

Chapter 6

Gramsci and Weber: The Dialectic of Motivation and Competence

Up until this point, there has been a certain obvious logic to the cast of characters I have selected for comparison. Marxists all go together, naturally; Gramsci selected Machiavelli himself; and Durkheim's ambivalent sympathy for socialism is well known. In these discussions, my focus on their attention to the social psychology of collective action far from any simple definition of rationality cuts across an otherwise comfortably familiar and straightforwardly intersecting set of conceptual spaces.¹

This analysis of the boundaries of the conceptual space of European social and political theory as marked out by the recognition and inclusion of contextual rationalities (each, of course, irrational with respect to other value or dispositional systems of differing universality) does not cut across a more comfortable comparison of Gramsci and Max Weber; it is the entryway to comparison, and an uncomfortable one at that. Confrontation of the two men's similar insights and divergent conclusions reveals the tension, ambivalence, and struggle of the best minds of the early 20th century — now including Durkheim — to cope with the diversity and contingency of the social world in a practical, reasonable fashion, at a time when both liberal and socialist certainties that any simple set of understandings or solutions was possible had collapsed. Any attempt subsequent to them to understand history and society, human action and inaction with a positive sense of confidence about humans' straightforward comprehensibility and tractability must be looked upon with the utmost skepticism.

Gramsci's intellectual relationship to Weber was actually quite dense, but with minor exceptions it was not direct.² It can occasionally be discovered through the mediating

¹I self-consciously take this formulation from the language of modern thermodynamics, also concerned with the analysis of complex dynamical systems far from straightforward equilibrium. See C. Dyke, *The Evolutionary Dynamics of Complex Systems: A Study in Biosocial Complexity* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) for a lucid and sobering account of the tremendous difficulty involved in understanding and modeling complex dynamical systems like evolutionary biology and societies, and of the provisional strategies developed by the sciences that make possible limited analytical access to complexity.

presences of Sorel, Croce, De Man and Michels.³ In reacting to these men, Gramsci was often reacting to ‘Weber-like’ problems, or entering debates that implicated Weber’s central concerns.

The conversation that emerges reveals strikingly similar minds: obsessively analytical, yet passionately committed; supremely (even arrogantly) confident, yet charmingly self-ironic; pathologically disciplined, yet intellectually flexible. The best jugglers are those who can keep the most objects of different sizes, weights, and colors in the air at once; Weber and Gramsci were juggling virtuosos. They saw a complex world and attempted to make sense of it, not by shrinking the world to fit their brains, but by stretching their brains to the limits of coherence.⁴

It is hopeless to think of people of this caliber as typical. But neither do they pierce the veil of history to become part of some noumenal pantheon. They represent part of an outer limit, the boundary of what could be thought. Within their conceptual space are to be found all of the elements that consumed contemporary students of politics and society more singly and idiosyncratically. To the extent that it is possible for one person, each de-

²Gramsci’s references in the *Notebooks* reveal that his direct awareness of Weber was limited, but substantive. The references are: *Q* 2, §75, 230-1, summary of Weber’s theory of the party and of charismatic leadership from *Economy and Society*, gleaned from an article by Michels; *Q* 3, §119, 388, reminder to consult again Weber’s *Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order* — followed up parenthetically in *Q* 12, §1, 1527, in which Weber’s book is cited as a data base and model of analysis for the impact of the monopoly of power by the nobility on the development of bourgeois political competence (this is a crafty recognition that the central theme of Weber’s piece was political culture, practical political education, and the consequences of the lack thereof, very akin to Gramsci’s notion of ‘passive revolution’); *Q* 8, §231, 1086-7, a positive but passing reference to Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which Gramsci had read serialized in the journal *Nuovi Studi* (this reference was dropped in the second draft of the note, *Q* 10, §31, 1274-5, but the positive reference had become acceptance of Weber’s thesis as old hat — which is *interesting* as confirmation of Gramsci’s openness to explanations of social phenomena mediated well away from the economic ‘structure’); *Q* 11, §12, 1389, *Protestant Ethic* cited again as positive evidence of the revolutionary power of new (religious) conceptions of the world.

³This is not to be taken as an assertion of a chain of influences, but as an identification of certain local conceptual convergences that create the possibility of building analytical bridges. It would be surprising if, in a given historical period and a culturally interpenetrated space like Europe, such convergences did not abound.

⁴Tracy Strong captures this about Weber when he says that “[f]or Weber, and contrary to a whole millennium of Christianity, we must *refuse* to make sense of the whole world and take that meaninglessness on us as far as we can. The world, for Weber, can ultimately not cohere; the danger that confronts us is that we will constantly be tempted to want to make it cohere.” “Weber and Freud: Vocation and Self-acknowledgement,” in *Max Weber and his Contemporaries*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Jurgen Osterhammel (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 473.

veloped the conceptual material of his time to its fullest, and in doing so encapsulated its strengths and weaknesses. What Hughes has said of Weber was true of Gramsci as well: “In [his] thought, the whole vast ambiguity of our century was held for one brief moment in a desperate synthesis.”⁵ In comparing these men, the issues raised in the preceding chapters come together in a new alignment. Corruption, virtue, leadership, organization and moral formation, all are revealed in the light of Weber’s and Gramsci’s deep and unflinching commitment to the locality and constructedness of rationality as elements of the difficult and risky fate of humans in modern society.

I. Rationality, Intelligibility, Meaning

It is cumbersome continually to qualify ‘rationality’ as ‘local’, so at this point it will be helpful to recall and advance the nuances of the break with universal normative rationalism argued in the ‘Procedural Interlude’. Neither Durkheim, Gramsci nor Weber rejected the normativity of rationality or even its generality; *given* a set of fundamental premises (such as those contained for Gramsci in common sense or philosophy), knowledge and action can readily be judged rational or irrational with respect to them. The point is that when any of these three theorists says that a perception or an action is rational or irrational, a follow-up question must be asked: With respect to what underlying value, value-system, or conception of the world?⁶

Properly to understand their basic conceptual frameworks, rationality is best understood *initially* as the technique of adjusting means to ends; action is more or less rational as a function of how conscious, organized, and systematic the technique and its application are.⁷ Actions are rational not because they are ‘right’, but because they are ‘proper-

5H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 290.

6This remains the jumping-off point for cultural studies of rationality. See especially James F. Hamill, *Ethno-Logic: The Anthropology of Human Reasoning* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1990). Hamill defines reasoning minimally as patterned thinking: “Reason consists of arranging information into valid structures or patterns... [v]alidity refers to the quality of the patterns” (xii), with culture supplying the values or conceptions grounding qualitative judgment. The ground of reasoning for Hamill, as for Weber, is not truth but *meaning*.

