflict-ridden environments, bureaucratic administrations are typically forced to undermine their own principled rejection of doing business on a case-by-case basis by engaging in judgment calls, decisions made without the benefits of fixed, objective rules that can be applied with precision. In a continuously uncertain and often turbulent environment, the stable attainment of organizational objectives depends on continuous changes in the bureaucratic structure itself. This means that under late capitalist conditions, “without regard for particular persons and situations” is an unrealizable watchword of all bureaucracies. They cannot self-consistently attain their respective goals through reliance upon abstract-general regulations, which are applied exhaustively and consistently to every case. Indeed, bureaucratic organizations that attempt to monitor and control all situations strictly through such formally rational regulations are continually subject to heterogeneous rivalries and struggles that, in turn, have internal disorganizing effects upon those organizations. Conversely, the persistence of such struggles and rivalries obstructs the formal rationalization of social and political life. Processes of bureaucratization display a definite unevenness or lack of uniformity. They are therefore also marked by continual efforts to readjust, reorganize, and redeploy their systems of command — through, for example, corporatist forms of policy making and bargaining between bureaucratic organizations. Bureaucracies do not necessarily display constant pressures toward caution and “playing it safe,” a stifling and pedantic suspicion of experimentalism and departure from the wonted routine. Under late capitalist conditions, everyday life is bureaucratized to different degrees and from incompatible and often contradictory points of view.
This kind of environmental restriction upon the formally rational mode of operation of public and private bureaucracies is typically reinforced, secondly, by analogous difficulties within those organizations. Certainly Weber was aware of numerous historical instances of the obstruction of formal rationality within bureaucratic institutions of production and administration.\textsuperscript{148} This awareness is nevertheless not systematically extended into the present. Once again, Weber's account seriously exaggerates the degree to which bureaucratic organizations can and do conduct their operations in accordance with a key criterion of efficiency, that is, "without regard for persons" and in accordance with abstract-general rules. Within his political writings, and especially when he dealt with the political power of the Junkers, Weber occasionally recognized this point.\textsuperscript{149} Nevertheless, his systematic underestimation of its significance prevented him from analyzing the dynamic and expansionist character of bureaucracies. The formal rationality of these organizations, it must be emphasized, is chronically obstructed by vested interests - a most important reason why bureaucracies have a tendency to perpetuate themselves in power and scope, if not to expand continuously. Within the upper echelons of bureaucratic organization particular individuals or groups typically appropriate and assign the resources of power in their own favor. As a consequence of their "hunting for higher positions" (Marx), bureaucratic elites usually fail to formulate and discharge their business cost-efficiently, anonymously, and without regard for particular persons.

As Norbert Elias first pointed out, what are officially called the imperatives and needs of bureaucratic organizations are always defined by the struggle for power and its monopolization.\textsuperscript{150} The points associated with this observation are perhaps so familiar that they need once again to be spelled out. In spite of official proclamations, bureaucratic organization has not altogether eliminated the exploitation of office holding for "rents and emoluments." Forms of nepotism, clientelism, and simple favoritism are not insignificant or exceptional characteristics of state and corporate organizations. The appointment and deployment of bureaucratic staff at all levels by no means always and everywhere proceed in accordance with unambiguous functional criteria, as if career opportunities and the rational allocation of tasks were unhindered by nods and winks, lobbying, incompetence, procrastination, threats, struggles between departments, pork-barreling, and duplication of effort. In the competition for power among and within public and private bureaucratic organizations, the directing authorities do not act entirely \textit{sine ira ac studio}. They rather continually strive to appropriate the organization as their own private property, to increase their own superiority by multiplying services and positions, overseeing the proliferation of artificial controls and unproductive functions, providing those under their tutelage with opportunities for success, security of tenure, consumption and acquisition, and so on. "Bureaucracy loves bureaucrats," Lefort correctly notes, "as much as bureaucrats love bureaucracy."\textsuperscript{151} Finally, bureaucratic authorities also typically seek to enhance their powers of command through claims upon knowledge and top secrets, and through the (initial) concealment of their plans and intentions. Especially among senior officials, privileged access to technical details and knowledge involves at the same time the accretion of power into their own hands.
Bureaucratic administration, as Marx already stressed (and as Weber sometimes recognized) tends to be an administration of secret sessions. Bureaucratic hierarchy is a hierarchy of knowledge, information, and liaison behind closed doors. One of its supreme resources of power lies in its capacity to transform specialized and official knowledge into official secrets, classified material, and professional expertise.

No doubt, this list could be expanded considerably. These examples nevertheless suffice to illustrate the more general thesis: Bureaucracies, contrary to Weber’s account, persistently undermine their own claims to competence in discharging their business economically and efficiently in accordance with formally rational rules. Bureaucratic organizations cannot be unfailingly neutral, as if they could place themselves at the disposal of every power that skillfully claims their precise service.

This thesis is of course well noted and widely sensed. It nevertheless is the carrier of a less frequently recognized political implication. Simply expressed, Weber’s overestimation of the degree to which both public and private bureaucracies can and do operate in accordance with strict, formally rational rules directly jeopardizes his claim that the participation of citizens within autonomous forms of public life has become highly dysfunctional for efficient bureaucratic administration and must therefore be minimized. It is true, or so Weber argued, that the modern struggle for constitutional democratic government – for a political system that acknowledges the formal political equality of all citizens – has everywhere definitely fostered the growth of bureaucratic administration. Modern mass democracies typically take the form of bureaucratized democracies. Such demands as equality before the law and equal rights of the governed accelerated the destruction of old forms of privilege, especially that based on birth. These demands have nevertheless promoted, within the sphere of the state at least, the advance of bureaucratic administration against the localized rule of notables. The pacification of the governed through systems of bureaucratic organization – what Weber called “passive democratization” – is an unintended but nonetheless direct consequence of the popular struggle for mass, representative democracy.

Weber nevertheless proposed that this tacit alliance between bureaucracy and representative democracy is marked by unanticipated consequences. In spite of their former support for the bureaucratization process, demands for democracy more and more often turn against the rule of bureaucracy. In Weber’s (not inaccurate) view, continuing struggles to realize the more substantive principles associated with formal, representative democracy are in definite contradiction to the rule of bureaucracy and its penchant for authoritarian command, secrecy, and the silencing of criticism. Demands for the universal accessibility to office and the popular election and recall of administrators and subordinate staff also directly endanger the precise functioning of the bureaucratic mechanism. Weber therefore concluded that the struggle for democratic, public life (whether in the sphere of the economy or in that of the state) would produce “technically irrational obstacles" to the smooth formulation and deployment of bureaucratic commands. In his view, this antinomy between bureaucracy and autonomous
public life could be attenuated through plebiscitarianism. Systems of plebiscitarian leader democracy, he proposed, would facilitate the emergence of genuine political leaders who could act as both free trustees of the masses and, at the same time, their virtually unrestrained masters. Weber's proposal appears highly implausible in view of his persistent overestimation of the technical competence of bureaucratic organizations. Indeed, given their substantively irrational effects (discussed by Weber) and their chronic technical incompetence under late capitalist conditions, his case against democratic, public life remains considerably weakened, even unwarranted.

