

The political consequences of the moral point of view in Nietzsche and Weber

Tracy B. Strong
University of California, San Diego

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You are ... men of sin, whom destiny ...
has caused to belch you up.

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

It is generally thought that Nietzsche was rather hard on morality. This, however, is misleading. What bothers Nietzsche is what has been called “the moral point of view.”¹ It is not that he thinks we should rob and rape and kill, but that he thinks that the reasons that we (Westerners) have given our selves for not do so are in themselves dangerous. If one thinks in a moral structure after the death of God, one can, Nietzsche argues, justify anything. And the history of the past century (and, alas, this one) tends to confirm that. A conservative estimate gives 155 000 000 deaths in the wars of the twentieth century, 43 000 000 deaths in genocides, 87 000 000 deaths from famine. And we are not counting those maimed in body and in spirit. What used to be thought of as ‘nature’ is increasingly revealed to be understood as a supply dump from which humans may extract what they want. Indeed, we have “cracked nature’s mold.”² The question arises if we are capable of making sense of and engaging these developments. As George Kateb has remarked, it is the morally worst century ever.³

¹ Classically: Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View*

² Shakespeare, King Lear III.2.8

³ George Kateb, *Human Dignity* (Cambridge, MA. Harvard Belknap, 2011), 85.

To pursue this question of morality and politics further, I want here to bring Nietzsche and Weber into exchange with each other on the question of morality. This is not a trivial matter as Nietzsche has often been and still is designated a forerunner and enabler of fascism; the same is true for Weber. The matter is made more complex for in the last two decades the English-language study of Max Weber has been transformed. The new Weber was, I might say, “Nietzschean” in that I read him as responding both epistemologically and politically to Nietzsche. Weber sought to grasp the full significance of his historical thrownness into the world as a western bourgeois without ever seeking to escape from his historical condition. He understood the world to be ultimately chaos that had to be tamed by the person of knowledge; he was a man who had only scorn for those who could not face the moral nihilism of the present “like men”.

But for all the macho daring-do, there is also in this a kind of curious hanging back on Weber’s part:

It is true that the path of human destiny must break on those who gaze upon a portion of it with heartrending dismay. But anyone so affected would do well to keep his small personal commentaries to himself, as one does before the sight of the ocean and the high mountains, unless he knows himself to be called and gifted for an artistic formation or a prophetic claim [*zu künstlerischer Formung oder zu prophetischer Forderung*].”⁴

⁴ See Max Weber’s *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Vol. I (Tübingen. Mohr, 1947) p. 239, hereafter cited as GAR I; “Vorbemerkung”, p. 14. Another English version

Weber is often compared favorably to Nietzsche for precisely this kind of remark. It may be that he was conscious of the dangers to and of western civilization in the fin-de-siècle: but (it is said) he showed a sense of proportion, an “inner distance.”⁵ And indeed, just at the moment that the force and logic of his argument have led him to the space in which the prophetic or artistic voice becomes appropriate, Weber pulls back. The tension here is one we have seen – it is between what his learning has enforced on him and the finding of words sufficient to that understanding. At this moment, and at similar moments at the end of the “Vocation” essays, Weber expresses a caution about saying more, as if anything that he might say would necessarily be wrong, or irresponsible, or misunderstood. His stance seems to be that of one who is not entitled to such speech. If Weber spent his life in part coming to terms not only with Marx but most especially with Nietzsche,⁶ what is it that leads him at junctions like this to be so resistant to sounding like Nietzsche?⁷

Wolfgang Schluchter has explored this topic in a preliminary manner in an essay on the “Wissenschaft als Beruf” address.⁸ It is a central contribution, it seems to me,

can be found in Parsons’ translation of Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 1958b: 29), hereafter cited as PESC. Contrary to the impression Parsons gives, the “Vorbemerkung” is intended as an introduction to the entire GAR, not just to the PESC

⁵ See the interesting essay by David Owen, “Autonomy and “Inner Distance”: a Trace of Nietzsche in Weber”, *History of the Human Sciences* 4(1): 79-91.

⁶ Cf E. Baumgarten, ed. (1964) *Max Weber, Werk und Person*. (Tübingen.: Mohr, 1964), p. 554 and especially Robert Eden, “Weber and Nietzsche: Questioning the Liberation of Social Science from Historicism”, in W. Mommsen and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds) *Max Weber and His Contemporaries*,. London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), pp. 405-21.

⁷ See the remarks in Harvey Goldmann, “The Person in Weberian Social Theory”, in M. Milgate and C. B. Welch (eds) *Critical Issues in Social Thought* (London and San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1989), , pp. 76-94.

⁸ Schluchter, W. (1979) “Value Neutrality and the Ethics of Responsibility”, in G. Roth and W. Schluchter (eds) *Max Weber’s Vision of History*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.), pp. 86-129., esp. pp 65-66.

to understanding the relation and difference between Weber and Nietzsche. I should like to explore it somewhat further in the context closest to it, namely each writer's major "meta-ethical" (dare one use such a term with these men?) writing.

"Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen" and *Zur Genealogie der Moral* are the obvious texts to question here. Nietzsche's presence in the former text has often been remarked on, but there has been, to my knowledge, no real comparison of the two writings, with the partial exception of two pages in Bryan Turner's *For Weber*.⁹

Let me briefly assert here about Nietzsche what I have argued at greater length elsewhere.¹⁰ The *Genealogy of Morals* presents its reader with a picture of the developmental structure of what Nietzsche understands as the moral way of grasping the world. It is not for him the case that morality is bunk, a fake. It is rather (all too) real. After the servile moral way of being in the world made it impossible for the masterly moral way to continue, it came to dominate the world, if only out of lack of opposition. Note that Nietzsche thinks, as did Hegel and Rousseau, that the historical victory is to the weak, to the slaves. Morality is in fact the way that we grasp the world, Nietzsche says, and we will continue to do so for the reasons that we first did. It allows us to make sense of the world; it justifies our position in the world to us (including our unhappinesses). If we did not experience the world morally, Nietzsche asserts, we would run the risk of not experiencing it at all – we lose the selves that we are. We think, Nietzsche suggests, that anything is better than the loss of one's self.

⁹ Bryan Turner, *For Weber* (London. Routledge, 1981), pp 157-158. See also E. Fleischman, "De Weber à Nietzsche," *Archives européennes de la sociologie* (1964) pp. 190-238.

¹⁰ See Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* 3rd edition (Urbana, IL. University of Illinois Press, 2001), chapter eight.

