

## CHAPTER 23

# Weberian Theory Today

## *The Public Face*

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A protracted debate has occurred within the social sciences during the last 25 years, particularly in scholarly circles whose primary goal is the elaboration of social theory. The question at stake, “Who among the ‘holy trinity’ of classical theorists will most forcefully propel social analysis into the 21st century?” seems finally to be settled, at least for the foreseeable future. Marx has been consigned by most laypersons and many scholars, perhaps only temporarily, to the same “dustbin of history” he eloquently invoked when criticizing his theoretical forbears or contemporary enemies. The Marxist star was most firmly hitched, properly or not, to the political fortunes of the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc satellites. As they failed to construct a workable communist social order and were dragged unwillingly into the capitalist world system, the relevance of Marxist social analysis seemed, especially to the theoretically uninformed, to have disappeared as quickly as did statues of Stalin and Lenin from the streets of Moscow. Marx’s uniquely astute analysis of how capitalist accumulation occurs on the corporate or global level will likely regain its pertinence during the next major economic downturn. For the inevitable price of uncontrolled global capitalism, environmentally and otherwise, will require a “rethinking” once the current so-called “boom” has exhausted itself, especially in the West, where such “booms” are politically defined for mass consumption. But for now, without a major national government using his name for the purposes of political legitimation, the kind of intellectual supremacy Marx’s ideas enjoyed between the mid-1960s and late 1970s, especially in those countries where social sciences flourish, is difficult to foresee.

The case of Durkheim, of course, is entirely different, since his ideas were never overtly attached to government policies beyond the reach of French pedagogical practices. Yet it is probably fair to say that Durkheim’s most general ideas have so thoroughly saturated analysis common to the social sciences that it is difficult to speak in any tongue but his, especially regarding the related phenomena of deviance, the division of labor, and religious practices. Oddly, though, even given the ubiquity of “the Durkheimian perspective” or “a Durkheimian conceptualization,” his works themselves, when reread carefully, seem increas-

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ingly musty and time-bound. Leading today's novices through *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Durkheim, 1912/1915) or even *Division of Labor* (Durkheim, 1893/1933) with any real hermeneutic care becomes ever more an exercise in identifying antiquated debates and forgotten scholars than is the case even with Marx's work, despite its having been written 30 or 40 years prior to Durkheim's. The latter's pronounced moralism and his dedication to the cause of making civility into a religion (to borrow from Robert Bellah) will always suit certain mindsets and political situations. Yet his role in the postmodern intellectual environment seems more like that of the visiting uncle from deep within the underdeveloped countryside than as a viable family member whose daily advice is prized for its enduring applicability to modern life. Arguments that there is indeed a "postmodern Durkheim," no matter how creatively posed, do little to ward off the suspicion that he truly is of another era. His principal theoretical concerns, it now seems, spoke more immediately to modes of social organization and the worldviews that sprang from them, which have weakened in form and force since World War I, a catastrophe, it should be remembered, that killed not only Durkheim's only son but his own spirit to live. Increasingly, I suspect, his works themselves will assume a role in social analysis not unlike that of Hobbes' (1651/1962) *Leviathan* in political thought: always cited, seldom read.

One therefore could argue with some confidence that it is Weber who remains the towering figure from the classical period, whose work and person continue to inspire endless emulation, commentary, critique, and utility in empirical or "theory-driven" studies, as well as in less lofty forms of published work where normally the names of social theorists seldom appear. His language is quoted, without irony or embarrassment, by everyone from newspaper columnists to philosophers of religion; his principal theoretical and substantive concerns are those that continue to inspire ever-growing bodies of scholarship internationally; his theories and corporeal self seem as much at home in today's cultural and intellectual environment as those of his historical peers do not. There is a distinctly Weberian approach, an almost "Weberian mood," as it pertains to various features of the contemporary social scene for which no apology or second-guessing is required and which still bears as much analytic power as did Marxism only 20 years ago or as Durkheim continues to do when applied to more restricted zones of social life.

I make these somewhat contentious observations not out of vague impressions based on haphazard reading but rather from an "empirical study" of my own devising that has been in process for a decade. Years ago I was asked to answer in book form what then seemed a simple enough question: "To what extent and in what ways does Weber continue to influence contemporary thought and research?" or, to mimic Croce's (1907/1915) wonderful title regarding Hegel in 1907, *What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Theorizing of Max Weber?* What began as a casual study of major sources has become over time an obsessive search for materials that speak in Weberian diction, which examine his own works in homage or critique, or somehow enlarge on themes he introduced during his relatively short professional heyday between 1904 and early 1920. What I have learned from this bibliographical study has proved endlessly interesting, not only because so many of Weber's ideas continue to lead researchers into passionate and diverse courses of study, but also due to what has *not* been pursued owing to his implied or explicit directives. Weber's mind and writings become all the more interesting after one recognizes how his particular viewpoint and language necessarily curtailed study that might otherwise have occurred. (My own study of Weber's difficulty with the "problem of irrationality" is one example among an increasing number that look for and try to repair specifiable lapses in his thinking, few though they may have been; Sica, 1988). Some of his metaphors ("the iron cage" is the most famous) and many concepts, like "charisma," are still

much with us, as are heated arguments over whether, for example, the “Protestant Ethic thesis” applies to historical formations all the way from Korea to Namibia. Yet as with any supremely talented thinker, “lacunae” are almost as informative as the research topics for which he had a ready affinity and left behind detailed analyses. Thus, his forgetfulness, as it were, becomes ours, just as his enthusiasms infect and inform our own.

In a short chapter it is impossible more than to hint at the vast range of scholarly and subscholarly works in English over the last 80 years that clearly bear the Weberian stamp. The bibliography I have assembled currently numbers 3400 published items (nearly all of it in scholarly as opposed to journalistic outlets) and 410 dissertations, plus hundreds of book reviews directly addressing products of “the Weber industry.” There also are 90 individually published English translations of Weber’s own writing, with more appearing all the time. In Germany the monumental collected works in German (the *Gesamtausgabe*) moves slowly toward its eventual goal of publishing 33 thick, annotated volumes of Weber materials, much of it, particularly the letters, currently unknown. Out of this cornucopia, of course, even more and improved translations will surely be made into all the major languages. (Weber has a particularly strong following in Japan, for example.) Although it would be facile, therefore, to summarize under a few simple topic headings everything that is going on today under the Weberian bigtop, there are noticeable tendencies that have differentiated themselves to some extent from those that held the attention of scholars in preceding decades.