7“All serious reflection about the ultimate elements of meaningful human conduct is oriented primarily in terms of the categories ‘end’ and ‘means’.” “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Social Policy” (1904), in Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. and trans. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (New York: Free Press, 1949), 52.

ly done' according to a standard that is prior to rationality.⁸ Thus, rationality's normativity is borrowed, so to speak, from the values it serves. This 'tool-like' manifestation of rationality is often called 'instrumental' rationality, and a variety of specialized techniques have been developed as subsets of it: formal logic, law, engineering of various sorts, bureaucratic procedure as ideally conceived, assembly lines.⁹

The importance of this insistence on the fundamental locality of rationality at this juncture is that rationality was a key term for Weber, one that appears over and over in a variety of contexts and with a variety of specialized definitions in his work. As was the case with Durkheim and Gramsci, it was at the core of his approach to understanding and interpreting society. In Weber's hands, rationality was an analytical instrument of extraordinary power. Yet, he understood the modern West to be the bearer of rationality to the world, and this was a *problem* for him. The tendency of local rationalities to seek universality, and the unique success of Western rationalism in achieving it, disturbed him deeply. There was a dimension of social life beyond, or more accurately *before* rationality that he valued: values themselves, and the struggle among them. Rationality cannot supply *meaning* to human life — this comes from beliefs and commitments that profoundly motivate us, to which rationality is attached as a weapon. When this weapon takes on a life of its own, meaning can be swept out of the world. Establishing the *limits* of ratio-

⁸Those familiar with the American pragmatic tradition in general and George Herbert Mead in particular should see many points of conceptual convergence here and in what follows. In *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) William James concluded that "[r]easoning is always for a subjective interest, to attain some particular conclusion, or to gratify some special curiosity." For Mead, all actions are attempts at problem-solving, and problems are simply situational. Meaning, then, does not metaphysically precede action, it follows it: meaning is in the first instance determined by the consequence of an action, and in all later instances by the anticipation of this consequence. See, e.g., "A Behavioristic Account of the Significant Symbol," in George Herbert Mead, *Selected Writings*, ed. Andrew J. Reck (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1964), 244. Thus, the rationality of any given action can only be determined in retrospect by its achievement of the desired outcome, i.e. the happy resolution of the initial situation.

⁹Game theory is the most popular current academic exemplar. In another recent effort to clarify the discussion of rationality, apparently once and for all, philosopher Robert Nozick notes that "[i]nstrumental rationality is within the intersection of all theories of rationality (and perhaps nothing else is). In this sense, instrumental rationality is the default theory, the theory that all discussants of rationality can take for granted, whatever else they think." *The Nature of Rationality* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 133. This is a useful and welcome admission, even or perhaps especially if one remains unconvinced by Nozick's further efforts to reconstruct a rationality that is more than this.

nality is thus a fundamental step to understanding Weber's conception of society, and its intersection with Durkheim's and Gramsci's.

Unlike Durkheim, who could not quite comprehend why people misunderstood him when he said he was a rationalist, and Gramsci, whose approach to rationalism tended to be dismissively ironic, Weber was acutely aware of the profound conceptual difficulties hidden within this apparently straightforward term. He was not wrong to be concerned. His almost obsessive insistence in his writings on declaring the inability of science (the most elaborate instrument of western rationality) to adjudicate among values, and its more limited role in assessing consistency with respect to identified values, has not always been accepted as a good faith effort to coach the reader.¹⁰ The skeptics' reluctance marks a fundamental conceptual divide: for some people, it seems, the transcendental sense of rationality is a deep conceptual given invoked automatically with the use of the term. The values of the Enlightenment live on, even in the critique of them.¹¹

For Weber, values in themselves are neither rational or irrational, good or evil, true or false — except relative to other values. The values that motivate action are always rooted in the 'irrational'; they may be *rationalized* by being integrated into an internally consistent system attached to an effective technique of execution.¹² The subtle beau-

¹⁰For example, in *Weber, Irrationality and Social Order*, an intriguing book, Alan Sica demonstrates his impressive commitment to hermeneutical rigor by reporting a variety of these instances. But since he assumes throughout that Weber must have meant something transcendent by 'rationality', he remains perplexed by these apparent admissions of fatal weakness and chalks them up to confusion, inconsistency, or even theoretical immaturity! For a frank and stunning demonstration of this systematic refusal to take a major theorist at his word and adjust interpretive assumptions accordingly, see 177-9. Sica prefers Pareto because the Italian developed an intricate typology (Sica likes orderly categorical consistency) and explicit language to investigate 'non-logical' action as such. Unfortunately, Sica's lengthy disposal of Weber ends up leaving few words left for Pareto.

¹¹In the late 20th century it has become common sense that people make sense in different ways — this is the *National Geographic*/PBS popular culture — *until* a set of values or practices causes an experience of deep personal offense. For Weber, this is the point at which the ethics of the scientist and of the politician must split. It is the scientist's vocation to understand evil, the politician's to oppose it. That one person can be both, Weber proved in his own life: that one can morally be both *simultaneously* he vigorously denied.

¹²Pierre Bourdieu has called attention to the fact that the pre-rational commitments or 'orienting practices' to which rationalization is attached as an instrument may not be 'values' in any transcendent sense, but merely dispositions (crudely, habits) built into each person's and group's positioning within classified/stratified social fields. Indeed, 'values' are always subject to this suspicion. This strikes me as a very useful development of Weber's basic argument, in a direction that would have made Weber sad but that he would have been unable to deny. See, e.g., *Distinction*:

ty of Weber's use of rationality as an organizing concept lies in the sociological fact that instrumental rationality may be attached to any number of values, value-complexes, or world views at various levels of general acceptance, yielding local systems of rationality. The question will then be where the locus of attachment is; and comparisons will be available between these loci. Is the locus of attachment a universal theology? Then both societies and individuals, even history, can be irrational or 'evil' with respect to the pursuit of the theological mandate. Is the locus a historical development, or the 'logic of history'? Then actions or institutions that buck the trend are irrational. Is the locus society? Then individuals or groups may act irrationally relative to widely shared norms, and other cultures may well be evil. If the locus is the individual, social intrusion on her self-determination becomes irrational; and if the locus of attachment of values to instrumental rationality is fragmented within the individual, say among beliefs, desires and feelings, then her actions may appear irrational even to herself.¹³ For Weber, it was not a matter of choosing among these loci to find 'the right one': the attachment of rationality to values is always intricately multi-local. "A central component of Weber's vision of the modern world is his belief that there is no longer any possibility of an objective ranking of ultimate values or moral principles. We are confronted by a pluralism of conflicting ultimate values."¹⁴

The purpose of Weber's shift of rationality to what would nowadays be called 'local knowledge systems' was to provide social science with the most powerful possible tool to *A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984 [1979]), 466; and below, for my discussion of Weber's own 'value' commitments. All of this parallels marxist ideology critique and mannheimian sociology of knowledge, with the possible distinction that these latter have been known to lapse into the position that one form of knowledge (marxism itself, or science) is True, while the rest are ideologies and hence, False.

¹³Weber excluded instances of this 'psychological' level from sociology, and insofar as Freud was also interested in contextualizing rationality this is where he intersected Weber and complemented him. But in Freud's later speculative sociology, if not before, it became clear that the realm of social phenomena he was willing to consign outright to 'irrationality' was much larger than Weber's. Weber's concise statement on the subject of the psychological dimension is in *Economy and Society*, 13; see also *The Methodology*, 88-9.