The polemic – he calls the book a *Streitschrift* -- in the *Genealogy* is thus not a facile “morals is bunk” approach. Rather Nietzsche is desperately concerned that in a day and age after the death of God, i.e. in an age in which moral self-justification is even less restrained by a non-human dimension than it has been in the past, humans who approach the world morally will come to justify anything. It is precisely because Socrates had it right - no one does what s/he thinks is evil - that anything will be declared and justified as good.”¹¹

Where does Weber stand in relation to considerations such as these? I want to argue that Weber’s apparent moderation may be more of a source of anxiety to us than appears at first glance.

The article known as “Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen” [“The Economic Ethic of the World Religions,” given in the Gerth and Mills translation as “The Social Psychology of World Religions”] appeared in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft* in separate parts, starting in the year 1915. In this article, Weber sought to explore in the various world religions the “direction giving elements in the mode of life [*Lebensführung*] of various social strata” which have given the practical ethics of those strata their most distinctive elements.¹²

His initial focus appears to be classificatory: Weber identifies the principal strata in six creeds whose styles of life have been at least predominantly decisive for certain religions. Religion, it appears, is a particular type of account that one might give to

¹¹ See Tracy B. Strong, *The Idea of Political Theory* (Notre Dame., University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp 164-167. In relation to Nietzsche more specifically these ideas are developed in my *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (3rd edition) Champaign, IL. University of Illinois Press, 2001), esp. chapters four and eight.

¹² GAR I, p. 239. Another translation is in H. Gerth and C.W. Mills, eds, “The Social Psychology of World Religions,” *From Max Weber* (New York. Oxford, 1958), p. 268.

oneself to explain one's position and being in the world. It is thus quite similar to what Nietzsche means by "morals", which, too, are a particular way of making sense of how one is in the world.

Soon, however, the essay shifts away from its apparent typological approach. Weber speaks increasingly of "development" and of "steps along [a] path." And within a few pages, he has switched his attention to a basic distinction having to do with the approach to the "evaluation of suffering" and the consequent different forms of "legitimation" of "fortune [Glück]". The concern with suffering, it appears, is the key experience that makes Weber's subject-matter religion. The existence of suffering leads to two responses.

First are those who do not suffer, who are "fortunate." Weber distinguishes between the religion of "honor, power, property and health" and suggests that the religion of those with such attributes is "positive". For such individuals religion (or morality) is the account they give to themselves of the world such that their happiness in the world is justified. In contrast, he then asserts that "the paths which lead to the subversion of this stand are complex: they lead to the religious transfiguration of suffering."¹³ Those for whom suffering is so transfigured are said to be "in need of salvation". A "professional organization [*Berufsmässigenbetriebes*]" grows up around the care of souls and in the service of "specifically plebeian motives". Next, "a significant further step along this path was taken when, under the pressure of a typical and ever-recurrent distress, the religiosity of a savior developed itself". This view is itself naturally linked, Weber asserts, to a "rational world-view" which is in turn "not rarely furnished suffering with a positive valuation, something which originally had been quite foreign to it."

¹³ The German here is itself tortuous: "Verschlungener sind dagegen die Wege, welche zur Umkehrung dieses Standpunktes: zur religiösen Verklärung des Leidens also, führen" GAR (I: 242; GM : 271).

It does not take much to see that Weber has here at least partially reproduced the schematic of the first essay in the *Genealogy of Morals*. He has presented two different forms of valuation, suggested that the first “positive one” (which corresponds to Nietzsche’s “master morality”) is relatively simple and that the second (“slave morality for Nietzsche) is not only more “complex” but brings about a transvaluation of suffering. Nietzsche had of course also argued that slave morality was by far the more complex morality and that through “ressentiment” and the activities of the ascetic priests suffering would be transvalued.

This distinction provides the energy for the rest of the essay. Various practices of various religions are used to illustrate the ramifications of this central distinction. The transvaluative or transfigurative mode is associated with “plebeian motives”. The next step is the development of the idea of a savior, and that in turn, Weber indicates, presupposes a “rational world-view.”¹⁴

Weber makes clear that he is elaborating on and to some degree correcting Nietzsche’s analysis when he continues (in a passage simply mistranslated in Gerth and Mills):

The power of this particular configuration of affairs grew greatly because of the increasing need to come up with an ethical “meaning” for the division of fortunes between men along with the growing rationality of this conception of the world. The increasing rationalization of the ethicoreligious understanding and the elimination of the primitive made for

¹⁴ GAR I p. 244 (GM p. 273)

ever greater difficulties for this theodicy. Individual “undeserved” suffering was all-too-common. Good things [*das Beste*] happened all-too-often not to the best but to the bad [*die Schlechten*], not only in terms of a “slave morality” but also in the terms of a masterly stratum.... The development of a rational religious ethic has positive roots in the inner conditions of those social strata that are less valued.¹⁵

Nietzsche’s analysis has been parallel and at this stage Weber makes a key move. Nietzsche too had argued that one of the components of slave morality was to render the world calculable, rational. (If there is salvation, then one knows that if one does such-and-such acts, forgiveness or redemption will be attained: the world makes sense.) Nietzsche additionally suggests at this point (along with Marx and Hegel) that in the struggle between the two world-views the victory is to the slaves. The thirteenth chapter of the first essay of the *Genealogy* sets out the mechanism and the rest of the book is written to a considerable degree as if master morality is no longer a factor.¹⁶

Weber here does allow that “*ressentiment*” (the driving force in Nietzsche’s progression from guilt to bad conscience to ascetic ideals) can play a role. He even allows a role for what Nietzsche would call “ascetic priests”, those for whom the energy of *ressentiment* has provided a means to “control and direct masses of people.”¹⁷ But all this is only true along side of “other factors”.

¹⁵ GAR I pp. 246, 248. The translation in GM pp 275-6 hides the reference to the categories of the Genealogy of Morals (“masterly” and “slave morality”) and leaves out “the elimination of.”

¹⁶ See my discussion in XXX in Christa Davis Acampora, ed. Nietzsche’s ‘On the Genealogy of Morals’

¹⁷ GAR I p. 248 (GM p. 277)

So: no apparently single factor explanation will be permitted by Weber, but at the same time he will indicate that there might be a common element to apparently very different forms of behavior. Weber's basic move here seems intended to complicate the Nietzschean categories as to make them disappear under the accumulation of historical specifics. For instance, a veritable litany of different desires for salvation appears. Nine sequential sentences start with "One could wish to be saved from ..." and the conclusion first appears to be that there are many more varieties of hope for redemption, still uncharted. However, having said this, Weber reasserts the actuality of a general stand: all of the desires for salvation derive from the experience of the "senseless"; and all of them imply a demand that the world should "somehow be a meaningful cosmos."¹⁸