This tentative conclusion is considerably strengthened by a second immanent weakness within Weber's ideal-typical account of bureaucracy. This second difficulty is not unrelated to the first, and might indeed be analyzed as its extension. Weber's account, it must be said, radically understated the capacity of the "lifeless machinery" of bureaucratic administration to catalyze new demands for public action. Hierarchically ordered relations of command and obedience are no doubt typical features of all contemporary bureaucratic organizations. These organizations plunge their roots deeply into all interpersonal relations; they have in common, as Weber suggested, the important characteristic of permanence. They tend to be institutions of everyday routine (Alltagsgebilde). Within the bureaucratic apparatus, however, individuals and groups are rarely depoliticized cogs in a dynamic and precisely functioning mechanism. The helpless frustration of the dominated is not the inevitable and nightmarish effect of the impenetrable formalism and officiousness of bureaucratic command. Bureaucratic administration everywhere and at all times tends to be the subject not only of class struggles (as Lukács narrowly insisted against Weber) but also of various power struggles outside the sphere of the factory and office. In addition to effecting the restructuring and redirection of the operation of these organizations, these struggles also produce conditions in which informal public spheres of argument, deliberation, and decision making tend to thrive.

Weber of course insisted that conflict could not be excluded from social and political life. The means, ends, and "bearers" of conflict may well be contingent, though conflict itself could never be permanently abolished. Guided by this axiom, he was acutely aware that the modern process of bureaucratization was highly conflict-ridden. With respect to the past, to mention two examples noted by Weber, modernization provoked both the bloody resistance of the American planters' aristocracy to urban capital and, in Europe, the struggle of traditional, rurally based power blocs (such as the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches) against the spread of urban rationalist culture. In the here and now, Weber's participation in the Verein für Sozialpolitik survey of the industrial labor process

* From the viewpoint of the following argument, it is of great interest that such struggles are never analyzed in any depth or systematicness by Weber. His account of the bureaucratization process, it will be argued subsequently, seriously underestimates the constitutive role played by various collective protest movements in the modernization process—a role whose history has yet to be written. These collective protest movements formed part of a process by which modern, bureaucratic societies were created, challenged, and
alerted him to forms of worker resistance to bureaucratized work. Concerning the future, Weber also speculated on the extent to which conflict would likely be an endemic feature of planned socialist economies administered dictatorially from above. This bureaucratic, state authoritarianism would probably effect a proliferation of (violent) power struggles, strikes over working conditions, boycotts, and the forcible dismissal of unpopular supervisors.

Precisely as a consequence of his ideal-typical preference for analyzing bureaucracies as stable systems of command and obedience, Weber unfortunately never pursued these suggestions. Further reflection suggests that this preference was strongly reinforced by his confident presumption that, under contemporary capitalist conditions, bureaucratic organizations would induce among the governed a settled orientation for sticking unthinkingly to rules and regulations. He took it for granted that very few are destined to live for politics as active, publicly involved citizens. It seemed obvious to Weber, the democratic elitist, that “a relatively small number of people are primarily interested in political life and hence interested in sharing political power.” Everywhere the law of the small number – the superior political maneuverability of small leading groups – determines political and social activity. Only a few strive to live off the state by making organized politics a permanent source of interest and income. Always and everywhere, politics is for most people naturally an avocation.

This conviction that the great mass of citizens can only be the objects of solicitation by bureaucratic ruling groups was supported by various – and highly conflicting – observations. On occasion (without further argument, and mostly with reference to the charisma of the ancient Judaic prophets), Weber assumed that officials and others submit easily to the appeals of demagogic leaders and their causes. This predisposition to voluntary servitude would be considerably encouraged by the capacity of charismatic leaders to create a willingness of others to follow them unconditionally: “Inwardly it is per se more satisfying to work for a leader.” Elsewhere (in language reminiscent of the ancients), he observed that efforts to institute the “old type” of direct, participatory democracy (such as that attempted in the Swiss cantons) always degenerate into aristocratic outcomes. Political involvement, he insisted, is always contingent upon a release redirected. Such protest has sometimes taken the form of countercultures (e.g., Taborite millenarianism, the English Ranters, Romanticism, the communal movements), which reactively opposed the artificiality of bureaucratization with their own allegedly natural, spontaneous, and highly affective forms of life. At other times, this collective protest has been organized around political movements (e.g., those of Calvinists, radical liberals, workers, women, rural populists, anticolonialists, regional separatists) that sought a share of state or social power, or its decentralization. Throughout earlier phases of modernity, these countercultural and political movements were typically fragmented (i.e., at odds with themselves) and usually subject to wide geographic variation. As marginalized movements, they were unable fully to control, arrest, and redeploy the processes of bureaucratization. They were therefore subjected to violent suppression, integration, or processes of internal decay and self-destruction. Within the metropolitan capitalist countries at least, their synthesis into alliances of great scope and power of resistance to the “age of reason” was rare – the workers’ movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries being the last great instance.
from the everyday struggle for the satisfaction of economic necessities. In at least one place, he even claimed that the contemporary division of the population into active and (mostly) passive elements is a product of genuinely voluntary choices. It follows from this "will to powerlessness" thesis that attempts at increasing the degree and quality of citizen involvement (for example, through the enactment of compulsory voting) are doomed to failure from the outset.

Finally, and most plausibly, Weber observed that the depoliticization of the masses under contemporary bureaucratic conditions is simply a condition of success of disciplined, plebiscitarian, and machinelike political processes. Under state capitalist conditions, it is not the politically passive citizenry that produces leaders, but the political leaders who seek to organize, recruit, and win followers through demagogy. This is the most reliable of Weber's attempted explanations, indicating why those who demand radical democratization are always in turn spitefully repudiated by him as "windbags," "street crowds," "mob-dictators," and believers in the "anti-political heroic ethos of brotherhood."

This most honest of explanations is also the least implausible, for it accurately proposes that depoliticization is a fundamental organizing principle of bureaucratically organized relations of power within the realms of state and society. At the same time, however, Weber's explanation is self-limiting. It fails to grasp that, within all spheres of contemporary life, such depoliticization continually generates politicizing countertendencies, that is, demands for the autonomous discussion, reform, and reconstruction of bureaucratic organization. These autonomous demands and struggles are persistently generated by a fundamental disjunction or contradiction within the mode of operation of both public and private bureaucracies. All bureaucracies, it can be argued, are structured by principles of organization that negate their practical realization as such. Bureaucracies cannot regularly secure the discipline of their constituents and clients by relying on such impersonal mechanisms as the appeal to professional expertise, objective regulations, careerism, the payment of wages and salaries, and the sense of duty. As Weber correctly emphasized, bureaucratic organizations seek to discipline and depoliticize their constituents through the deployment of abstract, formally rational rules of command. Indeed, the greater the scope of any bureaucratic organization, the more its activities are diversified, specialized, and partitioned, the greater will be the scope of these mechanisms of administrative coordination and control.