¹⁴Peter Lassman and Ronald Spiers, "Introduction," in Max Weber, *Political Writings*, ed. Lassman and Spiers (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), xxiii. I often get the sense reading Weber that he felt embarrassed to have to repeat something so obvious. Incidentally, ongoing globalization in the 20th century can be seen through this approach to have created a double movement: toward the proliferation of jarring contacts between cultural value systems; and toward an erosion of these meaning systems through the export and generalization of Western formal rationality (e.g. capitalism, the market, bureaucracy).

study the world as it is rather than as it should be.¹⁵ Within local knowledge systems, perceptions and actions have *meaning*, or to put this another way, at some level perceptions and actions ‘make sense’. This is as basic as a premise could be. If actions ‘make no sense’, how could anyone possibly understand them? They are simply a mystery; they enter analysis of social action as forces of nature, chartable but not intelligible.¹⁶ But with respect to *any* local knowledge system, no matter how chaotic, one action will be preferable to another; this is the analytical lever that the contextualization of rationality exploits.¹⁷ Understanding the ‘logic’ (whether conscious, unconscious, or conflicted) of selection makes the action intelligible.¹⁸ This is what Weber meant to get at by treating rationality simultaneously as a locally applied technique with a variety of manifestations and as a general tool of analysis.¹⁹

The existential and historical problem, as Weber saw it, is that whatever its locus, the attachment of value and rationality is unstable, for several reasons. One is that the ‘best’ or ‘most rational’ way to achieve any given goal or to honor any given principle is not always immediately obvious and may be highly ambiguous. A second is that in practice, values are often ‘stacked’, either dependent on one another or quite independently but simultaneously held at different levels of commitment, and the means of achieving one may be irrational relative to another.²⁰ Greater apparent rationality (consistency) will be

¹⁵Whether it was *worthwhile* to do so was a question that science could not answer, itself being based on values adopted pre-rationally. “Science as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford UP, 1946), 145.

¹⁶See Weber, *Economy and Society*, 12-3.

¹⁷“On the other hand, many ultimate ends or values toward which experience shows that human action may be oriented, often cannot be understood completely, though sometimes we are able to grasp them intellectually. The more radically they differ from our own ultimate values, however, the more difficult it is for us to understand them empathically. Depending on the circumstances of the particular case we must be content either with a purely intellectual understanding or when even that fails, sometimes we must simply accept them as given data.” Weber, *Economy and Society*, 5-6.

¹⁸A value of irrationality or anti-rationality produces an iron determinism of spontaneity. Actions are preferable because they make no sense; hence, they make sense.

¹⁹It is from this point that anthropologist Clifford Geertz’ debt to Weber may be reconstructed. See, classically, the essays in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), and then *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983 [1977]).

²⁰See Weber, *Economy and Society*, 10 and especially 32-3; and the poignant open letter “Between Two Laws,” in Weber, *Political Writings*, 79.

achieved as conflicting values are subordinated to a single organizing motive — this is what Weber called ‘rationalization’.²¹ A third is fate, the ‘paradox of unintended consequences’: there is a risk involved in any assessment of how to act in a social space cluttered with forces beyond one’s (or even many’s) control.

Most relevant here, once a technique is set up to pursue a value, it may achieve a life of its own: the value may die away, yet its instrument live on. Such, for Weber, is the fate of the modern West: ‘rationalized’, ‘disenchanted’. Diluted or gone, routinized away, are the motivating values that drove the development of capitalist economic rationalism into the comprehensive form of social life, and of the large-scale rationalized formal organizations such as the factory, the state bureaucracy, the university, and the army that are its subsidiary instruments. But the form and the institutions remain, still driven by their characteristic developmental dynamic: techniques for which the original orienting and motivating values have been left behind. “The capitalistic economy of the present day is an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which he must live.... The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so.”²²

In part as a means of coping with these existential blockages to the unproblematic linkage of motivation and technique, Weber developed an intricate analytical language of rationality on top of his basic conception of localized rationality, to represent modal applications of rationality in various contexts. Thus, for example, actions come in four pure types, for Weber (in empirical action admixtures are the rule): ‘instrumentally rational’, oriented toward success; ‘value-rational’, oriented toward value for its own sake, regardless of success; ‘affectual’, oriented toward emotions or feeling states; and ‘traditional’, oriented toward “ingrained habituation.”²³

Weber often characterized the latter two types as ‘irrational’, but the relationality of this designation — as required by the logic of his method — may be discerned from specifications of the types’ distinctions and interpenetrations. For example: “The orienta-

²¹It is in this connection that the technical sense of rationality as *systematic* action is most pronounced. Economic rationality is defined almost exclusively this way: see Weber, *Economy and Society*, 71.

²²Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner’s, 1976), 54, 181.

²³Weber, *Economy and Society*, 24-5.

tion of value-rational action is distinguished from the affectual type by its clearly self-conscious formulation of the ultimate values governing the action and the consistently planned orientation of its detailed course to these values.”²⁴ Both involve action oriented toward a pre-rational or ‘value’ premise, but in one case this has been thought through and planned out; in the other, it has not. In this relative sense only is the one rational and the other irrational; but this is a useful distinction, analytically, because it allows comparison of the degree of application of consistent, systematic planning to particular actions within local knowledge systems, and thus a dynamic theory of ‘rationalization’.²⁵ Nevertheless, to understand Weber at the conceptual level, and particularly the tensions with which he was struggling, his analytical terminology must resolutely be kept in its place.²⁶

II. Politics as Passion and Planning

Weber’s typology of social action points back to a set of problems basic to specifically sociological theory. For Gramsci, Durkheim, and Weber, there are two key questions for understanding meaningful human action. What is the source of motivation? How is that motivation sustained and effectively channeled? At the intersection of these questions is the dialectic of motivation and competence, including questions of theory and practice, passion and planning, pre-rationality and rationality. The importance of this dialectic is revealed in a historical observation that is not difficult to make, that indeed has been the background here throughout. The most powerful collective displays are those with substantial emotional content: the riot, the religious ecstasy, the defense of the fatherland, the World Cup. But, once liberated, these energies often fade quickly away into

²⁴Weber, *Economy and Society*, 25.

²⁵This is a sense I take to be revealed in translations of Weber by the occasional device of setting off ‘irrational’ with single quotation marks. This would be a dangerous presumption were it not that the conceptual exposition as a whole bears out my interpretation.

²⁶I leave as adding nothing to this particular discussion the further types of ‘formal’ and ‘substantive’ rationality, a distinction that allowed Weber to examine gradations in the number and variety of factors taken into account (or admixed motivations) within a rational calculation — an example being accounting as compared to the ethical operation of a business. Formal rationality is purely technical; substantive rationality is not simply attached to a primary motivation (e.g. making money) but is sensitive to other values (e.g. workplace morale) as well. In practice, nearly all instances of rational action will be ‘substantive’ in this sense to at least a small degree, as a pure formalism is difficult to achieve. See 19,99Weber, *Economy and Society*, 85-6 and 108-9. This distinction is central, by the way, to Weber’s sociology of law, which will not be considered here.

exhaustion, leaving no tangible residue. To change or revitalize the world, energies like these are needed; but must their appearance be spasmodic, and their effect transient?

The social role of emotion or passion in Gramsci's theory of revolution, already an issue in Chapters 4 and 5, now arises at its most pressing in the context of Weber, because Gramsci's attitude toward this aspect of social action was similarly ambivalent. For Machiavelli, passion was inescapably, unproblematically the source of collective strength; politics was a matter of organizing and channeling this. Durkheim also had no problem with the idea that social reform and renewal should come from an intensely emotional collective affirmation of community (religious) values — 'collective effervescence'. Without these episodes, he believed, society would simply disintegrate; again, the issue was how to channel and organize these energies, the very best products of human collective life. In the modern world, the sacredness of the individual and the foci of moral integration and regulation occupied by the state and the professional and civic organizations could do the job.