Very unlike his peers, Durkheim and Simmel, Weber’s works had not been deemed worthy of attention by English language translators until well into the century. Finally in the 1930s, Weber gained some currency in the anglophone world, but even then he was generally misclassified as an unusually broad-gauged historian of socio-economic change, since only his *General Economic History* (1927) and *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930) were the only extant translations for many years after his death. As is well known, the former work was assembled posthumously from sets of student notes taken in a course called “Outlines of Universal Social and Economic History,” which Weber gave at Munich in the winter term of 1919–1920, materials he never imagined to constitute a finished work. He offered this course due to student demand and to counter the perceived aridity of his previous lectures on “conceptual foundations” of social science (which apparently drove away students en masse) and were later issued as Part One of *Economy and Society* (1968). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930), the much more famous piece, came from revised and augmented versions of two essays Weber published as journal articles in 1904–1905, and the voluminous debates they inspired until about 1910 when Weber publicly retired from the argument. To these materials was added a 1920 introduction written for another purpose, plus a “Forward” by R. H. Tawney, a noted British economic historian. Not until the late 1940s were what became the two warhorses of Weber scholarship available to readers of English, *From Max Weber* (1946) and *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Part I of *Economy and Society*) (1947), which have remained in print continuously ever since. During the 1950s, many more Weber works appeared, most notably his comparative studies of world religions, some of his methodological essays, his sociology of law, and the fragmentary sociology of music.

It was at this point that Reinhard Bendix (1960) published his *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*, a book that more than any other shaped learned opinion across disciplines about Weber’s sociological and political theorizing and served as a surrogate for those thousands of social scientists for whom the original or translated works themselves proved too much of a burden to absorb. Although a few reviewers, like C. Wright Mills, found Bendix’s version of Weber objectionably “bloodless,” for the great majority Bendix’s interpretation became

dogma and remained so until at least the early 1980s when specialist monographs (there are now dozens) and a few full-scale treatments began to appear that were intentionally constructed around more “nuanced” approaches to Weber’s complicated life and work (e.g., Käsler, 1988).

In short, the “Weber industry” has imitated the Dow Jones average during the last 20 years, so that what was still in the 1960s and 1970s a more or less tractable accumulation of scholarship, either generally inspired by Weber’s ideas or directly attentive to his own work, has since then become a mountain too high for any one scholar to climb without losing consciousness. What I want to do in this chapter is give a topographical description of part of this comprehensive, embracing Weberian terrain as seen from an airplane overhead, rather than digging into specific debates at ground level, some of which are so intricate as almost to defy solution (e.g., the precise relationship between Weber’s writings and those of the greatest German writer, Goethe; or how exactly was Weber’s greatest work, *Economy and Society*, constructed into book form after his death; or in what ways does the Protestant Ethic thesis apply to farming communities in Wisconsin in the mid-19th century).

### WEBER AND HIS IMAGE IN TODAY’S POPULAR PRESS

The formerly sharp demarcation between “serious” thought and the discourse of mass media, particularly of the printed form, has lately become blurred at points almost beyond distinction, following closely Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) predictions of 40 years ago. So before attending, however briefly, to the mountain of scholarly contributions that are clearly Weberian in nature, it might be useful to consider, as a micro-case study in the sociology of public knowledge, how Weber’s name and reputation are currently exploited in the mass media. Put another way, why has the descriptor “Weberian” begun to be recognized among ever larger numbers of readers with the same facility that “Freudian” has been known since the 1930s? (I speak here only of English language cultures, since his name has long been better known in Europe for a variety of reasons, partly to do with a different division of labor there between academics and journalists.) It is fair to say that prior to the 1980s or so, his name was scarcely known to journalists, but as the *cadré* of “public intellectuals” or quasi-intellectuals themselves became more widely educated as a group, and as the labor market for their talents pushed them out of universities and into magazine or newspaper production, Weber became not only an historically recognizable and intriguing person, but an icon of sorts.

Probably the most important sign that Weber had crossed from the seminar room into public discourse was his central importance in Allan Bloom’s (1987) *The Closing of the American Mind*, a semi-scholarly polemic that sold in the hundreds of thousands and was serialized in daily newspapers (e.g., the *Kansas City Star*). By using a caricatured argument first put forth by his beloved teacher, Leo Strauss (1953, pp. 36–78), Bloom’s international bestseller argued somewhat preposterously that Nietzsche and Weber, in a combined assault upon so-called “Western cultural values,” had themselves led the “youth movement” of the 1960s down the road of axiological nihilism. This dire development, Bloom argued forcefully, had in turn helped cause a Spengler-like “decline” in civility, educational standards, sexual morality, and associated features of cultural decomposition. This extraordinary contention was widely reported, reproduced, and apparently accepted by numbers of readers whose familiarity with Weber’s own works seemed to go no further than Bloom’s misuse of them.

In another book, while eulogizing Strauss, Bloom observed that “Strauss recognized the

seriousness and nobility of Max Weber's mind, but he showed that he was a derivative thinker, standing somewhere between modern science and Nietzsche, unable to resolve their tensions" (Bloom, 1990, p. 238). There is no room here to investigate the flourishing debate over the strengths and weaknesses of Strauss's rationalist political philosophy. But it is important only to note that the joint effect of Strauss having declared that Weber's thought was "derivative," stranded between scientism and nihilism, plus Bloom's broadcasting this view to the world at large (very few ordinary readers ever having heard of Leo Strauss) established in "popular consciousness" a straw man of Weber, and one that only recently has begun to diminish in the mass media. For the record, Weber never claimed for an instant to be an "original thinker." His modesty, however, did not prevent one of Germany's most original philosophers of the 20th century, Karl Jaspers, from characterizing Weber as "the greatest German of our era" (Jaspers, 1989, p. 31), an epithet that has become famous since he wrote it in 1958. But that aside, if there is any truth to Whitehead's (1938) claim that "In Western literature there are four great thinkers.... These men are Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, and William James" (p. 2), or, as he is often quoted, "Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato," then being "derivative" seems a universal fate. The real question, one could argue, is which writers are "more or less" derivative.

The more important issue is Bloom's charge that Weber's cultural influence has been pernicious, an accusation that still remains in place among literate nontheorists, largely owing to Bloom's posthumous influence and that of his imitators and students. One way of answering Bloom, though too briefly, is to remind his believing readers that Weber never held a brief for a particular set of values, epistemological or otherwise, unless he was writing an explicitly political tract. He simply reported what he uncovered using historical and contemporary data, in the most objective and value-free terms he could muster. And what he saw within Western culture at the fin-de-siècle provoked in him grave forebodings about the future of Europe and all those countries which imitated its general model of social organization. Now needless to say, these misgivings were fully borne out in the 45 years following Weber's unforgettable imagery at the close of the two essays (1904–1905) which became known in English as the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*:

In [Richard] Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the "saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment." But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage.

Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history.... In the field of its highest development, in the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which often actually give it the character of sport.

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise.... For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved." (Weber, 1930, pp. 181–182; for the possible origin of the famous final quotation, see Sica, 1985)

I do not repeat these honored passages from Weber's most quotable book because they are unknown, but because they recently have come under reexamination for reasons Weber would never have imagined. This is one of Weber's charms, if I may put it that way.