Thus far the parallels with the *Genealogy* remain strong. Both Nietzsche and Weber find the origins of morality/religion in the inability of people not to make sense of the world. Morality/religion show themselves in several different forms as a way of making the world make sense.¹⁹ Here, however, Weber begins to diverge from the thrust of Nietzsche's essay. Whereas Nietzsche takes up the question of what happens when the will to truth (to make sense of the world) becomes conscious of itself (i.e. after the death of God), eventually to conclude that we are without logical recourse against our condition, Weber suggests that it is the nature of religions to produce stratification and strata differentiation:

¹⁸ GAR I pp. 252-3 (GM pp. 280-1)

¹⁹ See my Friedrich Nietzsche and the politics of Transfiguration, chapter ten

The important fact of experience of the unequal religious qualifications of individuals stands for us right at and as the beginning of the history of religions.... From this there develops in all intensive religions a tendency towards a kind of status stratification.²⁰

Weber finds himself caught. In the name of historical intellectual honesty, he finds it necessary to correct the thrust of Nietzsche's essay, an essay he himself has called "brilliant [*glänzend*]". At the same time he is caught up in the torrent unleashed by Nietzsche's polemic. Each time he uses the word "nevertheless" it is a sign both of his being swept along and of his perceived need to resist the consequences of Nietzsche's grasp of the world.²¹

Weber, however, is determined to resist Nietzsche's final conclusion that the logic of the moral realm is that one would rather "will the void, than be void of will"²² (that is, to instantiate nihilism). In order to make it possible for value to be (re)introduced into the world, Weber now takes the argument in a new direction. This new direction rests on the centrality that the analysis of redemption has accorded to rationality and to the progressive rationalization and disenchantment of the world.

Weber wants to make use of the energy behind the desire for redemption. Nietzsche, on the other hand, at the same point of his analysis devoted an entire chapter of *Zarathustra* to the demonstration that the idea of redemption was something to be *moved away from*.²³ The motivation of the whole thrust of the rest of Weber's essay is to move religion and religious energy as much as possible *into the world*, or more accurately, to show that religion can be moved into the world and, with Protestantism,

²⁰ GAR I, p. 259 (GM p. 287)

²¹ Robert Eden, starting from an analysis of *Beyond Good and Evil* and the *Vocation* essays has arrived at a conclusion similar to this one. See Eden, op. cit and Robert Eden, *Political Leadership and Nihilism: A Study of Weber and Nietzsche* (Gainesville, FL. University of Florida Presses, 1984)

²² "Das Nichts willen, als nicht willen." This is the last line of the *Genealogy of Morals*.

²³ See the detailed analysis in Strong, op cit, chapter eight.

has been so moved. In this manner, Weber anticipates and informs Carl Schmitt's "political theology."

This motivation, in fact, controls all of the *Religionssoziologie*:

The son of the modern European civilization [*Kulturwelt*] will unavoidably and properly handle questions of universal history by asking himself the following: which concatenation of circumstances has led to the fact that precisely and only in the world of the West have appeared cultural phenomena which - at least we like to think - lie in a pattern of development which has universal meaning and value.²⁴

Each of the major studies of different religions comes back to the point in this paragraph. How and to what degree do developments in that religion lie in a pattern which has universal meaning? The logic of the sociology of religion, both in the text that we have been considering and in the long section of *Economy and Society* devoted to this topic, moves from "religious needs" to a consideration of the secular realm. Thus at the end of the "Economic Ethic" essay, Weber asserts that we are to be interested in religions insofar as they are "related to economic rationalism."²⁵ And he proceeds rapidly to introduce the basic forms of legitimate authority and to discuss them in terms familiar from several other places in his work. In fact, the words "religion" and "religious" do not appear in the last five pages of the essay at all, and appear only once (in a discussion of traditionalism) after the discussions of charisma and rational-legal authority are introduced.

²⁴ GAR I, p. 1. Different wording appears in the Parsons' translation of PESC. See note X

²⁵ GAR I, p. 265 (GM 293)

What has happened? I can only point to an answer but it must contain something like the following. Weber, no less than Nietzsche, sees humans as historical beings. The central characteristic of western humans (and he thinks this characteristic is increasingly universal to all humans) is that they live in a disenchanted, rationalized world. The analysis of this world - sketched out in the "Economic Ethic" essay and elaborated throughout his work - is thus a coming-to-know of ourselves, an acknowledgment of the kinds of beings that we are.

What do we find? We find that we are creatures who live under the conditions of the general rationalization of social relationships, what he calls "the bureaucratization of all forms of domination". In general - this is the conclusion of the two "Vocation" essays - there is no alternative but to accept this lot and take it upon ourselves. It is the destiny the sea has tossed up.

Bureaucracy, argues Weber, is a situation in which "obedience is thus given to norms rather than to the person."²⁶ (We had seen above the transformation in the sense of what it means to be a person). Bureaucracy is the form of authoritatively legitimacy entitled obedience that is due to and rests on norms rather than persons. It is thus a form of domination in which commands are linked not to human beings but rather to abstract and nonpersonal entities. There is "'objective' discharge of business ... according to calculable rules and 'without regard for persons.'"²⁷

In this, bureaucracy is set by Weber in opposition to the political, for politics, Weber says, "means conflict," that is a relation between *persons* and not between roles. "Bureaucracy," Weber suggests, "failed completely whenever it was expected to deal with political problems." The two forms

²⁶ WG 612/ES 954: Der Gehorsam wird den Regeln, nicht der Person geleistet

²⁷ WG 661/ES 975: »Sachliche« Erledigung bedeutet in diesem Fall in erster Linie Erledigung »ohne Ansehen der Person« nach berechenbaren Regeln.

are "inherently alien" to each other.²⁸ In part this seems to be because bureaucracy effaces or disguises the fact that there is ruling going on at all. Officials, even at the highest level, tend, says Weber, to think of themselves merely as the first official of their enterprise. Rules replace ruling and "it is decisive for the modern loyalty to an office that in the pure type, it does not establish a relationship to a person ... but rather is devoted to impersonal and functional purposes."²⁹ Here Weber attaches himself again to Nietzsche and to the latter's anxieties about "all herd and no shepherd."³⁰

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Politics and demagification

There are, however, political consequences for both individual and society when the procedures of bureaucratized domination supplant the choices of politics. This transformation diminishes what Weber sees as the presence of the political. Weber argues that to the degree that elections (through some kind of voting, e.g., a plebiscite) plays no major role in the structuring of an organization, then that organization will more easily tend to rationalize its procedures, i.e., to make them rule-governed. In fact, over the long term, bureaucratic organization must devalue any power obtained through election, since that tends to lessen the claim to rational competence.

Weber writes:

[T]he "separation" of the worker from the material means of production, destruction, administration, academic research [i.e. soldiers, civil servants, assistant professors] and finance in

²⁸ "Parliament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland," GPS 329n1, 351/ ES 1399, 1417. Henceforth PG.