Neither Weber or Gramsci were comfortable with this sort of resolution, but Gramsci's dissatisfaction with collective passion was balanced by an appreciation of the need to evoke and channel it for revolutionary action to be possible; Weber's balance came from his sense of doomed admiration for both exalted values and the rationalization that tends to sweep them away. Thus, despite their ambivalence for the various manifestations of passional motivation, Gramsci and Weber joined Durkheim in considering such motivation an essential part of the political dialectic.²⁷

The solutions these three mapped out delimit a space within which collective passion and its dialectic with organization can be understood. Weber's conclusion was

²⁷Reason's dependence on emotion for direction and motivation is a widespread insight not limited to the theorists under discussion. It has long been a commonplace in feminist scholarship, for example; Virginia Woolf's great novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927) is a case study. Philosopher John Macmurray argued in *Reason and Emotion* (1935) that "emotional life is not simply a part or an aspect of human life. It is not, as we so often think, subordinate or subsidiary to the mind. It is the core and essence of human life. The intellect arises out of it, is rooted in it, draws its nourishment and sustenance from it, and is the subordinate partner in the human economy. This is because the intellect is essentially instrumental." (New Jersey and London: Humanities Press, 1992 [1935, 1962]), 42. Cognitive neuroscientist Antonio Damasio has recently provided a speculative synthesis of the brain research tending to the same conclusion in *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (Putnam, 1994). Such positions are distinct from romantic or irrationalist exaltations of the emotions at the expense of reason (Sorel skirted this sort of position: see chapter 1).

frankly pessimistic, as the famous image of the iron cage reveals.²⁸ Gramsci's similar honesty and intellectual rigor left him only "pessimism of the intellect; optimism of the will." A rather different 20th-century conceptual space has been occupied by theories of collective *irrationality* that treat the passions as a black box with output to be assumed (conservatism), exploited (fascism), celebrated (romantic nationalisms and identity politics), swept away by history (marxism), or denied (liberalism). These three theorists thought they could do better.

III. Charisma and Formal Organization

In Weber's writings, the historical dialectic of motivation and competence is contained within the poles described most purely by 'charisma' and 'formal organization'. Their respective excesses are the Scylla and Charybdis of political action.

Charisma in its pure form is the extraordinary quality of a single person.²⁹ Thus, its specific realm is the exceptional situation, intractable by ordinary or 'routine' means. "All extraordinary needs, i.e., those which *transcend* the sphere of everyday economic routines, have always been satisfied in an entirely heterogeneous manner: on a *charismatic* basis."³⁰ The power charisma has in these situations, or its 'legitimacy', is to mobilize the collective energy of people motivated to obey the charismatic leader by their belief in her extraordinary power and by their distress or enthusiasm. The extraordinary qualities of the situation and of the leader thus combine to release an extraordinary output of social energy, focused through the leader herself.

Because of this, charisma is by nature revolutionary. It is not bound by rules of established procedure — if it were, it would hardly fit the exceptional need. But with re-

²⁸Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 181. For a very scary portrayal of the sisyphian 'senselessness' of modern culture, see "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," in *From Max Weber*, 355-7. "Viewed in this way, all 'culture' appears as man's emancipation from the organically prescribed cycle of natural life. For this very reason culture's every step forward seems condemned to lead to an ever more devastating senselessness. The advancement of cultural values, however, seems to become a senseless hustle in the service of worthless, moreover self-contradictory, and mutually antagonistic ends. The advancement of cultural values appears the more meaningless the more it is made a holy task, a 'calling'." It would be interesting to compare this position (published in 1915) to Thomas Mann's defense of Germany's war effort on the basis of the superiority of German 'culture' to the 'civilization' of the Allies. Another obvious comparison is with Freud's later *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

²⁹"The Social Psychology of World Religions," in Gerth and Mills, ed., *From Max Weber*, 295.

³⁰Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1111.

spect to those procedures in particular and to the *systematic* pursuit of values in general, charisma is irrational. “Charismatic rule is not managed according to general norms, either traditional or rational, but, in principle, according to concrete revelations and inspirations, and in this sense, charismatic authority is ‘irrational’. It is ‘revolutionary’ in the sense of not being bound to the existing order: ‘It is written — but I say unto you...’”³¹ Effective channeling of extraordinary collective energy, itself the proof of charismatic exceptionalism, is capable of solving a variety of problems and of ‘transforming all values’. Charisma is the “specifically creative revolutionary force of history” because it carries out its revolution from *within*; it “overturns all notions of sanctity,” potentially creating an entirely new conception of the world.³²

Charisma’s claim to legitimacy in practice and intelligibility in analysis is its immediate success in fulfilling its mission, that is, solving or reframing whatever problem was the occasion of its emergence. But its very exceptionality makes charisma unstable and non-continuous. The energy it releases is not sustainable. “Thus the pure type of charismatic rulership is in a very specific sense unstable, and all its modifications have basically one and the same cause: The desire to transform charisma and charismatic blessing from a unique, transitory gift of grace of extraordinary times and persons into a permanent possession of everyday life.”³³ This ‘routinization’ of charisma inevitably changes its structure.

The dialectic of motivation and competence is revealed in this transformation. In order to sustain its achievements, the exceptional charismatic regime must become the structure of day to day life; it must become *normal*. It must lose its extraordinary substance in favor of an ordinary form. “The following are the principal motives underlying this transformation: (a) The ideal and also the material interests of the followers in the continuation and the continual reactivation of the community, (b) the still stronger ideal and also stronger material interests of the members of the administrative staff, the disci-

³¹Gerth and Mills, eds., *From Max Weber*, 296. A very similar formulation is to be found in *Economy and Society*, 1115, which is in general the more developed discussion; but occasionally “The Social Psychology...” captures the essence of Weber’s argument somewhat more illustratively, if no differently from a conceptual standpoint.

³²Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1116-7. A targeted comparison with the Durkheim of *The Elementary Forms* could begin here.

³³Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1121.

ples, the party workers, or others in continuing their relationship.”³⁴ This is very straightforwardly a question of administration. Historically, the transformation of charismatic motivation into administrative competence has taken the form of ‘patriarchalism’, the characteristic structure of traditional domination in which charismatic revelation becomes habit, legitimized by the sacredness of tradition.³⁵

“In traditionalist periods, charisma is *the* great revolutionary force.... In prerationalistic periods, tradition and charisma between them have almost exhausted the whole of the orientation of action.”³⁶ The developing rationalization of the modern world, however, has tended to demolish this dynamic because of its technical inefficiency and intellectual insufficiency. In the struggle to ‘make sense’ of the world (to rationalize it), and in particular to explain suffering, religious conceptions of the world have demanded “that the world order in its totality is, could, and should somehow be a meaningful ‘cosmos’.... The general result of the modern form of thoroughly rationalizing the conception of the world and of the way of life, theoretically and practically, in a purposive manner, has been that religion has been shifted into the realm of the irrational.”³⁷

Cumulatively, this has the effect in the realm of ideal motivations (why people think they would want to act) of making the charismatic break increasingly unavailable as a legitimate option. Instead, a sober and relatively more stable intellectual approach to life prevails. This is linked to the rise of civic strata specifically interested in practical action in the world as a matter of material interest. Weber found the locus of this development in the Reformation, a moral and intellectual reform in precisely Gramsci’s sense, in which God’s meaning had been shifted so far into the other world that people in this one were thrown upon their own devices.