He crafted the final paragraphs of his book with a burst of uncharacteristic rhetoric, a flurry of human sentiment, which he normally excluded from his "scientific" writing. The reason his words proved prescient and, if correctly read today, illustrate the inaccuracy of Bloom's charges against Weber (conflated somewhat with Nietzsche) is because his hopes for

human liberation in the 20th century lay not with regimentation and “rationalization processes,” but with their opposite. He never renounced the national-liberal tradition in which he was reared, never underestimated the significance of the nation–state in global politics, or the necessary harshness of *Realpolitik*. But he believed, as did Leo Strauss, that certain, definable human values were preservative of global society and others wholly destructive. The difference between them, and therefore with Bloom, lay in Weber’s highly skeptical view of modernity, in his unwillingness to believe that the machinery of bureaucratized production and government would relinquish its iron grip on well-meaning individuals and allow them to pursue the philosophically virtuous lives that Strauss and Bloom recommended. Weber’s “sin” does not lie in promoting destructive values for the 20th century but in believing that the era of individual righteousness had ended for macrostructural reasons—with the invention of the machinegun, barbed wire, poison gas, and high explosives (my own expression and not Weber’s).

Bloom’s student, friend, and beneficiary, Francis Fukuyama, exploded onto the high-brow popular culture scene in 1992, with *The End of History and the Last Man*, the first of three books that borrowed heavily from “serious” social and political theory and applied these ideas to contemporary concerns. Most recently he addressed the “literate middle class” in one of their favorite organs, *The Atlantic Monthly*, with a cover story designed to encourage Americans who had wearied of the social initiatives begun in the 1960s and now shown, so he claims, to be at the root of today’s major forms of social disorganization (Fukuyama, 1999a). Once again Weber’s name appears in multiple contexts, but usually under the same general theme: the dark, brooding, Germanic presence whose dread of modernity’s apparent direction seems unduly fearsome to more optimistic spirits, like Fukuyama. It is unnecessary to recount the main argument to his first book, or the subsequent two of the series (Fukuyama, 1995, 1999b), other than to say that their general proclamation of “glad tidings” plays very well among victims of a shaken world order, yet would have been given short shrift by Weber, I suspect. The very virtues that Karl Jaspers saw in Weber—incorrigible honesty and acute insight, realism, and a refusal to indulge in mystical escape from painful truths—are missing or highly diluted in books like Fukuyama’s. Part of being a Weberian lies in the responsibility to bear up under the weight of bad news without being rendered helpless by it, and this central ingredient of Weber’s worldview seems always to be lacking in popularizations purporting to solve world problems through inspirational rhetoric. In short, “New Age” philosophy and Weberian thinking are antonymous.

Weber’s name and his image, of the hyperserious, brooding Teuton, are appearing more regularly in the popular press than ever before, according to the data that have come my way. In a *New York Times* review of John Diggins’ (1996) *Max Weber*, the political theorist Alan Ryan concludes his remarks by observing

[The book’s] purpose is an essentially uncomfortable one. It is to get readers to take Weber’s distaste for the brashness, vulgarity and general foolishness of modern democratic societies as seriously as he, John Patrick Diggins, takes it. In that he is rather successful, not in showing that Weber’s distaste was right, but in demonstrating that Weber made a case that needs to be answered—and today, surely, more urgently than ever. (Ryan, 1996, p. 14)

Ryan, as a renowned political philosopher, speaks with considerable authority, while other writers usually refer to Weber (far more often than actually quoting him) to validate some broad generalization they seek to make. But occasionally a truly interesting connection to Weber’s influence is made, as in another recent *Atlantic Monthly* piece about today’s re-evaluation of Confucius: “Zhang Binglin used the cultural–evolutionary theories of Weber and Herbert Spencer to recast Kongzi [“Master Kong,” i.e., Confucius] as a secular quasi-

modern, China's first rationalizer of a superstitious indigenous tradition" (Allen, 1999, p. 83). This quotation manages to include a range of Weberian concerns: the role of the traditional intelligentsia in either promoting or retarding "modernization" ("rationalization") processes, the importance of charisma in a cultural or political leader, and the routine redefinition of cultural heritages in the face of societal evolution. In fact, the author might well have had a difficult time even conceptualizing the quoted sentence without an awareness of the Weberian viewpoint regarding Confucian ethics and its role in Chinese economic history (as explained in Weber, 1951).

Numerous other citations to Weber's ideas or his person have become available in subscholarly publications during the recent past. A few examples might give the general flavor of uses to which the Weberian heritage is now being put, for good or otherwise. Restricting ourselves to the last 3 years, one can find an abundance of references to Weber from the global press, not all of them mere grace notes to a given text's larger theme. Andrew Porter in the *New York Times Book Review*, evaluating a major book by the historian David Landes, observes:

Landes's list of false prophets with misguided diagnoses is long. It includes dependency theorists; the new economic historians, who neglect older findings and dismiss any such thing as the Industrial Revolution; econometricians in pursuit of numbers, however unreal; multiculturalists irrelevantly quibbling over the terminology of European "discovery" of the rest of the world; ethnologists denying that there are grounds for criticizing or detecting weaknesses in another culture. By contrast, he admires the champion of the Protestant ethic Max Weber, and Karl Wittfogel, the outstanding student of what he calls "Oriental despotism." "If we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that cultures makes all the difference," Landes says. (Porter, 1998, p. 15)

This use of Weber, particularly as a polemical weapon, is important in this context since Landes is a distinguished historian (especially of Egyptian economic history and of time-pieces), and the enclaves he is attacking by means of Weber have been for some time in the seat of academic power, especially in the United States. It is instructive that the reviewer is British. That Weber is made out to be "the champion" of the Protestant Ethic, of course, is a distorting simplification, as clearly indicated by the quotation above from the closing pages of that essential book. But his identification with that ever-growing stream of research on the relationship between religious impulses and socioeconomic action in some ways resembles Freud's connection in the "popular mind" with "id, ego, and superego," terms that in his own work are far from crystalline.