Inasmuch as these disciplinary mechanisms continually estrange and provoke particular constituents at all levels, however, the commanders of bureaucratic organizations are continually forced to entreat or solicit the active, controlled involvement of these same dissident constituents whom the organization otherwise seeks to depoliticize as inactive, servile objects. The source of trouble in bureaucracies is that they must tacitly acknowledge that they are full of particular groups and individuals with initiative. Bureaucracies no doubt constantly tend to reduce their constituents and clients into pure and simple "executants." Given that this tendency cannot be fully realized – if only because of the active resistance generated, and because the typical dependence of the organization upon initiative at every level would be thoroughly thwarted – bureaucracies are obliged
to invite the participation of their executants, who are then forbidden all initiative and control. Bureaucracies require that their members and clients be subjects and objects at the same time; absolute reification is impossible. The intense circulation of reports and memoranda, the multiplication of paperasserie, the proliferation of meetings, the trends toward corporatist mediation of conflict, the phenomena of "participation," decentralization, and joint consultations, the media campaigns – all these are expressive of the fact that bureaucratic organizations subsist and expand upon their involvement of subordinates, whose genuine autonomy they in turn deny.167 All bureaucratic organizations depend upon processes of pseudomutual recognition. Ironically, they simultaneously presuppose, deny, and anticipate the regulative ideal of autonomous public association.

In respect of this ironic disjunction and its associated conflicts, the machinelike features of bureaucracy highlighted by Weber are typically contingent. Bureaucratic domination is the always fragile medium and outcome of (potentially) public, democratic struggles over the distribution and credibility of power. Weber's concern that the spread of formally rational organization to all domains of life might induce a new age of machinelike serfdom staffed by êtres inanimés is misleadingly overdrawn. Bureaucratic systems of command cannot permanently suffocate forms of politically secured individuality and value-oriented conduct. From the standpoint of this conduct, these systems are highly contradictory forms of organization. Even when judged according to their self-declared standards of calculating, technical rationality, bureaucracies must also be considered highly irrational processes. Weber's conviction that autonomous public spheres are not feasible under contemporary bureaucratic conditions is therefore also unfounded. Within all spheres of contemporary life, to conclude, bureaucratic processes repress and incite the growth of autonomous public spheres of discussion and decision making.

Still to be discussed, finally, is a third and unresolved difficulty within Weber's defense of bureaucratic domination guided by the principle of nationally conscious, plebiscitarian leadership. This unresolved difficulty derives from his failure to analyze further the conditions of possibility of his advocacy of this and not another principle. As we have seen, he consistently argued that judgments about the validity of value judgments are always a matter of faith. It is impossible, from the point of view of his decisionism, to establish and scientifically demonstrate fundamental ethical principles, in accordance with which solutions to political problems can be derived unambiguously. So-called ultimate ends, and even the apparently certain knowledge generated by mathematics and the natural sciences, are always debatable and therefore subject to variation and transformation through time and space. Inasmuch as the range of possible ultimate values is inexhaustible, their struggle can never be brought to a decisive and final conclusion. "Which of the warring gods should we serve?"168 is a question permanently posed for a bureaucratic age that has virtually debunked the validity of metaphysical systems of absolute knowledge. This question becomes more pressing and serious by virtue of the fact that the daily existence of individuals is more and more divided, fragmented, and routinely organized; ensnared within complex, bureaucratic divisions of labor, they are, in the here and now at least,
forced to sacrifice themselves first to this deity, then to that deity. Under modern conditions, then, the ancient plurality of gods reappears, but in a disenchanted and depersonalized form. These gods, Weber stresses, do not and cannot peacefully coexist. They vie for potential believers, entering into an eternal struggle with one another.

Precisely because their most treasured, ultimate ideals are precarious and transitory, the inhabitants of the modern world can no longer credibly afford to let life run on as if it were an event in nature. Weber was adamant: The resolution of the struggle between gods is ultimately a matter of power and politics. The highest ideals of our polytheistic epoch are always crystallized in the struggle with each other. "Every meaningful value-judgment about someone else's aspirations," Weber urges, "must be a criticism from the standpoint of one's own Weltanschauung; it must be a struggle against another's ideals from the standpoint of one's own."169

Weber's advocacy of the antidemocratic goal of bureaucratic domination guided by nationally conscious, plebiscitarian leadership is no doubt in conformity with this polytheistic principle. It is curious, however, that he never systematically considered whether his opposition to democratic public life — his defense of the necessity of bureaucratic domination — was in turn compatible with this principle of polytheism, struggle, and contestation. Further reflection suggests that it is not. His disavowal of autonomous public life, on the contrary, logically contradicts his avowed value relativism. This self-contradiction is evidenced by his failure to reflect critically on the institutional grounds or conditions necessary for the realization of the polytheistic struggle. Clearly, the principle of polytheism, the presumption that individual personalities must choose the meaning and direction of their own existence, implies a range of conditions necessary for its political realization as such. For example, the maxim that ideals can and must be crystallized in struggle with other ideals tacitly presupposes an opposition to all claims and contexts that deny this maxim. In this respect, conversely, Weber's polytheism rests upon the claim that, in principle, a minimal agreement or consensus can and must be reached in order to facilitate the permanent contestation of substantive principles. Actors must have already and always tacitly agreed to disagree.

Furthermore, this conditional agreement that every meaningful evaluation of another's ideals must involve a polemic against others' values from the standpoint of one's own presupposes institutional conditions in which this contestation can permanently and unrestrictedly take place. The private arbitrariness of substantively rational decisions cannot ultimately rest upon prerational decisions or solipsistic acts of faith, as Weber supposed. The decision to follow and defend rules privately, as he understood it, must rather always depend upon intersubjectively constituted, public spheres of discussion, argumentation, decision making, and disobedience. Only under conditions of unrestricted debate and a plurality of institutional mechanisms to ensure this debate could actors proficiently, competently, or even minimally defend their ideals. Weber's defense of bureaucracy becomes embroiled in a self-destructive paradox: The principle of polytheism (of which his polemic against substantive democracy is one instance) contains
The legacy of Max Weber

the imputation of democratic, public life. This principle presumes a special type of institutional form about whose validity actors must already have come to agreement – it presumes, in other words, the availability of actually existing forms of public life, to which speaking actors can have recourse, and only by means of which they can express their opposition to (or agreement with) others' ideals. Spheres of autonomous public life, in short, serve as a counterfactual, as a condition that must be established if value relativism of the type Weber defends is to obtain. This condition is not a substantial "ought," which takes the form of a heteronomous principle recommended to struggling actors. It is not just one condition among others, in the sense that actors struggling to realize their ideals could decide to satisfy the condition for a while, only later to reject it. On the contrary, it is not possible to renounce the counterfactually anticipated condition of democratic, public life without contradicting and wholly rejecting the polytheistic principle as such.