²⁹ WG 652/ES 959: Für den spezifischen Charakter der modernen Amtstreue ist entscheidend, daß sie, beim reinen Typus, nicht ... eine Beziehung zu einer Person ... herstellt, sondern, daß sie einem unpersönlichen sachlichen Zweck gilt.

³⁰ See my discussion in Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration, chapter 7 and Alexander Nehamas, Nietzsche: Life as Literature (Harvard UP, 1988)

general is the common basis of the modern state, in its political, cultural and military sphere, and of 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 equally typical of all those organizations; its existence and function are inseparably cause and effect of this concentration of the means of operation. ... Increasing public ownership in the economic sphere today unavoidably means increasing bureaucratization.³¹

A deadly process is initiated. Alienation encourages bureaucratization encourages the sense of autonomy. Socialism would only lead to more bureaucracy. To the degree that rational competence becomes a basis for social organization, the introduction of anything new to that framework (i.e., not legitimated in terms of that framework) will necessarily have to come from beyond that organization. Given bureaucracy, the political problem is to find the sources of the new, sources that must come from outside the rationalized structure.³² And for this the institutional structures in Germany were severely lacking. "The decisive question," Weber proclaims in *Parliament and Governance in a Reconstructed Germany*, "about the future of Germany's political order must be: How can parliament be made fit to

³¹ PG PS 322/- ES 1394: [d]ie »Trennung« des Arbeiters von den sachlichen Betriebsmitteln: den Produktionsmitteln in der Wirtschaft, den Kriegsmitteln im Heer, den sachlichen Verwaltungsmitteln in der öffentlichen Verwaltung, den Geldmitteln bei ihnen allen, den Forschungsmitteln im Universitätsinstitut und Laboratorium, ist dem modernen macht- und kulturpolitischen und militärischen Staatsbetrieb und der kapitalistischen Privatwirtschaft als entscheidende Grundlage gemeinsam. Beide Male liegt die Verfügung über diese Mittel in den Händen derjenigen Gewalt, welcher jener Apparat der Bürokratie ... direkt gehorcht oder auf Anrufen zur Verfügung steht, der allen jenen Gebilden gleichmäßig charakteristisch und dessen Existenz und Funktion als Ursache wie als Wirkung mit jener »Konzentration der sachlichen Betriebsmittel« untrennbar verknüpft, vielmehr: deren Form ist. Zunehmende »Sozialisierung« bedeutet heute unvermeidlich zugleich zunehmende Bürokratisierung.

³² ES 961. See the discussion by Erik Olin Wright, "To Control or to Smash the Bureaucracy: Weber and Lenin on Politics, the State and Bureaucracy," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol 19 (1974-75), pp. 69-108, esp pp 70f. Wright, however, focuses too much on a liberal-revolutionary dichotomy.

govern?"³³ The reason this is now the central problem, he argues, is that "Bismarck had dishabituated [Germany] from worrying about public affairs... [and] the nation [had] permitted itself to be talked into accepting something ... which in truth amounted to the unchecked rule of the bureaucracy."³⁴ It is a matter of recruitment: since the "essence of politics is... struggle, the recruitment of allies and of a voluntary following," it is impossible to get training in this difficult art "under the career system of the *Obrigkeitsstaat* [the administrative state]."³⁵

For Weber, over the long run, rationalization of social relationships runs counter to all forms of *political* democracy. At first, he allows, political democratization tends to increase and enhance social rationalization, for it encourages the notion that all individuals are to be treated on the same basis. But political decision-making procedures, he insists, are ultimately non-rational. The tendency to rationalization, therefore, will be to reduce the importance of procedures such as voting in face of more thoroughly rationalized and rule-governed processes. To the degree that this happens, specifically "human" solutions (ones that involve persons and thus rest on ultimately non-rational choices) will be increasingly devalued.

They will be attacked on the grounds that they are irrational, or non-rational, means to an end. The attack, however, will also be an attack on the idea that the means for social policies should be human means. Rules which make, or appear to make a claim to universality, in effect deny the historical and human quality of decisions and policies. Weber writes:

³³ ES 1426

³⁴ PS 347/ES 1413: Unter Bismarck der eigenen Sorge um die öffentlichen Angelegenheiten, speziell die auswärtige Politik, entwöhnt, ließ sich die Nation infolgedessen etwas als »monarchische Regierung« aufschwätzen, was in Wahrheit nur die Unkontrolliertheit einer reinen Beamtenherrschaft bedeutete, innerhalb deren, wenn sie unter sich gelassen wird, politische Führerqualitäten noch nie und nirgends in aller Welt geboren und in die Höhe gekommen sind.

³⁵ PS 347/ES 1414: Sondern das Wesen aller Politik ist, wie noch oft zu betonen sein wird: Kampf, Werbung von Bundesgenossen und von freiwilliger Gefolgschaft, — und dazu, sich in dieser schweren Kunst zu üben, bietet die Amtslaufbahn des Obrigkeitsstaats nun einmal keinerlei Gelegenheit.

It is decisive for the specific nature of modern loyalty to an office, that, in the pure type, it does not establish a relation to a person, like a vassal's or disciple's faith in feudal or patrimonial relations of authority. Modern loyalty is devoted to an impersonal functional purpose.³⁶

For Weber there is a real danger that persons and thus the nonrational – magic -- will be eliminated from the modern world.

Specialists without Spirit ...

One should note at this point, however, that Weber is caught in a paradox. The historical nature of human beings in the present is to increasingly be without an historical nature. Before exploring his approach to this paradox, a number of additional factors which complicate the world even more must be examined.

In relation to the conduct of political and social life, the entire quality of human relations is affected by the rationalization of society. Weber notes that rationalization tends to promote situations where business is discharged according to calculable rules and without regard for "persons." Furthermore, the notion of legitimacy that corresponds to this pattern of authority tends to reinforce it in the minds of those subject to it. We think, for instance, that there is something wrong, unjust, if an individual waiting to pay his or her bill at the cashier's is given either special treatment or denied equal treatment because of race, sex, religion or social origin. In this case, the person would have been treated in terms of his or her particular characteristics, i.e. not in terms of universal categories. Even one hundred years ago in the West, this would not have been so widely the case. What we want is for

³⁶ WG 652/ ES 961: Für den spezifischen Charakter der modernen Amtstreue ist entscheidend, daß sie, beim reinen Typus, nicht — wie z.B. im feudalen öder patrimonialen Herrschaftsverhältnis — eine Beziehung zu einer Person nach Art der Vasallen- oder Jüngertreue herstellt, sondern, daß sie einem unpersönlichen sachlichen Zweck gilt.

everyone to be treated the same -- there *are* attractive things about bureaucracy and the rationalized pattern of authority and one of them is that it makes situations predictable and hence controlled.