Mortimer Zuckerman, Editor-in-Chief of *U.S. News and World Report*, called upon Weber similarly in the context of "Creators of Our Prosperity," a paean to Bill Gates:

However, the predominant view of entrepreneurs is pejorative, and the vocabulary is one of selfishness, greed, and self-interest. As George Gilder has written, it is as if "our wealth springs from some Faustian pact: a deal with the devil by which we gain material benefits in exchange for succumbing to the sin of avarice," while millions of worthy poor go hungry. Such a negative perception goes back a long way. Max Weber commented on it in the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: "A flood of mistrust, sometimes of hatred, above all of moral indignation, regularly opposed itself to the fist innovator." (Zuckerman, 1998, p. 64; quotation is from Weber, 1930, p. 69)

Linking Gilder and Weber falls under the heading of journalistic license, but the quotation from *Protestant Ethic* is a good one and not often seen, even in the scholarly literature. Zuckerman claims that "American capitalism" managed to "confirm Weber's insight" by employing innovative trade practices and invention rather than hiding behind trade tariffs. The fact that this seriously distorts not only the record of American innovation proper, but also Weber's intensely nationalist appreciation for German trade barriers does not detract over-

much from the good use made here of his major ideas. Along with Lester Thurow, Weber is the only scholar named in Zuckerman's strongly worded endorsement of Gates' entrepreneurial "spirit." Thus, when an opinion-maker of high visibility such as Zuckerman chooses to speak of capitalist creativity, he turns without many alternatives (Sombart now being forgotten) to Weber.

This is only one step lower on the intellectual ladder from theologian Michael Novak's apologias for capitalist "ethics," including *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and *Business as a Calling: Work and the Examined Life*, all of them clearly imitating Weber's conceptual lead. As a winner of the lucrative Templeton Prize, Novak became an official spokesperson for what might be called "Christian business practices," if such a phrase were not at base oxymoronic. He, too, often quotes Weber, while trying to legitimate worldwide predatory capitalist practices (e.g., Novak, 1996, pp. 80–81, 119–120). That Weber would almost surely regard Novak's "casuistry"—precisely that right word for Novak's thinking, and one which Weber applied even to himself—as subtle capitalist propaganda does not detract from the fact that without Weber's ideas, writers like Novak would be able to construct a much less coherent argument. The same can be said for a British columnist who begins an op-ed piece in *The Guardian* (London) thus: "Passivity and fatalism used to be regarded as oriental failings by Rudyard Kipling and his like. These characteristics were often attributed, no doubt falsely, to the influence of oriental religions compared with the capitalist-oriented Protestantism celebrated by Max Weber" (Holtham, 1998, p. 17). This smattering of learning is typical in the higher echelons of the British press, once again setting up a straw man to which is attached the label "Max Weber."

A staff writer from the European office of *The Wall Street Journal* took another route down the Weberian linguistic path while reviewing a philosophy book: "... illegitimate application of scientific reasoning tends to shrink our world, to 'disenchant' it, in Max Weber's famous term" (Pollock, 1998). The German term, *Entzauberung*, means literally to remove magic, to "demagicalize," for which "disenchantment" is not a wholly satisfactory translation, particularly given the cultural background to Weber's particular use of the word. Nevertheless, it has become a readily recognizable term in the Weberian language of cultural criticism, though one whose prominence today would probably surprise and annoy Weber, since it seems to make of him an epigone of Nietzsche (reminiscent of Bloom's accusation). Still another Weberianism (if I may coin a term) appears in a review of Daniel P. Moynihan's *Secrecy*: "As noted by historian Richard Gid Powers in his trenchant introduction, Moynihan's most formidable insight (borrowed from Max Weber) is that secrecy is a form of regulation in which bureaucrats hoard secrets like assets" (Kirkus Reviews, 1998). It is interesting that this rather minor point in Weber's definitive analysis of bureaucratic behavior, as intriguing as it is given today's post-Watergate political culture, should be "Moynihan's most formidable insight," apparently rediscovered by the senator 90 years after Weber first made it part of his encompassing theory of organizational functioning. Yet as is so often the case, the anonymous reviewer nodded toward Weber primarily in order to indicate that Moynihan's analysis of Washington's political life is more "serious" and "theoretically grounded" than the run-of-the-mill Washington, DC, memoir.

Within a month of Holtham's piece in *The Guardian*, a columnist for *The Wall Street Journal* made use of still another chestnut from the Weber lexicon:

Death and enemies drive dictators from power, but notable democratic leaders have fallen time and again at the hands of electorates whose gratitude has worn thin under the grind of politics; sociologist Max Weber called this phenomenon "routinization of charisma." Weber held that a leader can keep his job only by repeatedly demonstrating his specialness. (Steinmetz, 1998, p. 1)

It becomes clear, then, that as one proceeds through a range of more or less highbrow organs of mass culture, a briskly formed familiarity with Weber's ideas becomes discernible, as key phrases appear regularly: Protestant Ethic thesis, iron cage of bureaucratized life, transformations of charismatic authority to fit modern politics, and so on. What is lacking, of course, is any contextual or elaborated understanding of what exactly Weber intended by these terms and to which historical configurations he intended them to be applied. Still another gambit, particularly popular since 1989, is to announce that "Max Weber has triumphed over Karl Marx" (MacShane, 1998). Given that during Weber's first year of teaching, he took a class through Marx's *Das Kapital* with painstaking thoroughness, and that his comments on Marx's work were invariably respectful, remarks of this order substitute the crass political symbols "Marx" and "Weber" for the scholars known by the same names.

The most amusing popular use of Weber during 1998 appeared in *The Observer*, where Simon Caulkin (1998) described him under the rubric of the "Guru Guide" of the week, apparently a regular feature of the paper. Scanning the formulaic categories "Age," "Claim to fame," "Biography," "Achievement," and "Said," the busy modern reader can "get the gist" of Weberian theory in only 276 words. One of his alleged "claims to fame" is "co-draughtsman of the constitution of the Weimar Republic," an odd and insupportable remark when the details of the case are studied carefully; in fact, Weber's most cherished ideas and suggestions were jettisoned by the constitution's real author, Hugo Preuss (Mommsen, 1984, pp. 332–389; Halperin, 1946, pp. 154–167). Caulkin (1998, p. 8) admirably captures what I referred to above as "the Weberian mood":

Although Weber is ridiculed [by whom?] for his description of the ideal bureaucracy as "the most rational means of carrying out imperative control over human beings," history has the last, and darker, laugh. Today's call-centres and fast-food outlets do nothing to dispel Weber's thesis of a society increasingly alienated by formal rationality; nor his insight that formal rationality often has irrational consequences (such as the dehumanisation of work). Weber also wrote tellingly about hierarchy, leadership and authority. Neo-Weberians, of which there are many, sometimes suggest that Scott Adams, creator of Dilbert, is their man in disguise.

I do not know any neo-Weberians who have made the connection in print between Dilbert and Weber's theorizing—perhaps because it is too obvious to merit mention—through for years I have indeed pointed to this confluence in my lectures to undergraduates. What is most intriguing about Caulkin's précis of Weber's ideas is that it appears on the "Observer Work Page," presumably for the edification of the busy executive who might want to know the serious background to Dilbert's black humor.