Especially granted the implausibility of his ideal-typical account of the technical superiority and disciplinary capacity of bureaucracy, Weber's failure to recognize this imputation strengthens the general charge proposed by this essay: Weber conspicuously failed to demonstrate the impossibility of defending autonomous public life against the "forward progress"170 of bureaucratic domination. At the end of Max Weber's life, it remained for others to elaborate this charge.
of public life are overburdened by the concept of a "proletarian public sphere," by which is meant the form in which the universal interests of the producing class are the driving force, as a "block of real life" whose homogeneity is constituted by its opposition to the "profit-maximizing interest" as such (Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung, pp. 163, 107. Kluge's more recent attempt to define a genuine, oppositional public sphere as a form of commonly shared experience that does not entail "exclusions" is equally misleading; see his discussions with Klaus Eder, published in Klaus Eder and Alexander Kluge, Über Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste [Munich, 1980]). In view of the highly differentiated character of both those who are subordinated and those who resist, the belief that there exists a single revolutionary class or group that is presently enduring a trial of powerlessness so that it can later become capable of a generalized critique of all powerlessness must be given up as dogmatic prejudice. Any political or theoretical attempt to impute or articulate the autonomous movements' universality (say, as "citizens," "working class," or "humanity") is not only bound to privilege the claims and organizational power of one fragment of these movements at the expense of others; such imputation also typically generates the chiliastic (and potentially authoritarian) anticipation of a future world stripped of all ambiguity and social division, a universe that is structured only by nonantagonistic contradictions and peaceful relations between "people," "workers," "human beings," and so on. This prejudice, which jeopardizes the possibility of a plurality of autonomous public spheres, has been a constant feature of critiques of bureaucracy since Lenin's The State and Revolution. It continues to be evident in a surprising number of recent discussions of the new autonomous movements' resistance to bureaucratic domination; in addition to Negt and Kluge, see, for example, Toni Negri, "Capitalist Domination and Working Class Sabotage," in Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis (London, 1979); James O'Connor, "The Fiscal Crisis of the State Revisited: Economic Crisis and Reagan's Budget Policy," Kapitaliste, vol. 9 (1981), pp. 41-61; and Touraine, La Voix et le regard.

2. The legacy of Max Weber

1 Describing the aims of the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik after its editorship was transferred to Edgar Jaffé, Werner Sombart, and Max Weber, Weber himself stressed: "Our aim is the understanding of the characteristic uniqueness of the reality in which we move. We wish to understand on the one hand the relationships and the cultural significance of individual events in their contemporary manifestations and on the other the causes of their being historically so and not otherwise" (The Methodology of the Social Sciences, ed. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch [New York, 1949], p. 72 [hereafter cited as MSS]).

2 Max Weber, Gesammelte Politische Schriften (Tübingen, 1958), p. 60 (hereafter cited as GPS); cf. GPS, pp. 60-1: "It is highly ludicrous to impute to modern high capitalism... any elective affinity with 'democracy' or even 'freedom' (in any meaning of the word)."


after cited as GAW), where Weber discusses the replacement of Gemeinschaftshandeln by Gesellschaftshandeln: "On the basis of our knowledge of the whole of past history, we observe... a steady advance of instrumentally rational regulation of actions based on mutual agreement, and in particular a progressive turnover of (voluntary) associations into institutions organized on an instrumentally rational basis." On the distinctiveness of occidental rationalization, see also the discussions of Benjamin Nelson, "Dialogs across the Centuries: Weber, Marx, Hegel, Luther," in J. Weiss (ed.), The Origins of Modern Consciousness (Detroit, 1965), pp. 149–65; and G. Abramowski, Das Geschichtsbild Max Webers Universalgeschichte am Leitfaden das oksidentalen Rationalisierungsprozesses (Stuttgart, 1966).

5 MSS, pp. 71ff., 130, 136–7; cf. GAW, pp. 427ff.
8 FMW, p. 216; cf. ES, p. 1149.
9 FMW, pp. 207–8. The propensity of bureaucratic systems for emancipating themselves from the "motivational structure" of their members is a favorite theme of Niklas Luhmann; see his The Differentiation of Society (New York, 1982), ch. 3.
10 FMW, pp. 214, 228, 232–5. It must be noted that, especially in his discussions of political events in Germany and Russia, Weber tends to weaken this explanation of the advance of bureaucratization under modern conditions. Not only technical competence, but also the arrogant will to power of bureaucratic elites, is reckoned to be a fundamental source of their expanded control. See, for instance, GPS, pp. 82–3, 140–1, 276, and 31–2, note 1, where, speaking of the 1905 Russian events, Weber refers to the "'enlightened' bureaucracy, which quite naturally looked down scornfully on the 'muddling through' and impractical 'stubbornness,' the 'private interests,' the 'stupidity' and egoism, the 'utopian dreams' of the intelligentsia, the self-governing bodies, the 'cliches' of the Press -- from its point of view, all this continually impeded its promotion of the utilitarian happiness of the people, and thwarted the appropriate respect for authority required by 'reasons of state.'"
11 FMW, pp. 105, 225. Weber here discusses several other examples of these technical imperatives. The bureaucratization of legal procedures in later Rome, he argues, was necessary because of the increasing complexity of both practical legal cases and the increasingly rationalized economy. Similarly, he explains the emergence of machine politics in nineteenth-century England as an effect of the parties' need to win the masses through the technical efficiency of a "tremendous" bureaucratic apparatus that relied (after 1868) on the caucus system.
12 Ibid., pp. 223–4. Thus Weber sees the "irresistible demand" for certificates of education as linked with opportunities for high status and salaried positions within expanding bureaucracies, and not with some disinterested thirst for education or a desire for cultivation and good learning; see, for example, ibid., pp. 240–4, and GPS, pp. 235–6.
15 This was first published in 1900, and translated as The Philosophy of Money (London, 1978); see the critique of Simmel in PE, p. 185, note 2. Weber also wielded this argument against Lujo Brentano's Die Anfänge des modernen Kapitalismus. According
Notes to pp. 34–37

to Weber (PE, p. 198, note 13), Brentano "has thrown every kind of struggle for gain, whether peaceful or warlike, into one pot, and has then set up as the specific criterion of capitalistic (as contrasted, for instance, with feudal) profit-seeking, its acquisitiveness of money (instead of land)."