For Weber, the peculiar nature of the Reformation as a charismatic intellectual and moral reform is that it explicitly tied exaltation to disciplined competence in *this* world. In the doctrine of predestination, the believer’s relationship to God and to other-

³⁴Weber, *Economy and Society*, 246. Weber himself did not finish *Economy and Society*. For details of its lengthy composition and posthumous reconstruction, see Guenther Roth’s “Introduction.”

³⁵Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1020.

³⁶Weber, *Economy and Society*, 245.

³⁷Gerth and Mills, eds., *From Max Weber*, 281. Weber, like Leibniz, called the meaningful explanation of the world’s suffering through religion ‘theodicy’. See esp. 270-84.

worldly salvation is fundamentally inscrutable, a tension that can only be alleviated (but not dismissed) by living the right kind of life — the ability to do so being taken as evidence of ‘election’. The main outlines of Weber’s argument are well known.³⁸ The important point here is that this ‘ethic’ of worldly performance sealed the fate of charismatic motivation. The magical, exceptional qualities of charisma drew their power from otherworldly passions; but access to this other world was no longer available. In the modern world, charisma is inexorably replaced by ‘vocation’, or ‘calling’, an altogether more personal, stable, and moderate source of motivation. While its original source is in the charismatic impulse, the vocation is the specific secularized form of limited, controlled charisma suited to a rationalized world. The argument of Weber’s famous essays on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is thus an exploration of the decisive stages of a ‘disenchantment’ of the world driven by the rationalizing impetus of theodicy. While charisma in its original form does not disappear, “[a]s domination congeals into a permanent structure, charisma recedes as a creative force and erupts only in short-lived mass emotions with unpredictable effect, during elections and similar occasions.”³⁹

This ‘ethical’ rationalization has an ‘elective affinity’, in Weber’s terms, with the developing organizational structures of rationalization. The decisive instrument of rationalization is produced with the development and perfection of specialized apparatus of ad-

38Weber himself summarized the argument, to which he frequently returned, at the end of “The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism,” in Gerth and Mills, eds., *From Max Weber*, 320-1. See also Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (Garden City: Anchor-Doubleday, 1962), 55-64 (followed by an important discussion of Weber’s analysis of the *variety* of factors beyond the Protestant ethic involved in the rise of Western economic rationalism), and Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Max Weber* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971), 124-32; as well as the latter’s introduction to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* itself — these among many available expositions.

39Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1146. This development of Weber’s analysis is the decisive element unfortunately missed by two of the few sustained efforts to compare Gramsci and Weber: Marcello Montanari, “Razionalità e tragicità del moderno in Gramsci e Weber,” *critica marxista* 6, year 25 (1987), and Gershon Shafir, “Interpretive Sociology and the Philosophy of Praxis: Comparing Max Weber and Antonio Gramsci,” *Praxis International* 5, No. 1 (1985). Montanari captures Weber’s ambivalence toward modern rationalization, but thinks the way out is the charismatic break (Shafir also understands this to have been Weber’s position), which is what he parallels to Gramsci’s theory of revolution. But the tragedy of modernity for Weber is precisely that the revolutionary quality of charisma has been lost; the choices now are between unopposed senseless technical rationality occasionally disturbed by sterile, fitful outbreaks, and a balance achieved by the more contained passion of political responsibility. Modern charismatic episodes can only be spasmodic, in Weber’s view, because of the invincible inertial stability of formal organization.

ministration of a type Weber called ‘formal organizations’, conditioned by the same basic impulses to make sense of and master the world manifested in theodicy. Bureaucracy (the formal organization of administration of state power) is the classic exemplar of the purely technical organization of efficiency, the most developed instrument of rationalization. Formal organization is characterized by the impersonal (or alienated) relationship between its functionaries and the administrative power they wield through the application of rationalized rules and procedures.⁴⁰ Thus, it creates an extraordinary stability and predictability, stripped of all individual, exceptional elements. Consequent to its structure, formal organization produces an unparalleled effect of efficient competence.

The advantages of this for the planned, systematic pursuit of any objective are clear. This is the source of the formal organization’s compelling historical logic; once developed, it makes return to any regime of lesser efficiency virtually impossible to contemplate. “Once fully established, bureaucracy is among those social structures which are the hardest to destroy. Bureaucracy is *the* means of transforming social action into rationally organized action.... Where administration has been completely bureaucratized, the resulting system of domination is practically indestructible.”⁴¹ For the same reason, formal organizations take on a life of their own. A bureaucracy can administer *any* state; it is simply a technical instrument. In bureaucracy’s ideal development, its functionaries are enjoined by a professional ethic of competence from having any substantive impact on the policies they administer, which are received from elsewhere. In the modern world states may rise and fall, but the technical apparatus and thus the mode of application of power does not change; competition with other, similarly equipped states demands it.⁴²

40A different comparison of Weber and Gramsci would call attention to the strange fact that Weber had a much more developed theory of alienation than Gramsci, whose puritanical discipline fetish led him to admire formal organization rather uncritically. This peculiar blind spot has recently received high-quality attention, often focusing on Gramsci’s notes on ‘Americanism and Fordism’, in which it is clear that he expected the techniques of Taylorism (including sexual discipline) to be of tremendous post-revolutionary value once their mechanical mandates were a matter of choice rather than imposition. The issue of rationalization is clearly linked to this discussion. See, as the best examples, the essays in *Modern Times: Gramsci e la critica dell’americanismo*, ed. Giorgio Baratta and Andrea Catone (Milan: Diffusioni ‘84, 1989), including Jacques Texier, “Razionalità rispetto allo scopo e razionalità rispetto al valore nei *Quaderni del carcere*: Note preliminari per una ricerca critica,” 184-210, a fascinating article to which I am indebted.

41Weber, *Economy and Society*, 987.

42Yet, as Weber pointed out in “Suffrage and Democracy in Germany” (1917), a well-developed bureaucratic apparatus requires above it a policy-making *leadership* if a state is to participate in

Thus, the historical dialectic of motivation and competence in which the creative ‘irrationality’ of charisma held the revolutionary position is replaced in the modern world. In the new dialectic of motivation and competence, the radical instability of charisma has been replaced by ‘vocation’ or ‘calling’ as the source of substantive motivation; but this is not powerful enough to bring about any fundamental structural change. The best the vocational politician can do is to set policy *within* the constraints of rationalized formal order. In the modern world, the only revolutionary element is the ongoing rationalization of formal organization — a morally sterile situation that in fact *discourages* the development of qualities of creative leadership. The accomplishments of bureaucracy are unprecedentedly effective, its methods are tendentially encompassing, yet it is not capable of generating any value beyond efficiency for its own sake, nor is it capable of any innovation beyond technical improvements of method.⁴³

Weber’s pessimistic but determined attitude toward this historical transformation of the dialectic of motivation and competence becomes more explicit in his writings on modern politics. In “Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order” (1917) he noted that “the future belongs to bureaucratization.” This must be realistically acknowledged as necessary and inexorable, but it must also be resisted. If the full logic of bureaucratic extension and centralization is allowed to play out, the space left for the creative will must virtually disappear:

In view of the fundamental fact that the advance of bureaucratisation is unstoppable, there is only one possible set of questions to be asked about future forms of political organisation: (1) How is it *at all possible* to salvage any remnants of ‘individual’ freedom of movement *in any sense...* (2) In view of the growing indispensability and hence increasing power of state officialdom... how can there be any guarantee that forces exist which can impose limits on the enormous, crushing power of this constantly growing

world politics — to complete the dialectic of motivation and competence. Weber, *Political Writings*, 127.