These processes extend themselves into other realms. The discharge of business without regard for persons --*sine ira et studio* -- is "also the watchword of the market place and, in general, of all pursuits of naked economic interests." Hence the bureaucratization of society means in fact the domination of those classes (defined in purely economic terms here) that will profit from the market, i.e., of the rich. Weber continues explicitly:

If the principle of the free market is not at the same time restricted, [this] means the universal domination of the 'class situation.'³⁷

Bureaucratization, in other words, tends to encourage the domination of the market over politics, or, more precisely, over what is left of politics.

A Marxist analysis might have said that the domination of the politics over markets encourages bureaucratization. Weber and Marx see the same things, but as they arrive at his their diagnoses from very different paths their conclusions were correspondingly different. In particular, Weber does not understand class consciousness as resulting from the obvious domination of politics by economics. Rather, he argues, no common consciousness is formed. By eliminating persons, and replacing them with roles, there is no need for a common consciousness. "Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it is 'dehumanized', the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, and in particular all irrational and emotional elements which escape

³⁷ WG 661/ ES 975: wenn das Prinzip der Marktfreiheit nicht gleichzeitig eingeschränkt wird, die Universalherrschaft der »Klassenlage«.

calculation. This is appraised as its special virtue by capitalism."³⁸ The word for "dehumanized" is "entmenschlicht" which also carries the sense of "brutalize."

Bureaucracy is thus the front of a great historical process of rationalization that has as its consequence the increasing destruction of affective or status relations between individuals and the progressive domination of the economic over the political.³⁹ The bureaucrat is in fact the vanguard of history, implicitly a participant in a vast revolutionary process that has totally transformed all relationships. Weber sketches this out in the last pages of the "Bureaucracy" section of *Economy and Society*. The democratic ethos is tied in with specific substantive questions (on rights, for example) that are not a necessary part of a rational legal system.⁴⁰ As a rational legal system is instrumentally oriented, it can make use of "rights" and so forth, but rights are clearly only instruments to its instrumentality. In fact, Weber claims, instrumentality has become the world historical *Zweck* for the West.⁴¹ Where there arises a conflict between the substantive parts of the democratic ethos -- treating an individual not only fairly, but with dignity, for example -- there also arises an incompatibility between bureaucratic procedures and democracy. This incompatibility will most especially be of importance to those in the lower classes, since by what we noted above, they will be increasingly subject to those who have money, to those classes, that is, who will naturally come to dominate the bureaucracy.

This is a little known part of Weber, where although in no ways "Marxist," he deals with the same constellation of circumstances as does Marx. He writes:

³⁸ WG 662/ES 975: Ihre spezifische, dem Kapitalismus willkommene, Eigenart entwickelt sie um so vollkommener, je mehr sie sich »entmenschlicht«, je vollkommener, heißt das hier, ihr die spezifische Eigenschaft, welche ihr als Tugend nachgerühmt wird, die Ausschaltung von Liebe, Haß und allen rein persönlichen, überhaupt aller irrationalen, dem Kalkül sich entziehenden, Empfindungselementen aus der Erledigung der Amtsgeschäfte gelingt.

³⁹ See here Karl Löwith, "Marx und Weber," *Gesammelte Abhandlungen. Zur Kritik der geschichtlichen Existenz* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960), pp 1-3.

⁴⁰ See here Max Weber, *The Religion of China* (New York, 1968), pp. 226-249

⁴¹ See the beginning of PESC.

In particular, the propertyless masses especially are not served by the formal 'equality before the law' and the 'calculable' adjudication and administration demanded by bourgeois interests.⁴²

Thus for Weber, those who suffer under the bureaucracy the most from the historical process *are the working classes*.

This is in fact a far more complex than most standard arguments about the "rise of mass society." It is a mistake to see Weber's position as noting with a sad grey regret the decline of the aristocracy and the rise of the plebs and faceless anonymity. He is rather reasserting an argument that he had made elsewhere against Gustav Schmoller, Wilhelm Roscher and others,⁴³ to the effect that although it is in the nature of the bureaucracy to be "neutral" and instrumental, it is not and cannot be the practice of the bureaucracy to so remain. In fact, Weber argues that the practice of bureaucratic domination goes "hand in hand with the concentration of the material means of management in the hand of the master,"⁴⁴ and that this process occurs in both business and public organizations.

This is the central development of modern society. As Robert Eden has pointed out,⁴⁵ to live by the division of labor as a member of the bureaucracy is to partake of the most widespread revolutionary process in the world. Marx had argued in the *Communist Manifesto* that it was in the nature and to the glory of the bourgeoisie that it wipe out all structures that threatened to become permanent. "All that is

⁴² WG 664/ES 980; see WG 671ff/ES 990ff.: Insbesondere ist den besitzlosen Massen mit einer formalen »Rechtsgleichheit« und einer »kalkulierbaren« Rechtsfindung und Verwaltung, wie sie die »bürgerlichen« Interessen fordern, nicht gedient.

⁴³ See Manfred Schön, "Gustav Schmoller and Max Weber," in Mommsen and Osterhammel, op. cit.; and Guy Oakes, "Introduction," *Roscher/Knies* (Free Press, 19)

⁴⁴ WG 677/ES 980: Hinter allen Erörterungen der Gegenwart um die Grundlagen des Bildungswesens steckt an irgendeiner entscheidenden Stelle der durch das unaufhaltsame Umsichgreifen der Bürokratisierung aller öffentlichen und privaten Herrschaftsbeziehungen und durch die stets zunehmende Bedeutung des Fachwissens bedingte, in alle intimsten Kulturfragen eingehende Kampf des »Fachmenschen«-Typus gegen das alte »Kulturmenschentum«.

⁴⁵ Robert Eden, *Political Leadership and Nihilism* (Gainesville, 1984).

solid melts into thin air," he wrote, signifying by that that the Faustian urge of the bourgeoisie would tolerate nothing to remain in the form it was in, neither human relations nor commodities.⁴⁶ Weber's vision is a cousin to Marx's, but with real family differences. It is also true for him that bourgeois society, as expressed socially in rationalized structures, tends to eliminate anything that is solid. But the "solids" that melt -- love, friendship, passion, hatred, marriage, honor, and so forth -- are specifically *human* relations, not just those of the stages prior to the full realization of the bourgeoisie. For Weber, the bureaucracy leaves nothing as it was and transforms previous orders into its own rational vision. To be a bureaucrat is not only not to be a person, but to participate in a world historical transformation of the world, far more extensive than any that particular political groups or parties could advocate. Bureaucrats are the locomotive of the train of historical rationalism, destroying all other structures of domination. This is the struggle between the "specialist" type of man and the "cultivated man." The former is in the process of replacing the latter.⁴⁷

Rationalization and bureaucratization are ensured both an objective and a subjective basis of perpetuation. As Weber remarks at the end of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*:

The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so.
For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into
everyday life, and began to dominate world morality, it did its
part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic
order.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See the discussion of this passage from the Manifesto in Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Thin Air: The Experience of Modernity*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), chapter one.