16 ES, p. 86. Conversely (ES, pp. 100ff.), Weber insists that rational capital accounting of economic activity is impossible in principle if calculations are in kind.

17 PE, p. 58; cf. PE, p. 69.

18 ES, p. 159.

19 FMW, p. 366; PE, p. 181; ES, p. 140.


22 PE, pp. 17, 64.

23 ES, pp. 91ff., 154–5.

24 The capitalist monopoly of the physical means of production, Weber argues (ES, pp. 147–8), was the effect of the complex ensemble of modern developments, including the effective monopolization of money capital by entrepreneurs; the appropriation of product marketing rights (e.g., through the formation of monopoly guilds or through privileges granted by political authorities in return for periodic payments and loans); the subjective disciplining of putting-out system workers by means of entrepreneurial control of the supply of raw materials; and finally, the development of workshops marked by the appropriation of all means of production by capitalistic entrepreneurs.


26 ES, p. 162; cf. "Socialism," p. 201: "A modern factory proprietor does not employ just any worker, just because he might work for a low wage. Rather he puts the man at the machine on piece-wages and says: 'All right, now work, I shall see how much you earn'; and if the man does not prove himself capable of earning a certain minimum wage he is told: 'We are sorry, you are not suited to this occupation, we cannot use you'. He is dismissed because the machine is not working to capacity unless the man in front of it knows how to utilise it fully."

27 PE, p. 22; cf. ES, p. 92.

28 GASS, p. 396; cf. the description of the modern factory (GASS, pp. 224–5), with its "hierarchic authority structure, its discipline, its chaining of the men to the machines, its spatial aggregation and yet isolation of the workers (in comparison with the spinning rooms of the past), its formidable accounting system that reaches down to the simplest hand movement of the worker."

29 ES, p. 137. In only a few passages (e.g., ES, pp. 92, 99–100) does Weber discuss the modern corporations' propensity for bureaucratically manufacturing opportunities for selling the goods they produce. (The consequences and limitations of this corporate, bureaucratic stimulation of wants later became of central concern to Adorno, whose theses are analyzed in Essay 3.)


31 ES, pp. 92, 108, and 93: "Capital accounting in its formally most rational shape... presupposes the battle of man with man."

32 "Socialism," pp. 210, 211.

33 ES, pp. 108, 110, 150–1; "Socialism," pp. 201–2, 209–11. Weber's emphasis on the last-mentioned condition is linked with his belief that it was "the dictatorship of the
official, not that of the worker which, for the present at any rate, is on the advance” (ibid., p. 209).
34 *ES*, p. 162.
35 *PE*, pp. 24; see also *PE*, p. 75; and *FMW*, p. 131.
36 *ES*, pp. 67, 121, 135, 162.
37 Ibid., p. 92.
38 Ibid., p. 64.
39 This point is well emphasized in David Beetham, *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics* (London, 1974).
41 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1969), pp. 110–11. Cf. the later discussions of Carey, Bastiat, and the United States in Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 884–9, and *Capital*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1970), p. 703, where Marx notes that “the power of the State” is “the concentrated and organized force of society.” His typical account of the bourgeois constitutional state as superstructural is analyzed more thoroughly in my “The Legacy of Political Economy: Thinking with and against Claus Offe,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory / Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1978), pp. 50–5. Of course, it should be added that Marx elsewhere pointed to aberrant cases (e.g., the Bonapartist state in France, Bismarck’s Germany, the Asiatic mode of production), where the relatively greater independence of the state to organize the relations of production more actively was seen as resulting from (1) unique territorial and climatic conditions, reinforced by the general absence of private ownership and control of land; (2) the fact that feudal remnants continued to hinder the achievement of bourgeois hegemony; and (3) the failure of one particular class (or class fraction) to attain dominance over the others. These exceptions can be interpreted as anomalies with which classical Marxism never satisfactorily dealt.
42 *MSS*, pp. 70, 188.
43 See Weber’s discussion of Stammler’s incoherently “scientific” refutation of historical materialism, in *Critique of Stammler* (London, 1977) (hereafter cited as *Stammler*).
44 *Stammler*, p. 87.
45 *FMW*, p. 212; *ES*, pp. 1150–6.
46 *FMW*, p. 218.
47 Though the principle and practice of a “law without gaps” was (and still remains) hotly contested, Weber remarks (*FMW*, p. 219) that the early modern legal system more and more came to depend upon the modern judge, who resembles “an automaton into which the files and the costs are thrown in order that it may spill forth the verdict at the bottom along with the reasons, read mechanically from codified paragraphs.”
49 *FMW*, p. 77; cf. *ES*, p. 64, where Weber elaborates Franz Oppenheimer’s distinction between “economic” and “political” means, the latter being understood as synonymous with the direct appropriation of goods by force and with the direct coercion of others by threats (or actual use) of force.
50 See *FMW*, p. 78, where Weber expresses one of his most famous theses: “The state is a relation of humans dominating humans, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e., considered to be legitimate) violence.”
51 Ibid., pp. 97–8.
52 Ibid., p. 108; cf. *ES*, pp. 284–8; and *FMW*, pp. 109–10: “The typical boss is an
Notes to pp. 41-46

absolutely sober man. He does not seek social honor; the ‘professional’ is despised in ‘respectable society.’ He seeks power alone, power as a source of money, but also power for power’s sake... the boss has no firm political ‘principles’; he is completely unprincipled in attitude and asks merely: What will capture votes?"

53 FMW, pp. 102ff. Weber’s criticism of legislatures as “banausic” assemblies incapable of generating political leadership is particularly evident in his last writings (see GPS, p. 488).

54 “Socialism,” p. 197; PE, p. 16.

55 FMW, p. 88.

56 ES, p. 162.

57 GPS, p. 239; ES, p. 920; “Freiburg,” passim.

58 In at least one place (ES, p. 199), Weber does, however, anticipate the possibility of fiscal problems of the modern state. In the event of such problems arising, Weber argued for a form of corporatist rearrangement of state policy making: “One might proceed... in the ‘socialization’ of the capitalistic enterprises of individual branches, by imposing compulsory cartels or combinations with obligations to pay large sums in taxes. Thus they could be made useful for fiscal purposes, while production would continue to be oriented rationally to the price situation.”

59 FMW, p. 208; ES, p. 167.


61 FMW, p. 215; cf. “Socialism,” p. 199, where Weber insists that bureaucratic concentration of tools within all spheres (the factory, the state administration, the army, university faculties) is due in part to the nature of modern tools.