The final entry of popularized Weberianism from 1998 is a brief but dense article in the less ordinary venue, *Management Today*. Borrowing from a 1967 polemic against psychological theory by Arthur Koestler, the author entitles his comment "The Ghost in the Machine." Stuart Crainer quotes lightly from Parsons's 1947 translation of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Part One), arguing that "The man saddled with the reputation of being the founding father of the mechanistic world view is Max Weber." The bureaucratic "machine" was to work efficiently, as Weber described it, and human "needs" (of the kind Marx wrote about) became irrelevant:

But this does not mean that Weber advocated the bureaucratic system. He simply described it. . . . In many ways the bureaucratic world mapped out by Weber is similar to Orwell's 1984: a nightmare scenario rather than a prediction. In some respects, the nightmare has come to pass. Henry Ford echoed many of Weber's thoughts in his faith in strict demarcations and a fervently mechanistic approach to business. Ford preferred science to art. "How come when I want a pair of hands, I get a human being as well?" he lamented. (Crainer, 1998, p. 87)

While linking Orwell and Weber has become a standard ploy among cultural critics, the tie with Ford is less plausible, since his unapologetic, aggressive capitalism shared very little with Weber's humanistic values. Though granting that the machine "metaphor" (here falsely attributed to Weber) now has been replaced with those of "fractals and amoebas—elusive and ever-changing rather than efficient and static," Crainer ends his piece in a way that has become standard fare for journalists who exploit Weber's larger ideas: "Even so, Max Weber remains important.... Weber's bureaucratic model stands as a constant reminder of what could be. Aspects of the bureaucratic model remain alive in many organisations. Weber's world lives on and not only in our nightmares" (Crainer, 1998, p. 87).

Weber's name, often attached to some of his best-known ideas, continued to appear in the mass media dozens of times in 1999 and 2000. There is no room here to analyze carefully even the most provocative samples of this peculiar, relatively new form of transplantation—moving material from texts of the most densely systematic social thought into those that suit the facile needs of everyday journalism. A dozen items from 1999 exhibit an even wider range of usages than those from the preceding year. From the subcontinent, a letter to *The Statesman* quotes Weber's "insightful" *Religion of India* in order to buttress a subtle argument regarding today's caste system (Sarbadhikari, 1999). Another uses Ritzer's "McDonalised thesis," as an extension of Weber's rationalization theory, to explain why modern tourism has become "a version of being at home" (Boddy, 1999). A feature story in *Lingua Franca* characterizes Roberto Unger's recent utopianism as "a fusion of Christian romanticism, Max Weber, and the Marquis de Sade," surely an improbable amalgam, and one that would probably have perplexed even Weber (Press, 1999). At the other extreme, a British historian nominates Weber as an "overrated author" in the *Sunday Telegraph* (London):

It is a sign of a truly overblown reputation when one is referred to rather than actually read. Weber's theory that the industrious culture of capitalism evolved from the ascetic culture of Puritanism is well known. But who has actually waded through the *Protestant Ethic*.... Anyone who bothers will be dismayed by the discrepancy between Weber's huge assertions and the tiny empirical basis on which they rest.... There is no denying that Weber had big ideas. (Ferguson, 1999, p. 15)

This is a standard dismissal, particularly from Catholic writers, but given that no fewer than three new English translations of the *Protestant Ethic* are soon slated for publication, and that serious reanalysis of Weber's "thesis" continues apace, assertions like those of Ferguson's seem futile. In fact, the opposite viewpoint was expressed within several months in *The Daily Telegraph* (London) under the heading "Weber was Right":

Max Weber's theory about the correlation between Protestantism and progress may be discredited by many of your readers (letters, July 3), but it is alive and thriving in South America. During the past two decades, many South Americans have abandoned "Marxist" Catholicism for the unashamedly capitalist fervour of the growing evangelical Protestant churches throughout Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. In Brazil the evangelical Protestants are transforming the urban poor into a new entrepreneurial class. They have formed a separate political group in parliament and are doing for Brazil what Methodism did for Britain during the early stages of the industrial revolution (O'Grady, 1999, p. 25)

The use of Weber's name as a cultural "icon" further illustrates that even for those millions who will never "wade through" the *Protestant Ethic* or *Economy and Society*, his larger ideas—or the popularized surrogates for the actual ideas themselves—somehow "resonate" with today's cultural themes. In one whimsical article, Max Weber is claimed to form a so-called "mondegreen" (i.e., the mishearing of popular song lyrics, slogans, or sayings) for the words "Las Vegas" (Carroll, 1999). In another, serious article from *The New York Times* about software and human thought, the puzzling observation is made that "Academic critics echo the

arguments made by Max Weber and Marshall McLuhan (“the medium is the message”) that form has a critical impact on content” (Zuckerman, 1999, pp. 4–5 of online edition). Linking Weber and McLuhan might be feasible in some contexts, but this instance is ingenuous, first, because the observation attributed to both men is a platitude, and second, because to my knowledge Weber never wrote anything about this general topic. At a higher level, but in the same zone of rhetorical impertinence, a reviewer of a scholarly book about ancient Athens begins with, “To possess the capacity to be amazed by the world, Max Weber wrote, is a prerequisite of all unbiased inquiry. The Classical Athenians had this capacity in abundance ...” (Stace, 1999, p. 3). Here it is enough, so the reviewer apparently believes, to invoke Weber’s name in order to set the correct tone of high seriousness for what follows. With less solemnity, *The Independent* (London) offered this “Thought for the Day”: “The experience of the irrationality of the world has been the driving force of all religious revolution,” attributed to “Max Weber, German sociologist” (*The Independent*, 2000, p. 3). One wonders what the newspaper’s readers made of this decontextualized observation since Weber specialists are still debating its precise meaning.

Weber’s name seems to spark imaginations across the globe, at least in the higher reaches of print journalism, especially as a handy device for grabbing the reader’s attention. Closer to home, a reviewer in *The Washington Post* opens an essay with

It was the roaring ‘90s—the 1690s—and British investors were swept up in a passion for new technologies, emerging markets and new theories of the discounted value of future earnings. Initial public offerings were the rage, new financial derivatives were invented, and ordinary citizens invested as never before. Centuries later, the era’s commercial zeal was even elevated to philosophical heights *by no less* than Max Weber, who declared the robust capitalism of the age an extension of the Enlightenment and evidence of the triumph of rationalism. (Mufson, 1999, p. X06; emphases added)

That this is almost entirely wrong regarding Weber’s ideas—*not* the Enlightenment but the Reformation, not “rationalism” but “rational action”—is beside the point. What matters in this context is that the words “Max Weber” when used in concert have become part of the lingua franca of “civilized discourse,” a shorthand notation covering a range of sociocultural concerns that even a decade ago would not have seemed plausible. When a Scottish journalist writes, “Take away or undervalue these things [cultural values] and we reduce teachers to what Max Weber called specialists without spirit, soulless technicians constructing machines rather than forming persons,” he efficiently situates his argument in a proud polemical lineage against the mediocre and overly rationalized (Reilly, 1999, p. 15). Other recent linkages to Weber were forged regarding the St. Louis Exposition of 1904, which Weber attended (Tolson, 1999), the relationship of Hans Kelsen, the great legal theorist, to Weber as explained by a celebrated German novelist and jurist (Schlink, 1999), and Mother Teresa’s “indefinable quality that Max Weber called charisma” (Johnson, 2000).