⁴⁷ ES 1002

⁴⁸ PESCS p. 181.

In such conditions, ruling is impossible without a bureaucracy.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Weber tells us, since bureaucracy bears no necessary relation to any given political economic system, the drive towards perpetuation will take place under both socialist and capitalist states.⁵⁰

Weber implies, indeed *asserts*, that under no foreseeable conditions will life in other than a rationalized society henceforth be possible. Here his attitude towards the division of labor is importantly different from that of his other two great social scientist contemporaries, Marx and Durkheim. The dream of doing away with an enforced division of labor that had attracted Marx as well as the utopian socialist seems to Weber a pointless dream. There was no hope for what Lenin was at about the same period to foresee, the slow re-emergence of "the elementary rules of social life that have been known for centuries."⁵¹ We live rather, in the image made famous at the end of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in an "iron cage," or in a better translation, a "steel box" (*stahlhartes Gehäuse*) outside of which there is nothing we can see.

Nor does Weber think, as did Emile Durkheim, that the social division of labor is necessary because society and justice are found upon it.⁵² Rather, Weber thinks, as does Marx, that the historical process and not the functional basis of society is the most important thing to look at in understanding the human world. Weber thinks that rationalization -- a form of theodicy -- is the force which is the animation of history and that no one has a choice, if they are honest with themselves, but to acknowledge themselves as a subject of that force. Thus, what Marx had seen as the source of our alienation -- the socially forced and necessary division of labor -- is in fact for Weber the fundamental

⁴⁹ ES 990; cf Mommsen, *Max Weber und die deutsche Politik*, pp 97, 121 (first edition)

⁵⁰ ES 988

⁵¹ V.I. Lenin, "State and Revolution," in *Selected Works*, vol. 1, part 1 (Moscow Foreign Languages, 1950), p. 74

⁵² See the letters from Marcel Mauss cited in Raymond Aron, *Memoires. 50 ans de reflexions* (Paris. Juillard, 1983), p. 71.

precondition and characteristic of our life.⁵³ It is still "alienation" for Weber, but with the difference that there is nothing else to in fact be alienated from. Thus we can no more live without the division of labor implied by bureaucracy than we can get off the track of history.⁵⁴

There is no way around this problem. The inevitability of bureaucracy has nothing to do with its power or potential power. Indeed, Weber wrote to his friend and student Michels in November, 1906, that "indispensability in the economic process means nothing, absolutely nothing in the power position and power chances of the class."⁵⁵ The importance of the bureaucracy derives solely from the fact that it comes to structure alterations in its own image and the ruler, Weber says, is helpless unless "he finds support in Parliament," that is from an outside and non-rational source.

We have been examining the historical characteristics of the world that govern the significance we can attribute to cultural phenomena. How then do beings such as those described above -- ourselves -- understand the world while fully acknowledging their position in it?

Weber's analysis of the social and economic conditions of advanced industrial societies and of Germany in particular had indicated, first, that an increasingly large group of people will suffer economically under the structural developments in such societies -- the working class being especially oppressed; and, secondly, that as the world becomes demagified, there will develop an increasingly large group of those who suffer from that process and for whom any integrated sense of their world will suffice. Hence the problem that fundamentally shapes modern politics -- not necessarily for the good --

⁵³ Compare the argument about Marx and Durkheim in Steven Lukes, "Alienation and Anomie," in Peter Laslett and W. Runciman, eds, *Politics, Philosophy and Society*, series I & II (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), pp. 134-155.

⁵⁴ GPS 321-322/ES 1394. I thus agree with Scaff, *op. cit.* and with Frederic Jameson, "The Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber," *New German Critique* (Winter, 1974), as well as with Bryan Turner, *For Weber* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) that there is a "structuralism" in Weber, although I see it as much more diachronic than do they.

⁵⁵ Cited from Wolfgang Mommsen, *op. cit.*, p. 97; see Lawrence Scaff, "Max Weber and Robert Michels," *American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 86, #6, pp. 1269-1286, esp. 1281-1283.

becomes that of theodicy, to find an answer to the question of "why do I suffer?" There are the elements of a political theology in Weber analogous to that in Carl Schmitt.

Weber must pay special attention to the dynamics of how new communities get formed, for get formed they certainly will. His understanding is that the only dynamic available to modern society is the political "prophet," the charismatic leader who can resolve the epistemological nihilism in which humans find themselves.

Much has been written in criticism of Weber on this count, with the most extreme version being that by Mommsen who accused Weber of laying the groundwork for fascism.⁵⁶ Weber certainly holds out a hope for the charismatic plebiscitarian leader, but he also, I think, establishes such stringent criteria that such a leader must meet as to make the actual existence of a real leader close to impossible. What is often ignored here is that on this score his mode immediately becomes what I might call Augustinian in that it focuses on the personal qualities of the man of action.

In "Politics as a Vocation," Weber discusses the personal characteristics – the character --that the political leader must have in order to be entitled to act so as to weld people together into a community. Under what conditions does the political leader exist: the answer is that he exists under the same as everyone else, except that he has the ability to "bear" it. In "Politics as a Vocation" Weber spends much time describing both the bureaucratization of the world and the necessity of accepting it while concomitantly insisting on the reality that we are "placed into different life-orders, each under differently understood laws."⁵⁷ The premises of the political sphere are thus approximately those of the scientific one. Any action, including a political action, will constitute an attribution of meaning; we know that all general claims to meaning are invalid; yet the world is filled with those who have not the self discipline to hold unto themselves the world in all its chaos. We must make something of the world and

⁵⁶ Mommsen, op cit; The same argument reappears in Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*

⁵⁷ "Politics as a Vocation" GPS 554/ VL 87

not take our action as other than it is. "Seeing how much I can bear" is the premise of facing both the scientific and political worlds as they are.

What then do we make of the rage of those who claim that they love (in Weber's list) "the future of socialism," or "international peace," or "fatherland" more than their souls?⁵⁸ This formulation gives us, according to Weber, the problem as it now stands: what are we to make to those who claim to be able to use violence in the name of a transformation of the chaos of the world? At a slightly more conceptual level, this is for Weber the problem of those who claim to be morally justified in their political actions.