62 FMW, p. 215.

63 ES, p. 223.

64 FMW, p. 215.

65 ES, p. 1394; cf. FMW, pp. 81, 131; and “Socialism,” p. 199.

66 On the background to controversies between the conservative and liberal factions of the Verein für Sozialpolitik see Dieter Lindenlaub, Richtungskämpfe im Verein für Sozialpolitik (1890-1814), 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1967); and Beetham, Max Weber, ch. 1 and pp. 63ff.

67 GASS, p. 415.

68 ES, pp. 85–6, 108.

69 FMW, p. 215.


73 “Freiburg,” p. 441.

74 Cf. Weber’s early inversion of this evolutionist assumption: “Abandon hope all ye who enter here: these words are inscribed above the portals of the unknown future history of humanity” (ibid., p. 437).

75 See, for example, Karl Kautsky, The Labour Revolution (London, 1925); and Lenin’s polemic - directed at “autonomism,” “anarchism,” and bourgeois intellectuals who “accept organizational relations platonically” – in support of the thesis that bureaucracy is “the organizational principle of revolutionary Social Democracy” (“One Step Forward, Two Steps Back,” in Selected Works, vol. 1 [Moscow, 1970], pp. 275–7, 403ff., 430–1).

266
Notes to pp. 47–51

76 ES, pp. 103–7, 110–11.
77 GPS, pp. 474 and 448: "The Communist Manifesto rightly emphasized the economically – not politically – revolutionary character of the project of the bourgeois capitalistic entrepreneurs. No trade union, even less a state socialist functionary, can replace these entrepreneurs and perform this role for us."
78 ES, pp. 110 and 151: "Other things being equal, positive motives for work are, in the absence of direct compulsion, not obstructed to the same extent as they are for unfree labour."
79 Ibid., p. 128.
80 GASS, pp. 407–12.
81 “Socialism,” pp. 197, 214–15; ES, pp. 139 and 148, where Weber notes that, in the contemporary capitalist world, this expansion of an administrative strata was already evident in the restructuring of capitalist enterprises into associations of stockholders.
82 GASS, p. 414.
84 “Socialism,” p. 204; GPS, p. 242. Weber considered that this tendency for state bureaucracy to weaken private economic power was already at work within the period of "high capitalism." Statism was also a decisive characteristic of Rome during its decline: “Bureaucracy stifled private enterprise in Antiquity. There is nothing unusual in this, nothing peculiar to Antiquity. Every bureaucracy tends to intervene in economic matters with the same result. This applies to the bureaucracy of modern Germany too" (Agrarian Sociology, p. 365).
85 "Freiburg," p. 440.
86 PE. For an account of the early polemics (between 1904 and 1910) concerning this thesis, see J. Winckelmann, Max Weber: Die protestantische Ethik II: Kritiken und Antikritiken (Munich, 1968); more recent controversies are analyzed in Gordon Marshall, In Search of the Spirit of Capitalism (London, 1982).
87 PE, p. 36.
89 PE, p. 53; cf. PE, p. 153. Weber elsewhere (ES, p. 100) speaks of a “natural economy [Naturalwirtschaft]” to designate forms of economic life from which money as a medium of exchange is absent, either because there is no exchange at all or because exchange is only by barter.
90 PE, pp. 171, 250, note 152, 263–4, note 22.
91 Ibid., p. 177. Weber is overly ambiguous about the degree and scope of this self-rationalization process. His comment that the "treatment of labor...as a calling became as characteristic of the modern worker as the corresponding attitude toward acquisition of the business man" (ibid., p. 179) seems rather exaggerated. Elsewhere, for example, he proposes (with reference to the squirearchy, the original bearers of "merrie old England") that the elements of an “unspoiled naïve joy of life” remain a crucial aspect of English national character (ibid., pp. 173, 279, note 91).
92 Ibid., p. 176.
93 Ibid., p. 182; cf. ibid., pp. 54, 70–2, 188, note 3.
94 FMW, p. 117; MSS, p. 144.
95 MSS, pp. 134–5, 139.
Notes to pp. 51–56

1969); and the comments on Ringer by Jürgen Habermas in “The Intellectual and Social Background of the German University Crisis,” Minerva, vol. 9, no. 3 (1971), pp. 422–8.


98 MSS, pp. 176 and 55: “Even the knowledge of the most certain proposition of our theoretical sciences — e.g., the exact natural sciences or mathematics, is, like the cultivation and refinement of the conscience, a product of culture.” Weber is not always consistent on this point. See, for example, MSS, p. 160, where it is denied that those natural sciences which take mechanics as their model are conditioned by subjective values.

99 Ibid., pp. 76, 77, 80, 85–6.

100 Ibid., pp. 74, 78–80, 159, 173, and 78: “We seek knowledge of an historical phenomenon, meaning by historical: significant in its individuality (Eigenart).” Particularly in his later writings, Weber modified this singularity postulate. While the ideal-typical quality of all cultural-scientific categories is still insisted upon, cultural-scientific analysis is seen to be concerned with concepts, analogies, and rules of cultural development that are general by virtue of their applicability to the history of not only our own but all civilizations (cf. GAW, p. 265; ES, pp. 19–22; and PE, p. 15).

101 MSS, pp. 74, 81, 125, 175; cf. RK, pp. 154, 157–8, 185–6, 217–18; GAW, p. 332; Stommel, pp. 74–5, 96, 110–11, 139, 148; and ES, pp. 3ff.

102 FMW, p. 143; cf. FMW, pp. 144, 147.

103 MSS, p. 173; cf. MSS, p. 150; Stommel, pp. 88–9, 112–15; “Freiburg,” p. 440; and FMW, p. 132.

104 This special concept of objectivity is frequently misunderstood, usually from a positivistic standpoint, the classic example of which is Theodore Abel, “The Operation Called Verstehen,” American Journal of Sociology, vol. 54 (1948), pp. 211–18.

105 MSS, pp. 110, 150; “Freiburg,” p. 440; FMW, p. 132.

106 MSS, pp. 55, 61, 84, 110–11; cf. FMW, pp. 152 and 153: “No science is absolutely free from presuppositions, and no science can prove its fundamental value to the person who rejects these presuppositions.”