⁴³The histories of nationalism, decolonialization and identity politics of various sorts in the 20th century call this rather teleological pessimism into question (whether in salutary fashion remains open to dispute). Further, Weber was not always quite ready fully to anthropologize the West, and consequently tended to miss the survival of performative politics (the ‘theatrical’ quality of the state or ‘imagined community’, enacted through collective representations along precisely the lines Durkheim pointed to) of the sort Geertz analyzed in *Negara: The Theatre-State in Nineteenth Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980). For application to the European case, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: The Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

stratum of society and control it effectively? How is democracy even in this restricted sense to be *at all possible*?⁴⁴

Weber noted the institutional value of secondary associations located between the state bureaucracy and the individual; he allowed that these are preferable, in that resisting them is at least conceivable. Thus, rather than the division of formative labor that such a diversified institutional structure yields in Durkheim (who was also, it will be recalled, well aware of the protective function of such diversity), in Weber the division is of rationalized, dominative power.

But the main source of resistance, the final and most important question, in Weber's view, involves the limits of bureaucracy, that is, what it *cannot* do: supply leadership. For this, a different sort of training is necessary, a specifically political education. The professional ethics of the functionary and the leader are decisively different: the first must serve rules for which she is not responsible, the second must make rules for which she is. But as Weber's subsequent discussion of Bismarck's political legacy reveals, he believed the political acculturation of leaders to have been decisively blocked in Germany by the structure of state administration and powerlessness of parliament. This, he argued, was a disaster.

The crucial importance and difficult fate of political vocation in the modern world is the theme of Weber's famous speech on "Politics as a Vocation." "To take a stand, to be passionate... is the politician's element, and above all the element of the political *leader*. His conduct is subject to quite a different, indeed, exactly the opposite, principle of responsibility from that of the civil servant."⁴⁵ In a world of fundamentally irreconcilable values, the politician who acts passionately according to a calling stands responsibly for a position that is fundamentally unjustifiable, and by his exemplary commitment motivates support for it. Thus, political action may tend to organize as a party based on — and seeking to generalize — an ethical conception of the world, or *Weltanschauung*.⁴⁶ In this way only

⁴⁴Weber, *Political Writings*, 159. This lengthy essay is also included as an Appendix in *Economy and Society*.

⁴⁵Gerth and Mills, eds., *From Max Weber*, 95. *Political Writings* retranslates this essay under the title "The Profession and Vocation of Politics," a nice nuance but perhaps a bit confusing given the wide diffusion of the Gerth and Mills volume.

⁴⁶For Weber, politicians following a calling are distinct from 'bosses' and functionaries (occupying, perhaps, the same formal positions) precisely by their active ethical commitment to a generalizable conception of the world.

could the dialectic of motivation and competence, tending in the modern world to be dominated by the rational efficiency of formal organization, be rebalanced with a passionate and compelling source of motivation.

To further characterize the vocational politician, Weber distinguished two fundamental types of ethically oriented action, the ‘ethic of responsibility’ and the ‘ethic of ultimate ends’ (or ‘principled conviction’). Initially, he set these up as ‘irreconcilable’ opposites: indeed, action according to a desired outcome and action according to a principle regardless of outcome are apparently quite different.⁴⁷ But as he recognized, these actually supplement each other at the highest level of ethical commitment to action in the world:

However, it is immensely moving when a *mature* man... is aware of a responsibility for the consequences of his conduct and really feels such responsibility with heart and soul. He then acts by following an ethic of responsibility and somewhere he reaches the point where he says: ‘Here I stand; I can do no other’. That is something genuinely human and moving. ... In so far as this is true, an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine man — a man who *can* have the ‘calling for politics’.⁴⁸

Weber’s admiration for the passionate source of motivation is clear here, as is his sense of the spectacular tragedy of the modern world, where good men with irreconcilable values struggle for control of the instruments of rational domination along with the unscrupulous and mediocre alike.

The tremendous technical efficiency gained through the development of formal organization is won at the expense of a growing moral mediocrity. As more and more facets of life become subject to administrative rationalization, the *dispassionate* ethic of the functionary becomes the increasingly general effective relationship of people with the world. Rational efficiency becomes senseless as it loses touch with the values that initially underlay it, and discourages the development of new ones. This degradation must be resisted with all of the resources of political vocation or leadership, with patient and com-

⁴⁷Gerth and Mills, *From Max Weber*, 120. The alternate translation is from Weber, *Political Writings*, 359.

⁴⁸Gerth and Mills, *From Max Weber*, 127. That his initial distinction is meant to be an analytical one is supported by the reflection that in order to determine a desirable outcome, one must have an ultimate value that the outcome seeks to attain or further. The two types thus describe different moments in an ethical ‘calculus’, or better, dialectic.

mitted work: “politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards.”⁴⁹ But Weber was afraid that this would not be enough.

IV. Vocation and Citizenship

The primary conceptual differences between Gramsci and Weber can be traced to the fact that it never occurred to Gramsci not to be a politician and a scientist simultaneously. Weber kept these two aspects of his intellectual life separated as a matter of strong conviction; in his view, to properly understand the world requires a fundamentally different ethical approach than to act within it.⁵⁰ But for Gramsci, the construction of knowledge already expresses a political position; to describe the world without also seeing how it can be changed is to take a stand on the world as it is.⁵¹

Their critiques cut both ways. Weber’s political sociology was based on observation of the peculiar fact that, in society, some people give orders and others obey them. Thus, his basic conception was that politics is the realm of relations of power; and that its dynamics are contained within different structures of ‘domination’ (traditional, charismatic, and legal).⁵² Weber’s entire understanding of politics was based on a command model; the possibility of republican willed community based on active collective decision-making was *defined away*. Action based on thoughtful, active agreement with a directive rather than some form of ‘consent to be ruled’ is invisible to Weber’s typology. Whether this is

⁴⁹Gerth and Mills, *From Max Weber*, 128.

⁵⁰An argument for the recovery and repurification of this distinction may be found in Edward Bryan Portis, *Max Weber and Political Commitment: Science, Politics, and Personality* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986).

⁵¹For Gramsci’s direct discussion of the relationship of politics and science, see *Q* 13, §16, 1577-8. Comparisons of Weber and Gramsci have appeared more frequently since the mid-1970’s (reflecting, perhaps, a new openness to such comparisons after the dogmatic excesses of 1968), but have remained casual. Among the best is Carl Levy, “Max Weber and Antonio Gramsci,” in Mommsen and Osterhammel, ed., *Weber and his Contemporaries*. Levy suggests a variety of bases for thematic comparison: “I think the most important are their attitudes towards and conceptions of leadership formation in mass societies (elites and democracy); legitimate domination and hegemony; intellectuals, bureaucracy and state formation; charisma and caesarism; religion and research methodologies; science,” 383. In my view, this is the right list; I would add that its elements are of the most interest if seen as components or consequences of a deep conceptual commonality, shaped by Gramsci’s and Weber’s shared sense of the locality of rationality. This commonality, in turn, characterized a wide cross-section of European thought in the early 20th century, as the chapters in the cited volume reveal.