During the first part of 2000, Weber has been used even for academic humor: “Refusing to be hemmed in with a ‘career,’ Ralf Gothoni, the Finnish pianist–conductor, echoes Max Weber, the German founder of modern sociology, who once complained, ‘I do not have a field because I am not a donkey’ ” (Binaghi, 2000, p. 24). It seems that Weber’s sentiments are now entering the realm of the apocryphal. Competition between journalists to cite Weber even hints at mild plagiarism, e.g., an editorial from *The Economist* begins “Max Weber once described politics as a struggle between bureaucracy and charisma” (*Economist*, 2000), when from India only 4 weeks later a similar piece opens thus: “Max Weber once described politics as a struggle between charisma and bureaucracy” (Pande, 2000). Other works within the same few months allude to Weber’s distinction in “Politics as a Vocation” between those who live “for

politics” versus “from politics” (Martinez-Saenz, 2000, p. 17), or Weber’s ideas about how historical causality should be established (Mclynn, 2000). In the opening pages of a popular book, *Bobos in Paradise*, about today’s nouveaux riches, the author comments, “Finally, a word about the tone of this book. There aren’t a lot of statistics in these pages. There’s not much theory. Max Weber has nothing to worry about from me” (Brooks, 2000, p. 3). Of all the names Brooks could have chosen to distinguish his chatty social analysis from “theory” proper, Weber’s apparently seemed to him the most austere or authoritative.

The most important recent comparison between Weber and another social analyst has occurred in the British press, where Manuel Castells’ latest, essentially cheery pronouncements about globalization and the internet-driven economy have been pointedly compared to the otherwise unrivaled Weber. For example, “Castells will be ranked by future generations as comparable in breadth and stature to Max Weber or Emile Durkheim” (Taylor, 2000, p. 12), or “[Castells’ book] *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture* [is] a work which, in one admiring view, does for the internet economy what Max Weber’s the *Protestant Ethic* ... did for the industrial age a century. Like Weber, Castells is European.... He is also a social theorist.” The author later wisely observes that “Castell’s internet is also a deeply unsentimental place, as underdeveloped socially as it is overdeveloped technologically. Weber would recognise it at once. Thus it excludes unwanted elements as ruthlessly as it embraces what’s valued” (Caulkin, 2000, p. 9). A comparison of Castells’ work with Weber’s along the lines suggested here will likely be carried out by some enterprising graduate student eventually, but one wonders what exactly such a study would yield. In a way, of course, Castells’ 1000-page “three decker” is precisely not what the “global libertarian hacker culture” needs or wants from its social theorists—to the extent this “culture” (essentially young males) is aware that such work even exists. If Castells is right about the socially “underdeveloped” nature of globalized electronic “culture,” the role of literacy-based social theory of the kind Weber and Durkheim pioneered is thrown entirely into question, in much the same way that classical music has been ousted from the hearts of ordinary people by popular forms ever since World War II. Who can now believe that the Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts of the 1930s and 1940s were then considered “popular culture”? The reason that Caulkin’s premonition about Castells’ eventual status as a rival to Weber in the realm of social theory seems far-fetched has less to do with Castells’ abilities than with the nature of reasoned social analysis in a postliterate, image-driven society. Weber chose from an abundance of texts to analyze and the specific historical groups who tried to live by them. What materials can Castells draw on of comparable intellectual density? And even if they could be shown to exist, to have been created by analogously self-conscious social entities—in ways that resemble the role of Richard Baxter’s or John Calvin’s writings as part of the Protestant transformation of Europe and the United States—where is an audience of the kind who have been studying the *Protestant Ethic* unremittingly for nearly a century?

Last, from the plethora of popular references to Weber, several verge on the absurd: a popular book called *Charisma: Seven Keys to Developing the Magnetism That Leads to Success* (Alessandra, 1998), the advertisement for which reads “Now Tony Alessandra explores the most crucial element in gaining success in every phase of your life. It’s the power, mysterious, unstoppable force called ... *Charisma*.... Breaking down charisma into its key ingredients—the ability to talk, to adapt, to listen, to speak, and to persuade ... Using self-quizzes and power examples of charisma in action, Tony offers you a step-by-step program of ‘charisma basics’.” Presumably Jesus, Confucius, Luther, Mao Zedong, and others of that ilk would have done even better in their “careers” had they studied this book before “deciding” to become charismatic. A full-page magazine ad for a line of bedding called “Charisma”

features a “headshot” of Marilyn Monroe at her most photogenic, with the caption “Some People are Born with Charisma; Others Just Buy It.” The Mendel Group, part of “BioMed Management Systems,” offered online in 1997 something called the “Rationalization Grid,” a term that they copyrighted, that “applies a matrix-based approach to the standard licensing process. Products are selected based on more objective, customized criteria that incorporate rapid screening, classification, and priority ranking of in-licensing candidates based on preset parameters.” The language is ersatz Weberian, but the aim seems to revolve around the selection of medical treatments based on a “multidimensional matrix” of “preset criteria.” But surely the most charming “use” of Weber’s theoretical insight comes from the cattle-breeding industry. In 1998, a bull named Foreplay, at 2345 pounds, with suitable scores on both “Frame” and “Scrotal,” was described as having fathered calves that brought large prices, from \$6,000 to \$22,000 each: “These calves reflect Foreplay’s extreme thickness, moderate frame, whistle front, uncanny style, and *abundance of charisma*. Foreplay has been used successfully on heifers due to the light birth weight of his calves” (SEK Genetics, 1998). Perhaps his owners read Alessandra’s book on “how to become charismatic” to the bull when he was young.

It could be argued, and not facetiously, that the proliferating appearances of Weber’s name and ideas in the printed mass media are much more important as a contribution to “globalization” than is his perennial popularity among academic scholars. It often is claimed that one defining quality of cross-cultural postmodern culture is the breakdown of barriers between regions, religions, and the finer distinctions of quality that previously held sway. If this is true, then one knowing reference to Weber’s ideas, say, about the rationalization process in *The Economist* or *The Washington Post* is surely “worth” a hundred articles in “refereed journals” with readership numbering in the hundreds rather than hundreds of thousands or millions. Though impossible to analyze adequately here, it would seem that this fairly new phenomenon—the “popularization of Weberianism”—will probably itself become a subfield within the “Weber industry” or the sociology of culture in the not too distant future.