For Weber, it is in the nature of morality that any particular claim must be subsumable under a general claim. For instance, the claim that "I promise to meet you at four o'clock" must be derivable from a general and abstract claim that "one ought to keep one's promises." Among other things ethical situations have the characteristic of requiring of their players that reasons be offered when ethical principles are infringed. If I do not meet you, I must offer an excuse as to why not. That excuse will very likely be an explanation of what kept me from meeting you such that it was not my fault that I stood her up. Politics, however, cannot for Weber be the realm in which the failure of complete a particular action (or the unintended consequences of a particular action) can be excused. No true leader can ever plead intentions or offer effective excuses. A dialogue he held with Ludendorff after the first world war in which Weber calls upon Ludendorff to sacrifice himself for events that were not his "fault" makes this plain.⁵⁹ It does no good in politics to plead that one didn't mean it; and, since politics is the legitimate use of violence, the only question can be that might make it legitimate. As Arendt was to remark: "Politics is not the nursery," not that is the province of the immature.

⁵⁸ "Politics as a Vocation" GPS 558/VL 91

⁵⁹ Gerth and Mills, "Introduction," pp. 41-42.

When Rousseau had famously confronted this question in the beginning of the *Social Contract*⁶⁰, his answer had been to elaborate the boundaries of legitimacy in volitional time and space, that is, to lay the ground for the legitimacy of the modern state. Weber seems to suggest that this solution has come to an end. Before legitimacy stopped at borders and was recognized as doing so. (This is why international politics was such a threat for Rousseau⁶¹). In the modern age, however, where borders are of less importance and ideologies transcend national boundaries⁶², the very possibility of legitimacy is central. Weber does not, I think, argue, as some commentators claim, that the legitimate is what people accept.⁶³ Weber's fear, rather, is precisely the fact that there is nothing that the people will find to be legitimate, that they will not have the criteria by which to recognize legitimacy, and thus that they will turn to almost anything. (In somewhat the same spirit, Oswald Spengler suggested after Hitler's rise to the Chancellorship, that "*Wir brauchen einen Helden, nicht einen Heldentenor.*"⁶⁴) The course of legitimacy must come, in politics as it had in religion, from "true" prophecy.⁶⁵

Heroes and hypocrites

Weber's account here is both frustrating and enticing. The true political leader, who is entitled to lead a state (i.e. to make reality for others), must "become conscious of these ethical paradoxes and of his responsibility for what can become of himself under their pressure."⁶⁶ The danger that threatens is that of succumbing to the "diabolic." Indeed, anyone will be "helplessly taken over (*hilflos*

⁶⁰ "Man is born free and is everywhere in chains. How did this situation come about? I do not know. How can it be made legitimate? I think I can provide an answer." *Social Contract*, I, 1

⁶¹ Stanley Hoffmann, "Rousseau on War and Peace," APSR, 1964 (CHECK)

⁶² See "Politics as a Vocation," GPS 557/ VL 89; see the analogous recognition in Arno Mayer, *From Wilson to Lenin: Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918* (New Haven: Yale, 1959), chapter 1.

⁶³ See John Schaar, "Legitimacy in the Modern State," in Philip Green and Sanford Levinson, eds. *Power and Community: Dissenting Essays in Political Science* (New York: Pantheon, 1969)

⁶⁴ See Tracy B. Strong, "Oswald Spengler - Ontologie, Kritik, und Enttäuschung," in P. Ludz, ed. *Spengler heute* (Beck, 1980), pp. 74-100.

⁶⁵ Cf Jameson, op. cit., p. 68

⁶⁶ This and following citations from "Politics as a Vocation," GPS 557ff/ VL 89ff

preisgegeben)" by the devil unless "he sees him." (It is an old Teutonic belief that the devil will get you unless you see him before he sees you.)

This is a matter of grasping the consequences that will befall one from ones actions. Here the focus in Weber moves to the notion of maturity. This ability to see what may become of oneself derives not from age, or even experience, but from a kind of Aristotelian notion of maturity. "A man, whether old or young in years" is how Weber refers to him, drawing on and revising Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁶⁷

It is at this point that Weber introduces his term for those who cannot face the realities of the world as a grown-up. In the political realm, they are *Gesinnungspolitiker*, a word often translated as "politicians of conviction,"⁶⁸ but better rendered as "politicians of disposition" or "ideologists." These are those who interpret the world in such a manner so as to avoid facing the realities of their position in and especially the consequences that their actions will entail for the world. Those who claim that they are going to eradicate the "false and the base," says Weber, as "spiritual lightweights," who have "become enraptured with romantic sensations."

For Weber, maturity -- being an adult -- is the recognition that any action taken is taken under circumstances where the consequences of that action are not only not apparent, but do not over the long term add up to make sense (as Hegel had thought they would). The acceptance of this, and the avoidance of the plea of good intentions, no matter what the outcome, is what distinguishes an adult

⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachia*(Oxford. Clarendon, 1963), 1095a, 6-10

⁶⁸ Gerth and Mills, for instance, give it as "politics of conviction." The editors of the Cambridge Kant give "disposition." In French versions of Kant it is "intention." In 1935, Raymond Aron gave "morale d'inspiration" in his *La sociologie allemande contemporaine* (Paris. Alcan, 1935). See the discussion in Michel Pollak, *Max Weber en France* (Cahiers de l'institut de l'histoire du temps present, # 3. July 1986), 49-52

from a child. Mistakes are to be attributed to insufficient skill and commitment. Politics, as Hannah Arendt remarked in a similar vein, "is not the nursery." It does no good to say "I didn't mean it."⁶⁹

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However, there are limits. By "bureaucratization of all forms of domination", Weber does not mean simply the system of organization by which large institutions govern their day-to-day affairs. Rather, he notes, bureaucracy is the typical expression of the forms of legitimacy in which obedience is due to and rests on norms rather than on persons. It is thus the form of "*Herrschaft*" in which commands are linked to and are experienced as coming from abstract and non-human entities, from roles, not from persons. Indeed, the elimination of irrationality in the world is also the elimination of relations between persons as a basis of society.

In a world that is disenchanting, politics has been lost. From his "Inaugural Lecture" to the end of his life, Weber sought to recover the political, that is the magical, the non-rationalized. What he saw in his studies of religion, I think, is that religious needs had secularized themselves. They had done so in two ways: one was by empowering rationalized institutional structures; but the second was to have legitimated ethically the salvation/redeemer desire. The main reason why Weber cannot accept Nietzsche's demand for a complete transfiguration of the structures of morality is that *he hopes that, in the*

⁶⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1974), p. 279

desire for a redeemer which a secularized religious ethic may still induce, a people will find the energy to respond to a new leader.

This gives us a sense of the problem with the moral point of view in today's world. *What though are the consequences of retaining the moral point of view in an increasingly demagified, disenchanted world?* In his notes Wittgenstein jotted this down:

There is no tragedy in this world (the one I am in), and thus there is nothing that is without limits (*das Unendliche*), which in fact is that which gives rise to tragedy (as its result).