⁵²Gerth and Mills, *From Max Weber*, 77-9.

justified for the future must remain an open question, as he would no doubt have admitted.

Gramsci was vulnerable to the criticism that his political passion for a solution to the problem of revolutionary organization and action clouded his ability properly to assess the forces and structures in opposition. But it should be clear at this point that the distinctiveness of his approach to revolutionary theory was precisely his extraordinary attention to the dense intricacy of the task. Perhaps Weber gave up too easily because he did indeed make his stand on the world as it was, tragic though he may have found it. Gramsci's more open 'sense of possibility', certainly the result of his political commitment, may have allowed him to glimpse another option to the modern rationalized dialectic of motivation and competence that to Weber was ultimately intractable.

Nevertheless, their conceptual grasps of the basic parameters of the problem were strikingly similar. Gramsci understood the political practice of revolution to be contained in the dialectic of motivation and competence, involving several elements now familiar from prior discussions. These include a *passionately motivated* collective will to overthrow the old world and to make the new; comprehensive political culture, the *competence* to participate in the political community; and organizational and conceptual structures to channel and *sustain* this will and competence over time. All of these elements had initially to be embodied in the party. The party's task was to universalize them.⁵³

Much of Gramsci's approach to the elements of the dialectic of motivation and competence has been covered in the preceding chapters, in the contexts of virtue and of moral and intellectual reform. But in confrontation with Weber, the tension of these elements falls into place. Collective passion is a dangerously unstable source of motivation; but without 'extraordinary' motivation no collective remaking can occur. The party may readily congeal into a rationalized instrument of domination; but without structure and leadership, collective effort recollapses into the fragmentation of 'local rationalities'. Weber's

⁵³Both Weber and Gramsci understood the economy to produce generic structuring conditions, a 'playing field', within which 'independently' effective cultural/ political forces act to work out the details. In this sense, they both 'assumed' capitalism to be the structuring basis of the limits of possibility; but those limits are quite broad, and within them the economic level is often not decisive. A different comparison of Weber and Gramsci could focus on this aspect of their common conceptual space; my procedure here has been to follow their frequent course in taking it as 'read'.

implicit critique illuminates how delicately these imperatives were balanced in Gramsci's revolutionary theory, by far the most sophisticated any marxist had produced.

Gramsci approached the problem of political passion through critiques of Sorel and Croce. The relevant notes are well known, but the overlaps they trace between Gramsci and Weber remain largely unexplored. Sorel's approach to revolutionary consciousness and action is familiar from Chapter 1; at this juncture, it can be understood as a complete surrender of the element of competence and stability in favor of total focus on the creative power of liberated passion. Gramsci admired Sorel, but considered his position unacceptably partial:

A study might be made of how it came about that Sorel never advanced from his conception of ideology-as-myth to an understanding of the political party, but stopped short at the idea of the trade union. It is true that for Sorel the 'myth' found its fullest expression not in the trade union as organisation of a collective will, but in its practical action — sign of a collective will already operative. The highest achievement of this practical action was to have been the general strike — i.e. a 'passive activity', so to speak, of a negative and preliminary kind (it could only be given a positive character by the realisation of a common accord between the various wills involved), an activity which does not envisage an 'active and constructive' phase of its own. Hence in Sorel there was a conflict of two necessities: that of the myth, and that of the critique of the myth — in that 'every pre-established plan is utopian and reactionary'. The outcome was left to the intervention of the irrational, to chance (in the Bergsonian sense of '*élan vital*') or to 'spontaneity'.⁵⁴

In essence, Sorel's 'myth' occupies the conceptual space of 'charisma' as a sweepingly transformative 'irrational' force.⁵⁵ But, leaving aside this approach's applicability to the modern, rationalized world, the issue of the sustainability of this passion or its results was apparent to Gramsci as it was for Weber. Mere upheaval and the creation of a new order are very different prospects. Gramsci's critique of the Sorelian myth brings into focus the limitations of passion alone, its simple destructiveness and incapability of building anything positively durable.⁵⁶

⁵⁴*SPN*, 127.

⁵⁵There are a number of technical distinctions that might be made: for Weber, charisma was generally focused through a single person, for example.

⁵⁶I note in passing that current political theories based on validation of popular-cultural 'experience' and the native wisdom of oppressed groups, including some variants of feminism, postcolonialism, and subalternity theory, are potentially vulnerable to this same critique. It is ironic that

Gramsci's exploration of the motivational dynamic of passion continued in his responses to Benedetto Croce, whose idealism made him inattentive to the concrete organizational requirements of practical political process:

Croce's conception of politics/ passion excludes parties, since it is not possible to think of an organized and permanent passion. Permanent passion is a condition of orgasm and of spasm, which means operational incapacity. It excludes parties, and excludes every plan of action worked out in advance. However, parties exist and plans of action are worked out, put into practice, and are often successful to a remarkable extent.... It is necessary therefore to explain how passion can become moral 'duty' — duty in terms not of political morality but of ethics.⁵⁷

Again, the unsatisfactory partiality of passion without planning is clear. Such a force remains irrational because it is unable to build a new rationality; it remains, literally, incoherent.⁵⁸ Political motivation must come from a controlled, focused passion based on a sense of moral duty.

Another note on Croce supplies additional parameters of this critique and its resolution in practice. Here, the role of the leader as the mediator of political passion is proposed:

...[I]f the concrete political act, as Croce says, is made real in the person of the political leader, it should be observed that the characteristic of the leader as such is certainly not passionality, but rather cold, precise, objectively almost impersonal calculation of the forces in struggle and of their relationships.... The leader rouses and directs the passions, but he himself is 'immune' to them or dominates them [in himself] the better to unleash them, rein them in at the given moment, discipline them, etc. He must know them, as an objective element of fact, as force, more than 'feel them' immediately, he must know them and understand them, albeit with 'great sympathy' (and in such case passion assumes a superior form....⁵⁹

the latter often take a rather stripped-down Gramsci as their inspiration. The point, for Gramsci, was always to figure out how to climb out of the mere locality of experience (and the parochially self-validating 'common sense' passions it generates) to a more comprehensive, articulated practical, intellectual and moral synthesis.

57SPN, 139.

58Gramsci's critique of De Man proceeds from this point. "Hence in such [spontaneous popular] movements there exist multiple elements of 'conscious leadership', but no one of them is predominant or transcends the level of a given social stratum's 'popular science' — its 'common sense' or traditional conception of the world. This is precisely what De Man, empirically, counterposes to Marxism...." SPN, 197-8.

59Q 26, § 5, 2299. In this note Gramsci goes on to discuss 'irony' and 'sarcasm' as political stances; sarcasm is both a form of advanced consciousness and a passionate means of criticizing contradic-

Passion must be experienced, respected, understood, but controlled. It must be made into an instrument of the political will; but there is no sense that feelings thereby lose their dignity as essential features of human experience and the legitimate source of intense motivation. Rather, the feelings express a ‘conception of the world’ that has not (yet) become conscious and ‘rationalized’, that is, systematic and internally consistent.⁶⁰ Politics is the nexus of transformation of the feelings into ‘rationality’, and thus, permanence.