### ACADEMIC DIRECTIONS OF WEBERIAN SCHOLARSHIP

A distinction could be made, and probably should be, between so-called “substantive” works that are explicitly inspired by one or another of Weber’s “big ideas” (e.g., the charismatic nature of the “founders” of the American Republic) and theoretically motivated writings that probe, expand upon, or truncate an idea or set of notions which Weber offered the social science community during his most fertile creative period. The comprehensive bibliography I have assembled naturally contains far more works of the former type than of the latter. This is because—as evidenced in the journalistic literature—it has become *de rigueur* for scholars of all kinds to invoke Weber’s concepts in order to lend luster to their work or to clarify a thorny point that crops up in their data that seems otherwise intractable. Yet the number of theorists who have come to know Weber’s work thoroughly enough and with sufficient subtlety to expand upon it, or to clarify some notion of his that appears insufficiently lucid in the original, has remained relatively small. Such so-called “hard-core Weberians,” despite their pedantic tendencies, play a vital role in clarifying the original texts from semiphilological or purely conceptual points of view. Selected works by Roth (2000), Roth and Schluchter (1979), Mommsen (2000), Hennis (1988), Scaff (1989), Kalberg (1994, 1997a), Oakes (1988), or Burger (1976/1987) typify this sort of work, which is as indispensable to a

precise understanding of Weber as it is generally unknown to most other researchers who simply utilize one or another of Weber's ideas as it suits their projects.

Yet Weber's ideas have come to "infect" and affect so many realms of scholarship that it would be difficult even to list them all. To take but one typical example, a serious battle of wits has consumed the energies of historians for some time in trying to ascertain the validity of "the Protestant ethic thesis" (in addition to other Weberian notions) when applied to Colonial and Federalist America. Applications of Weber's ideas within the context of American history are as various as his substantive and theoretical innovations were far-flung. The notable aversion many historians feel for the "merely theoretical" (see Burke, 1992, pp. 1–11, for an enlightened discussion of this condition) has not prevented them from plundering Weber's ideas when it suited them, though it is clear that many more could have strengthened their studies had they known more about his methods and ideas (for an exception, see Jäger, 1991). The uniquely high quality of Weber's theorizing probably reflects the fact that his generalizations always grew directly from contact with historical data and his unswerving desire to solve substantive problems by means of theoretical innovation.

Popular uses of his ideas among historians have included treatments of presidents and other leaders who either exhibited "charisma" (Lincoln, both Roosevelts, Kennedy; see particularly Schwartz, 1987, on Washington, and Schwartz, 2000, on Lincoln) or who lacked this mysterious power over their followers (most of the remaining ones). The church historian, Rudolf Sohm, supplied Weber with a scholarly use of charisma ("gift of grace"), but Weber characteristically broadened it to include forms of political, military, or religious leadership that draw on "irrational" sources of attraction to inflame followers. Hundreds of studies have put to use Weber's explanation of "charismatic domination" (the *locus classicus* for which is in his *Economy and Society*, pp. 1111–1114 and 1141–1142), including those by Lindholm (1990), Spencer (1980), Peacock (1989), and Schweitzer (1984). No one has argued that this relatively small part of Weber's oeuvre can be viewed as an unassailable analytic device, yet its widespread use among historians and other social scientists, even in diluted form, suggests its fundamental strength as a way of interpreting macropolitical events.

The "Protestant ethic thesis" is a perennial favorite with which historians love to do battle, often with carefully documented caveats. The debate has by now occasioned several thousand publications in international scholarship. It is unnecessary to recount Weber's argument here, other than to note that its subtleties are very often missed, perhaps because most of the data are buried in forbidding endnotes that make up over half the printed text. Briefly, he held that in northern Europe, Britain, and the United States, attitudes toward work, savings, and a prohibition against conspicuous consumption (to use Veblen's term, coined in 1900; see Diggins, 1999, pp. 111*ff*, for a comparison of Weber's and Veblen's theories of capitalist development) all conspired to establish fertile ground in which capitalism could flourish. Southern European (hence, Catholic) countries, as well as those in Asia, did not inculcate their citizens with the requisite virtues of thrift, punctuality, rational accounting, and a fear of luxurious living, necessarily attached to ideas of predestination, that Weber identified as essential for capitalist processes and economic organization. It is important to note that Weber did not argue that sharp business practices had never existed, say, in China, India, or Italy. Rather, capital accumulation and rational accounting procedures had never found so suitable an ideological basis as that provided by Reformation theology, much of which can be summarized in the unique German concept of *Beruf* (God-given work).

One need not look very far in American religious texts to find documentation of this attitude. It was well summarized by Thomas Chalkley, an American Quaker:

We not only have Liberty to labour in Moderation, but ... it is our duty so to do. The Farmer, the Tradesman, and the Merchant do not understand by our Lord's doctrine, that they must neglect their Calling, or grow idle in their Business, but must certainly work, and be industrious in their Calling (Tolles, 1948, p. 56)

Needless to say, his arguments about this issue, particularly because he used Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (see *inter alia*, Axelrad, 1978; Bier, 1970), Richard Baxter's devotional literature (see Cooke, 1994), and other familiar writings as hallmarks of "the Protestant ethic," have been scrutinized in extraordinary detail. Not surprisingly, when particular cases have been considered [e.g., the merchants of 17th century Boston (Bailyn, 1955)], what is taken to be Weber's general prescription for capitalist growth has not always held (see Henretta, 1991, pp. 35–70; also Buck, 1993; Johnson, 1971; Kolbenschlag, 1976; for a sharp critique, see Kolko, 1961; for an intriguing extension concerning presidential rhetoric, see Falk, 1980). Part of this is the result of misinterpretation of what Weber actually claimed (for thorough documentation, see Lehmann & Roth, 1993; also Hudson, 1988), and partly it is because even as good as he was in handling historical data, he could not possibly anticipate every "anomalous case" that researchers would subsequently be able to identify, e.g., "The Business Ideology of Benjamin Franklin and Japanese Values of the 18th Century" (Watanabe, 1988).

James Henretta (1991) has examined the Weber thesis carefully in terms of the Colonial American case, and overall finds considerable support for the argument, even if modifications must be made to accommodate peculiarities of place and time. First of all, it is child's play to find quotations from early Americans, especially in Quaker Philadelphia or Puritan Massachusetts, who wrote testaments of faith that clearly support Weber's portrait of the prototypical capitalist "mentality." As Weber put it, dedication to a calling originated in "rational planning of the whole of one's life in accordance with God's will" (Weber, 1930, p. 153). Bailyn had already demonstrated the persuasiveness of Weber's view in an early work, by quoting sources like Joshua Scottow of Boston, who, after moving to Maine, declared in 1691 that mercantile Boston had become "a lost Town ... We must cry out" and admit "our Leanness, our Apostasy" (Bailyn, 1955, pp. 122–123). Scottow knew that unbridled capitalist activity would spell the end of religious devotion, even as devout practices enlarged capitalist fortunes. Perry Miller (1953) and Frederick Tolles (1948) were early students of this phenomenon, and recognized that "the lives of such Puritans and Quakers were not easy, for this religious doctrine created a major tension in their lives" (Henretta, 1991, p. 38). As their fortunes grew, the strain within their religiosity and that of their children naturally began to tell. Existential contradictions of this type were studied by later historians of the phenomenon, such as Foster (1971) and Ziff (1973), and even though certain clarifications of Weber's claims had to be made, the edifice of his argument held.