108 FMW, p. 147.

109 MSS, p. 52.

110 Ibid., pp. 53, 54; FMW, p. 152.

111 MSS, pp. 52ff.; FMW, pp. 151–2; “Freiburg,” p. 440.

112 FMW, p. 228.


114 FMW, p. 85.


116 GASS, p. 416; GPS, pp. 169–70 and 152: “I have always viewed not only foreign affairs but all politics solely from a national point of view.” So many interpreters of Weber’s project have missed the significance of this conviction, which owed much to Ranke’s theory of history as a struggle between great powers. This omission is evident in Benjamin Nelson’s account of Weber’s introduction to the Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie (PE, pp. 13–31) as a “master clue” to his larger intentions. Weber is interpreted as a “pioneer in the comparative historical differential sociology of sociocultural process and civilizational complexes” (“Max Weber’s ‘Author’s Introduction’ [1920]: A Master Clue to His Main Aims,” Sociological Inquiry, vol. 44, no. 4

268
Notes to pp. 56–58

[1974], pp. 269–78). The affinity between this interpretation and Parson’s later works is here clear. See, for example, Parsons’s “Comparative Studies and Evolutionary Change,” in I. Vallier (ed.), Comparative Methods in Sociology (Berkeley, Calif., 1971), pp. 97–139. Such interpretations seriously ignore the political context to which Weber addressed his scholarly and political texts—a context in which, among the German middle classes, a militant nationalism informed by Social Darwinist and racist assumptions became increasingly influential (cf. Fritz Stern, The Politics of Cultural Despair [New York, 1961]). These interpretations also ignore and therefore depoliticize Weber’s explicit concern with the need to intervene politically against the threats posed by the general advance of bureaucracy under contemporary conditions. On his defense of the primacy of the principle of the nation-state, his “passionate championship of a German national imperialism,” see Mommsen, Max Weber und die Deutsche Politik, pp. xvi, 40; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, The Age of Bureaucracy (Oxford, 1974), ch. 2; Anthony Giddens, Politics and Sociology in the Thought of Max Weber [London, 1972]; and Ilse Dronberger, The Political Thought of Max Weber (New York, 1971), pp. 116ff. 117 Cf. ES, p. 920: “Every successful imperialist policy of coercing the outside normally—or at least at first—also strengthens the domestic prestige and therewith the power and influence of those classes, status groups, and parties, under whose leadership the success has been attained.”

118 Weber’s defense of the leadership principle is strongly evident in his later writings, particularly those concerning his campaign for a presidential system of government during and after the German winter elections of 1918–19. See, for example, GPS, pp. 472–5, 486–9. His concern with developing a theory of charismatic authority is also expressive of this defense of strong-willed, passionate leadership; see Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “Zum Begriff der ‘plebiszitären Führerdemokratie’ bei Max Weber,” Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, vol. 15 (1963), p. 295–322. 119 FMW, p. 95. This recommendation continuously informs Weber’s critique of the conduct of German domestic and foreign policy prior to and during World War I. This is summarized in GPS, p. 198: “Germany...has the best and most honest officialsdom in the world. The German performance in this war has shown what military discipline and bureaucratic efficiency is capable of. But the frightful failures of German policy have also demonstrated what cannot be achieved through this means.” See also his comparison of the British and German states’ treatment of striking workers under conditions of war in ibid., p. 286. 120 In his earliest writings on the 1905 Russian Revolution (GPS, pp. 76-8), Weber therefore criticized monarchic regimes for their incapacity to generate consistent and genuine leadership in the face of creeping bureaucratization. 121 FMW, pp. 115ff; see also the discussion of the theory of Führerdemokratie in Mommsen, “Zum Begriff der ‘plebiszitären Führerdemokratie’” 122 FMW, p. 117. 123 Max Weber, “Die drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft,” in J. Winckelmann (ed.), Staatssoziologie (Berlin, 1956), p. 110. 124 FMW, p. 127. 125 Ibid., p. 120. 126 Ibid., p. 123. 127 Cf. Reinhard Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait (Garden City, N.Y., 1962), ch. 10. 128 FMW, p. 106. 129 Ibid., p. 103; see also ibid., pp. 104-6, where Weber argues this thesis with respect to the democratization of the franchise in England (and the ensuing bureaucratization...
of party politics, which culminated in Gladstone’s ascent to office). Here Weber followed Ostrogorski’s description in *Democracy and the Organization of Political-Parties* of the growth of the plebiscitarian form in Britain and the United States. It should be noted that on other occasions (e.g., *GPS*, p. 214; *ES*, pp. 1419-20), and especially prior to the revolutionary disturbances of 1918–19, Weber criticized “token Parliamentarism” and proposed (with the British parliamentary model in mind) the strengthening of legislative institutions, in order that they might function as a site of “positive politics,” as an arena for the protection of civil rights and, above all, for the recruitment and training of genuine leaders.


131 *FMW*, p. 107.

132 *MSS*, p. 27.

133 *FMW*, p. 116.


136 *MSS*, pp. 84, 130, 169–70.

137 Ibid., pp. 93, 107, 130, 135, 171, 185; cf. *PE*, pp. 47–8; *FMW*, p. 138; Stammler, p. 73; “Marginal Utility Theory,” p. 34.

138 *GAW*, p. 206; cf. the misleading thesis of Niklas Luhmann (The *Differentiation of Society*, p. 23) that Weber’s theory “with its impressive compactness, cannot be controverted within its own premises.”


140 *MSS*, p. 90; cf. *GAW*, p. 184: “The conceptual boundaries within which the social world can become an object of observation and scientific explanation are impermanent. The presuppositions of the sociocultural sciences remain variable into the indefinite future, at least as long as an Oriental petrification of thinking does not smother the capacity to raise novel questions about the inexhaustible nature of social life.” In respect of their admitted contingency, Weber’s ideal-typical analyses are, strictly speaking, not outside “historical time,” as has been claimed by Mommsen, *The Age of Bureaucracy*, pp. 15, 74, and by J. G. March and Herbert Simon, *Organizations* (New York, 1958), p. 36.

141 *MSS*, p. 78; cf. *MSS*, pp. 82, 157, 159.

142 This point is correctly emphasized by Martin Albrow, *Bureaucracy* (London, 1970), pp. 31, 51.

143 Consider the following statement (*GASW*, p. 277): “According to all available knowledge, the bureaucratization of society will at some point triumph over capitalism, in our civilization just as in ancient civilizations. In our civilization, the ‘anarchy of production’ will eventually also be replaced by an economic and social system analogous to that typical of the late Roman Empire, and especially of the ‘New Kingdom’ in Egypt or of the rule of the Ptolemies.” For a somewhat different view of Weber’s assumptions about historical processes, see Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “Universalgeschichtliches und politisches Denken bei Max Weber,” *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. 201 (1965), pp. 557ff.; and (from the perspective of developmental history) Wolfgang Schluchter, *The Rise of Western Rationalism* (Berkeley, 1981).

144 *FMW*, p. 82; *ES*, p. 194ff.

145 Cf. *PE*, pp. 77–78, where Weber notes (1) that eighteenth-century philosophical
Notes to pp. 61–65

rationalism was most highly developed in geographic regions (e.g., France) where capitalist accumulation processes were considerably retarded, and (2) that the greatest degree of economic rationalization in England took place under conditions in which the great legal corporations retarded the retrieval and deployment of the rationalized Roman law of late antiquity.