The special role of leadership is the first of two interlocked elements of this nexus, each aspects of the construction of general virtue. The second is the political responsibility of the citizen. “The concept of ‘legislator’ must inevitably be identified with the concept of ‘politician’. Since all men are ‘political beings’, all are also ‘legislators’.” This legislative action may be conscious or unconscious, have a greater or lesser sphere of application in each case; but to a degree, “every man... contributes to modifying the social environment in which he develops... in other words, he tends to establish ‘norms’, rules of living and of behavior.”⁶¹ Emergent political culture (as discussed in Chapter 4) may thus be seen as the creation in *each* member of the community, through an intellectual and moral reform (as discussed in Chapter 5), of the mediating political persona of ‘leadership’, allowing her passion to serve her legislative action rather than to drive it directly and chaotically.

This self-discipline makes a *non-dominative* division of revolutionary labor and function possible. “If everyone is a legislator in the broadest sense of the concept, he continues to be a legislator even if he accepts directives from others — if, as he carries them out, he makes certain that others are carrying them out too; if, having understood their spirit, he propagates them as though making them into rules specifically applicable to limited and definite zones of living.”⁶² All of this reveals that for the spectacularly energetic but unstable motivating passion of charisma, Gramsci substituted a generalized version of the “matter-of-factness, of passionate devotion to a ‘cause’,” of the “feeling of responsibility” and “sense of proportion” that characterized Weber’s individual vocational politician.⁶³

tions for the purpose of educating and elevating consciousness further.

⁶⁰See, e.g., the tremendously important section on ‘Relation between science, religion, and common sense’ in *SPN*, 326-43.

⁶¹*SPN*, 265-6.

⁶²*SPN*, 266.

⁶³Gerth and Mills, eds., *From Max Weber*, 115.

In comparison to an automatic 'breakdown' arising from the sphere of production, or the compact and resolute action of the party acting in the name of the proletariat, this was a highly contingent and risky 'mechanism' of revolution. But it revealed that results achieved in these other ways could only be nominally revolutionary.

Gramsci's response to Weber on the inexorable logic of formal organization and the routinization of original motivations has been implicitly discussed in the context of Gramsci's theory of the party, in Chapter 4, and may easily be imagined from the above discussion. Again, the direct confrontation with Weber adds a sense of the tension in his approach, based on their shared understanding of both the necessity and danger of rational planning and organization:

As political and economic forms develop historically, a new type of functionary is increasingly being produced — what could be described as 'career' functionaries, technically trained for bureaucratic work (civil and military). This is a fact of prime significance for political science, and for any history of the forms taken by the State.... Certainly every type of society and State has had its own problem of functionaries, which it has formulated and resolved in its own way...

Because the objective of the revolutionary party is to become the kernel of a revolutionary community, or new form of state, this is clearly a relevant problem; the more so since the critique of Sorel and Croce established a clear requirement for organization. The passage continues:

The problem of functionaries partly coincides with that of the intellectuals.... Unity of manual and intellectual work, and closer links between legislative and executive power (so that elected functionaries concern themselves not merely with the control of State affairs but also with their execution), may be motives of inspiration for a new approach in solving the problem of the intellectuals as well as the problem of functionaries."⁶⁴

Gramsci observed that the sharp division of functions was largely responsible for the rigidification of an administrative body into an instrument of domination, and he proposed that the gaps be tightened up. But, more fundamentally, his solution to the danger of organization was to reject the restriction of the virtuous vocation of politics to a small stratum of leaders. It will be recalled that in his view everyone is an intellectual; in posing the problem of organization as a problem of the intellectuals, he suggested that it is

64SPN, 186.

through the elevation of consciousness at all party levels that a non-dominative dialectic of motivation and competence may be pursued as a flexible division of labor.

As will be recalled from Chapter 4, Gramsci called the form of this solution ‘democratic’, or ‘organic centralism’, based on an obvious metaphor, and opposed it to ‘bureaucratic centralism’.⁶⁵ The organization, first of the party and then of the revolutionary community, must remain flexible and permeable at all levels. The value of the high leadership’s expertise is plain enough, but in order for this not to rigidify into a clique or impersonal apparatus, effort from below is required: “In any case, it needs to be stressed that the unhealthy manifestations of bureaucratic centralism occurred because of a lack of initiative and responsibility at the bottom, in other words because of the political immaturity of the peripheral forces...”⁶⁶ The importance of the intellectual and moral reform as a *component* rather than a *result* of the revolution becomes clear from another angle: as a guarantee, by the development of the political *will* and the political *capacity* of the masses, against the degeneration of the party into a ruling elite.

The price of a dialectic of motivation and competence, if it is to have any chance of achieving a liberating outcome without quickly degenerating into a fragmented conflict of values or rational elite domination, is thus total, continuous, active, collective commitment to the comprehensive moral order of the marxist conception of the world. This is liberating insofar as it is consciously and freely chosen; it is effective insofar as it is organized.

The vast energy necessary for this monumental effort cannot be generated from a charismatic episode; Gramsci and Weber were in agreement on the unpredictability and transience of these mass-irrational events. The prospect that Gramsci envisioned was rather to turn every member of the community into a conscious ‘vocational politician’, in Weber’s sense. The focused, structured release of energy by citizens morally convinced of the value of their effort is the key to revolutionary transformation, the construction of a coherent general rationality.

⁶⁵SPN, 188-9.

⁶⁶SPN, 189. Gramsci was referring here, presumably, to both the PSI and to the PCI under Bordiga’s leadership, both of which had failed to develop substantive interactive relationships with ‘the following’. Gramsci had only just begun to confront this problem as leader of the PCI when he was arrested.

Weber's understanding of politics as domination ruled out this solution, for him; yet, there is an echo of it, within his conceptual limits, in his pronouncements on the value of human life and the importance of modern democracy. His assertion that "nothing is worthy of man as man unless he can pursue it with passionate devotion" seems to require more than mere consent to the legitimacy of a legal order of the type that characterizes the modern world; but his expectations about the fundamental passivity of the masses blocked the extension of this principle beyond the elect of the 'calling'.

A more radical repositioning resulted from Weber's passionate devotion to Germany's position as a world power: "the historical tasks of the German nation." This devotion led him to recognize the inevitability of 'democratization', and to favor a version that would include the masses in the political life of the Reich. In turn, this pushed him right up to the limits of his scientific conception, where he butted up against Gramsci, occupying the political side: "There are only two choices: either the mass of citizens is left without freedom or rights in a bureaucratic, 'authoritarian state' which has only the appearance of parliamentary rule, and in which the citizens are 'administered' like a herd of cattle; or the citizens are integrated into the state by making them its *co-rulers*. A *nation of masters (Herrenvolk)* — and only such a nation can and may engage in 'world politics' — has *no* choice in this matter."⁶⁷ This opening to radical citizenship is *barely* compatible with the liberalism to which Weber is usually consigned; perhaps it is also too small to more than suggest an even more comprehensive convergence with Gramsci than I have argued.

⁶⁷"Suffrage and Democracy in Germany," in Weber, *Political Writings*, 129. Weber's grudging acceptance of the inevitability of democratization and his determination to make the best of it echo Tocqueville's attitude a half-century before; an interesting convergence that illustrates a great deal about the respective histories of emergent political culture in Germany and France.