The most important alteration sprang from the insight that independent entrepreneurial activity generated substantial friction when set opposite the needs of community, a problem that surfaced very early, as most famously documented in *The Apologia of Robert Keayne* (Bailyn, 1965). Keayne, a successful merchant, was punitively fined in 1639 for having practiced what we now call "price-gouging," but his ornate self-defense celebrates the virtues of his business practices as part and parcel of his religious devoutness. Joyce Appleby (1984, 1993), Jack P. Greene (1988), Karl Hertz (1991), Daniel Howe (1972), Rex Lucas (1971), Gary Nash (1984), and Michael Walzer (1963) have elaborated this modification of the Weberian picture, highlighting the economic communalism that was practiced in early American society as opposed to ruthless capitalist practices of the ideal type. Bruce Mann (1980, 1987) extended

this stream of argument from the familiar case of Boston to a Connecticut village, with particular attention to the ways “community norms of equity” controlled profit-making (Henretta, 1991, p. 68). Yet even with all such qualifications duly registered, Henretta summarizes his survey with this observation: “The ambiguities of the ‘Protestant ethic’ carried to New England by John Hull, Joshua Scottow, and John Higginson had achieved a clear definition in the ‘capitalist spirit’ of the founders of Waltham and Lowell, their religious and biological descendants” (Henretta, 1991, p. 70). Thus, considering early American history without utilizing Weber’s ideas seems at this point in scholarly developments almost inconceivable.

A number of tangent scholarly streams can be connected to the Protestant ethic debate. In a recent publication, Dorothy Ross has shown that

Another kind of new history emerged from efforts to use modernization theory as the narrative and analytical spine of American historiography. Modernization theory descends from ideas of liberal progress that have been powerful since the eighteenth century and from the sociological theories of Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber (Ross, 1998, p. 93)

She enlarges the argument by pointing out that modernization theory served broad American political interests during the Cold War as an antidote to revolutionary Marxism, “casting economic development as the prime motor of progress, to which were linked changes in personality and politics . . . it tended to view modernization as an integrated, deterministic process but allowed for failure, particularly through the semiautonomous sphere of politics” (1998, p. 93). Although historians were “wary of it from the start,” modernization theory had a strong impact on American foreign policy and theories of global economic life, much of which owes its fundamental notions to Weber’s work in his magnum opus, *Economy and Society*. Just as an understanding of imperialism as an economic or political policy is impossible to understand with reference to Marx’s work, so too modernization theory must necessarily be tied to Weber’s conceptualization of the global market and the violent struggles that typically occur when “traditional” societies are confronted by those committed to “rational action,” particularly along economic lines. An important contribution to this neo-Weberian research was Robert Wiebe’s (1967) *The Search for Order, 1877–1920*, in which “island communities” were shown over time to be unwillingly amalgamated into a nation-state built on capitalist foundations. Wiebe’s version of what happened undercuts naive views of bureaucratization as being seamless, untroubled processes, for in fact, “separate bureaucracies, barely joined in some areas, openly in conflict elsewhere” were more the norm than the exception as the United States was being shaped into the mid-century powerhouse it later became (Wiebe, 1967, p. 300).

The range of historiography regarding US culture, from its colonial beginnings to its postmodern incarnation, which has benefited from Weber’s ideas, is obviously too broad and deep to canvass here in any detail. But a sense of its scope might be gained by mentioning a few other studies of the sort that now make up the Weberian canon. General statements that highlight Weber’s utility to historiographical method include William Green (1993) and H. Stuart Hughes (1960). Earl Hamilton (1929) long ago used a Weberian perspective in showing how riches plundered from the Americas buttressed capitalist development in Europe. One of many such works, Ronen Shamir (1993) contrasted “formal” versus “substantive” rationalization in American legal history, two Weberian notions that are as central to the history and sociology of law as “charisma” has become to studies of leadership. Fresh additions to this vast literature include those of Kennedy (2000), Marsh (2000), and Joerges (2000). There also is a body of work that connects Weber as a political actor or researcher with actual US

conditions during his lifetime, including Eileen Leonard's (1975) prescient dissertation, and Jonathan Imber's (1996) more recent reflections. The history of political theory and practice in the United States also can be easily linked with Weber's work, e.g., in Stephen Kalberg's (1997b) studies. John King's (1983) *The Iron of Melancholy* illustrates how a more psycho-historical vantage point can be tied fruitfully to old-fashioned concerns with conversion processes and religious activity. Such studies are the tip of an iceberg that has not yet been thoroughly analyzed, either by American historians or by Weber scholars.

In addition to issues of charisma and the Protestant ethic, American historians have been concerned at least since the days of Charles Beard with questions surrounding objectivity in the transmission of historical knowledge. Weber, of course, wrote the seminal works in this regard, delivered as two speeches to large, unsympathetic audiences, "Science as a Vocation" (1917) and "Politics as a Vocation" (1919) (both in *From Max Weber*, 1946, pp. 77–156). His contentious argument insisted that the scholar's job is to tell the truth, no matter what the social costs, and that the politician's is to further the goals of his or her platform, once duly elected. Thus, they cannot be one in the same person, and he who conflates the two roles risks destroying the efficacy of both. Weber's beliefs in this regard have been subjected to endless critique, most recently by Haskell (1998, pp. 15–19, 337–345, *passim*) and Novick (1988). Yet in any analysis of the political uses to which social knowledge is put, Weber's essays form the bedrock of all subsequent discussion. The same can be said—and has been with increasing frequency during the last 30 years—for nearly all Weber's theoretical work in its relation to the most ambitious forms of historical writing and thinking now being carried out, here and abroad.

What this excursus on Weberian inroads into American historiography suggests is this: using my bibliography as a database, one could surely continue along the lines I have begun here, with the rather tidy example of American history, and divide the bulk of empirical or substantive studies into a range of plausible categories. These might include topics such as power, legitimation, cross-cultural assessments of the Protestant ethic thesis, ideal types and related methodological problems, rationalization processes considered historically and comparatively, changes in bureaucratic organization and procedure, the role of the press, the sociology of music, 20th-century German politics, global geopolitics, the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and changes in the nature of charismatic domination after Weber's death, to name a very few. But such an undertaking must await another occasion. Meanwhile, it is enough to observe that Weber's significance seems to grow daily, as scholars attempt to understand the contemporary socioeconomic and political world by means of analytic devices and categories he devised more than 80 years ago.

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