147 This claim was often made during the nineteenth century (for example, by J. S. Mill, Considerations on Representative Government [London, 1912], ch. 6), and was subsequently repeated by Harold J. Laski, “Bureaucracy,” in Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (New York, 1930), p. 71, and Michel Crozier, The Bureaucratic Phenomenon (Chicago, 1964), pp. 186ff.

148 ES, pp. 140–1, 201. The restricted development of market capitalism because of the turning of public contributions into privately held benefices or fiefs (as in China and the Near East after the time of the caliphs) and the monopolistic diversion of rational capitalism (as in the royal monopolies and monopolistic concessions of early modern times and the more recent corporate pursuit of short-run, speculative profit) are two cases in point.

149 GPS, pp. 32–3, 82–3, 140–1, 276; FMW, pp. 232–5; GASS, p. 473.


152 ES, p. 1418: “Bureaucracy's supreme power instrument is the transformation of official information into classified material by means of the notorious concept of the 'service secret.' In the last analysis, this is merely a means of protecting the administration against supervision.”

153 FMW, pp. 224, 226; GASS, p. 497; GPS, pp. 254, 277, 466.

154 ES, pp. 983–7; GPS, pp. 256, 279.

155 ES, p. 138; see also FMW, pp. 201, 217, 226, 231; and “Socialism,” p. 194.


158 MSS, p. 27: “Peace’ is nothing more than a change in the form of conflict or in the antagonists or in the objects of conflict, or finally in the chances of selection.”

159 GASS, pp. 155-8. In his capacity as chief disciplinary officer of the military field hospitals in the Heidelberg district during the years 1914–15, Weber also noted the resistance of convalescing soldiers to the tedium and routinization of hospital conditions (see his unofficial report in Marianne Weber, Max Weber: A Biography, ed. Harry Zohn [New York, 1975], pp. 537–50).

160 ES, pp. 202–03.

161 GPS, p. 61; FMW, p. 370.

162 FMW, p. 99; cf. ES, p. 952; and GPS, pp. 197, 227, and (on Bolshevism) 440.

163 FMW, p. 104; cf. FMW, p. 79. Conversely, Weber argued that the masses' proclivity
to irrational identification with leaders should be harnessed and ordered – through, for example, forms of “orderly democracy” (ES, p. 1451) or the discipline provided by trade unions (GPS, p. 293). On the charismatic prophets’ harnessing of the devotion of their followers, see Weber’s Ancient Judaism (New York, 1967).

164 “Socialism,” p. 194; GPS, pp. 260 and 263; “‘Political character’ is cheaper and more acceptable for the wealthy man; no moralizing can change that.”

165 FMW, p. 99.

166 Cf. ibid., pp. 113, 125; and ES, p. 1428. It does not follow from this suggestion, of course, that windbagging, street crowding, mob dictatorship, and “brotherhood ethics” are or ought to be identical with socialist public life.

167 This point is suppressed in Hannah Arendt’s one-sided and pessimistic conclusion that bureaucracy “is a form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act” (On Violence [New York, 1970], p. 81). Concerning the propensity of bureaucratic organizations to strive continually to incorporate and instrumentalize the opposition that it generates, see A. Gehlen, “Bürokratisierung,” Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie, vol. 3 (1950–1), pp. 195–208; Philip Selznick, TVA and the Grass Roots (Berkeley, Calif., 1949), p. 9; Robert Michels, Political Parties (Glencoe, Ill., 1949), pp. 185–9; and Luhmann, The Differentiation of Society, pp. 33–5.


169 MSS, p. 60 (original emphasis); cf. MSS, p. 57.

170 GASS, p. 412.

3. A totally administered society?


5 Adorno insisted (Negative Dialectics [New York, 1973], p. 11) that “no philosophy, not even extreme empiricism, can drag in the facta bruta and present them like cases in anatomy or experiments in physics; no philosophy can paste the particulars into the text as seductive paintings would hoodwink it into believing.”

6 Ibid., p. 5.

7 Minima Moralia, p. 87; in “Der Essay als Form” (pp. 27, 30) Adorno contends that the mode of argumentation of the essay form is critical theory par excellence, a form
of presentation that enhances the "joy of freedom with regard to an issue, a freedom which yields more from that issue than would result if it were coldly compelled into a system of ideas."


9 Foreshadowed by such writings as Georg Simmel's Philosophie des Geldes (Leipzig, 1900), the particularly seminal work in this post-Weberian project is undoubtedly Georg Lukács's "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in Lukács's History and Class Consciousness (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), pp. 88–122. In search of a solution to the "riddle of the commodity structure," Lukács attempted to reformulate the Marxian critique of the capitalist mode of production in light of the Weberian theses on the rationalization of the modern world. Lukács accordingly posited the dominance of the reified commodity form as the key structural problem of capitalist society in both its objective and its subjective aspects. Within this framework of interpretation, the classical antinomies of bourgeois philosophy, such as idealism's dualistic separation of the object and the subject, were seen to be expressive of the inner logic of the commodification process, through which products assumed the appearance of separate objects apparently divorced from their equally reified producers. Expressive of this fetishism of commodities, bourgeois philosophy reifies its object as a fixed and immutable given. This philosophy thereby obfuscates the historical processes through which both production and consciousness come into being. Adorno acknowledges the crucial importance of the theory of reification in "Erpresste Versönung," in Noten zur Literatur, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main, 1961), p. 152.

10 This is apparent from the time of his critical analysis of Kierkegaard, first published as Kierkegaard: Konstruktion des Aesthetischen (Tübingen, 1933). Buck-Morss's The Origin of Negative Dialectics and David Held's Introduction to Critical Theory (London, 1980), ch. 7., incisively show that the conventional observation that the post-1938 work of the Frankfurt Institute broke decisively with the Marxist tradition ignores Adorno's continuing adherence to certain key Marxian themes, an adherence mediated by the problematics raised by Walter Benjamin.


12 According to Marx, only the actual qualities of things have use value (Theories of Surplus Value, vol. 3 [Moscow, 1971], p. 129). These properties or qualities in no way contribute to the phantasmic character of commodities: "The mystical character of commodities does not originate ... in their use-value ... the existence of the things qua commodities, and the value-relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connexion with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom" (Capital, vol. 1, pp. 76–7). This formulation fails to consider those intersubjective, symbolically mediated processes through which objects (and, indeed, human labor power itself) come to be represented as useful in the first place; see Marshall Sahlins, Culture and Practical Reason (Chicago, 1976), esp. ch. 3.

13 Negative Dialectics, p. 154.


16 Adorno, "Is Marx Obsolete?" 5; cf. Theodor W. Adorno, "Anmerkungen zum sozialen Konflikt heute" (1968), in Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, p. 188.

17 Adorno, Minima Moralia, pp. 113–15; cf. Adorno, "Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie," p. 379: "In the market economy the untruth of the class concept remained latent; under monopoly [conditions], it has become as transparent as its truth – the survival