It is so to speak as if everything was soluble in the aether of the world; there is nothing hard.

This means that hardness and conflict do not come into a commanding position (*wird nicht zu etwas Herrlichen*), but rather seem a defect.⁷⁰

What does it mean for "hardness" to come into a "commanding position"? For "hardness" not to seem a "defect"? Likewise Nietzsche, through the mouth of Zarathustra, sets a new commandment to his "brothers": to "become hard."⁷¹ What does he mean? Few passages in Nietzsche have taken more criticism than this one. And his language is dangerous. Jonathan Glover, for instance sees this as a "rejection of unmanly compassion, support[ing] the domination, even the cruel domination of others."⁷² Yet such readings are thin: at the beginning of the section in which the commandment appears, there is an exchange between the diamond and the "kitchen-coal." The latter asks the former "Why so hard? Are we not close relations?" The diamond responds: "Why so soft? – Are you then not my brother?" There are

⁷⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 9 (translation extensively modified).

⁷¹ Thus Spoke Zarathustra- On Old and New Tablets 29 WKG VI-1:264; See also *Dawn of Day* 541; *Beyond Good and Evil* 62; *Gay Science* 28.

⁷² Jonathan Glover, *Humanity. A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven. Yale University Press) 16

two ways of seeing excellence in human beings. The first is to claim that some are simple more, better, superior to others. Nietzsche is often read this way. But there is another. Here diamond and coal are close relations, even brothers. Diamond's response to coal is not to tell him that he is lesser, but to ask him why he is not more. A second way of seeing excellence is to ask why most humans are not more than they are, why they live, as Thoreau remarked, "lives of quiet desperation." (It is understandings of this kind that motivated the work of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and others of the early Frankfurt School (a quality, alas, pretty much lost in their present-day would-be descendants. A continuation of this already long book would move in that direction).

Why are most (of us) not more? We are, in Nietzsche's/Zarathustra's diamond words, "weak." To be weak here means to acquiesce to norms ("tablets") that are consequent to weariness, to submission to the forms of the society that is. Although only "one span" away from another world, Nietzsche writes, humans would from weariness prefer to "die of thirst."⁷³ Our weariness will not be overcome by gaining of more knowledge about the world –indeed that attempt is simply a continuing expression of weariness. When Cavell speaks of acknowledgement here he does not mean simply that one should add the normative to our knowledge ("do what we ought"). It is rather to respond to something about oneself.⁷⁴ And it is precisely this response that requires that one become "hard." The issue that must be faced in modern times is that the words "good" and "evil" have become too promiscuous.

⁷³ Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra- On Old and New Tablets 18 WKG VI-2: 256.

⁷⁴ See the excellent discussion in Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton. Princeton University Press, 2003), 34-35.

When Nietzsche calls to “break the good and the just”⁷⁵ he is reflecting on what one might call the moralization of morality in the present period. The “moralization of morality” means simply that what is *called* “good” is taken – without immediate dishonesty – to *be* good. Cavell again: “the moralization of moral theory has done to moral philosophy and the concept of morality what the events to the modern world have often done to the moral life itself: made it a matter of academic question.”⁷⁶ As Arendt wrote:

We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western tradition has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated of a still better future, are vain.⁷⁷

Is this not ineluctably elitist? There are two ways of thinking of the question of an “elite.” The first is to hold that some are simply, on some important criteria, “better” than others and that those criteria are essential to a viable human society. With this, one might come to think that the “leaders need to be led,” as Heidegger argued, or that dealing with states of exception requires special qualities. The second is to ask what it is about society that leads most not to be more than they are, to be content living, albeit semi-consciously, of “quiet desperation.” If one takes the second path, one will seek examples from inside the society that serve as exemplars of excellences. The idea of a great man or woman will have nothing to do with power or

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra- On Old and New Tablets* 27 WKG VI-2: 263.

⁷⁶ Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* 269-270. See my discussion in “Nihilism and Political Theory,” in John S. Nelson, ed. *What should political theory be now?* (Albany. SUNY Press, 1983) 243-263.

⁷⁷ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 381.

knowledge for there is not “is a separate class of great men ...for whose good, and conception of good, the rest of society is to live.”⁷⁸ Rather the existence and availability of excellence may be thought “essential to the criticism of democracy from within.”⁷⁹ What is essential here is that the criteria of excellence are themselves internal to a democracy, if only that can be instantiated. Socrates in the *Crito* shows that he owes his being to his membership as an Athenian and it is *from that membership*, from being a citizen, that he derived his exemplar integrity and his obligation to both resist Athens and not to flee.

Much mitigates against the possibility of human excellence in the world in which we live. It occurs, as Weber remarked, only in *pianissimo*, in the smallest settings. To persist in a vain enterprise is mere vanity: not to do so we need to tone the “insane and independent energy of reason.”⁸⁰ When morality is moralized, we justify the consequences of rational calculation – a justification that leads increasingly to the destruction of lives and peoples – we have but to look around. Since Machiavelli at least the West has tended to see politics as theater – action played by characters who fill their roles: prince and mass, sovereign and populace, capitalism and proletarians, white and black, leaders and led. And if all we are is characters playing a role – this was Weber’s fear for the modern age – then there is nothing to be done about those roles – merely to play them out. As then US ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright said when questioned by Leslie Stahl of CBS 60 Minutes as to the justification of an embarkation of supplies, including medical ones, that had led to the death of more Iraqi children than had died

⁷⁸ Stanley Cavell, *Cities Of Words* (Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press, 2005), 26. In the Republic, Plato sought to construct a city of words to show what excellence was.

⁷⁹ Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (Chicago. Open Court, 2000). 3.

⁸⁰ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*. Enlarged Edition (Cambridge. Harvard University Press, 1979), 92.

in Hiroshima: “My first responsibility is to make sure that United States forces do not have to go and refight the Gulf War.”⁸¹ One role followed leads to another, to refighting and more, to a way without end or goal. We cannot operate as a society without roles to play: but the tendency is for them to become the ground and justification for our actions. This is what so distressed Arendt about Eichmann. Instead, we rather need to start from the conviction that no one actually *is*, as him or herself, any thing or any one in particular. And precisely from that lack of definition we might start to find ourselves in acknowledgement of an other, of others, of our self.

If this is true, one must then ask oneself if Weber’s vision is not in the end more dangerous, more permissive, open to more temptations and to greater self dishonesty than was Nietzsche’s. Nietzsche was not crazy to have found the moral impulse dangerous in our day and age. Incremental reform may fail to meet the demands of the day.

⁸¹ CBS: 60 Minutes, cited in Thomas Pogge, *Politics as Usual* (Cambridge. Polity, 2010), 161-162.