The Limits of Rationality

justification can be given. These values, according to Weber, are in eternal conflict with one another, and this conflict cannot be rationally resolved. It is this conception of value conflict—a conception that underlies Weber’s persistent emphasis on the limits of rationality—that I examine in Chapter 3.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1 'On the whole, the course of historical development involves ... a steady advance of the zweckrational ordering of consensual action by means of rational rules, and in particular the progressive transformation of informal associations [Verbünden] into institutions organized on an instrumentally rational basis [zweckrational geordnete Anstalten] (GAW, pp. 446–7; Categ., p. 177).

2 The expression ‘objective rationality’, as Donald Levine has remarked (1981a, p. 11), is ambiguous, denoting objective correctness or validity on the one hand and supra-individual, institutionalized rationality on the other. My concern in this chapter is with objective rationality in the former sense; pp. 9–23 of Chapter 1 examine objective rationality in the latter sense (what Levine calls ‘objectified rationality’).

3 Actor and observer, it should be noted, may use the categories means and ends in different ways to make sense of the same concrete course of action. In particular, the end imputed to an action by an observer may not coincide with the end consciously intended by the actor.

3

The Ethical Irrationality of the World*

Weber’s conception of the limits of rationality is rooted in his understanding of value conflict. If, as Weber argues, value conflict cannot be reconciled, then the scope of rational decision-making is narrowly limited. Only in situations shielded from value conflict can choice be rational; between conflicting value commitments, choice must be arbitrary. Furthermore, if value conflict is irreconcilable, then conflicting conceptions of substantive rationality, based on conflicting value commitments, are likewise irreconcilable, and the ideal of a substantively rational society—of a ‘good society’—is meaningless from a scientific point of view, since there is no rational way to reconcile conflicting conceptions of the nature of a substantively rational society. The claim that value conflict cannot be reconciled, in short, is the basis for Weber’s argument that there are inherent limits to the rationality of individual action and to the rationality of the social order.

This chapter explores the philosophical and sociological foundations of Weber’s claim that value conflict is irreconcilable. Its perspective is expository, not critical.¹ Exposition, in this case, has its own risks: the highly elliptical character of Weber’s remarks requires us to go beyond straight exegesis in an attempt to reconstruct his theory of value conflict from a handful of tantalizingly sketchy passages.

Weber uses a rich variety of language, much of it uncharacteristically extravagant, to express his conception of value conflict. He speaks, for example, of the ‘struggle that the gods of the various orders and values are engaged in’ (FMW, p. 148); of

*The title is taken from ‘Politics as a Vocation’ (FMW, p. 122).
to certain ultimate "values" and "meanings" of life, "values" and "meanings" which are forged into purposes and thereby translated into rational-teleological action" (R&K, p. 192). Without a value-orientation, it is impossible to have a genuine personality. Value-orientations, in short, are at once cognitive and conative: every value-orientation, religious or secular, involves an integration of meanings, values and dispositions and represents a practical 'stand in the face of the world' at the same time that it expresses a 'systematic and rationalized "image of the world"' (FMW, p. 280).

Value-orientations interest Weber in two respects. In the first place, they are causally significant: they shape and guide human action. This does not mean that action is determined exclusively or even primarily by value-orientations. Value-orientations are complexes of ideas and dispositions, and Weber argues in a famous passage that 'interests (material and ideal), not ideas, directly govern men's conduct' (GAR, p. 252; FMW, p. 280). But while they do not directly determine behavior, value-orientations constitute the framework within which interests—especially ideal interests—are defined. In the terms of Weber's 'switchman' metaphor, value-orientations often determine the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest (FMW, p. 280). That a full understanding of historical change is impossible without an understanding of the practical consequences of these value-orientations is a thesis that informs not only The Protestant Ethic but all of Weber's empirical work.

In the second place, value-orientations interest Weber because of their moral significance, because they lend coherence, dignity and meaning to human life. This theme, discussed in detail in Chapter 4, need only be adumbrated here. "The dignity of the "personality"", Weber writes, 'lies in the fact that . . . there exist values about which it organizes its life' (M, p. 55). It is because value-orientations are causally significant that they are morally significant: it is because they shape and guide action by giving a central direction to life—and thus distinguish human life from a mere 'event in nature' (M, p. 18)—that they are able to endow life with a coherent meaning and dignity. This intermingling of empirical and normative perspectives is responsible for the resonance of Weber's discussion of values and value
conflict—but also for the ambiguity of some of his formulations. The empirically indispensable but at the same time morally charged notions of value-orientation and value sphere again and again lead him into a ‘gray zone’ between analysis and evaluation, where empirical claims and normative postulates are not easily disentangled.

Weber’s conception of the clash of value-orientations rests on his account—part philosophical, part sociological—of the struggle for meaning in the modern world. New conceptions of the meaning of life—and thus new value-orientations—derive chiefly from charismatic figures (especially religious prophets) and from what Weber calls ‘the natural rationalistic need of intellectualism to conceive the world as a meaningful cosmos’ (E&S, p. 505). Thus in order to understand Weber’s conception of the clash of value-orientations in modern society, we must first examine his account of the changing significance of charisma and intellectual need as sources of value-orientations in the modern rationalized world.

A charismatic figure is an individual who is believed to possess ‘supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically extraordinary [ausseralltäglichen] power or qualities’ and who, as a result, is set apart from ordinary men and endowed with a special authority (W&G, p. 179; E&S, p. 241).5 Charismatic authority, however, differs sharply from the authority of a sacred tradition or of a fixed and explicit set of rules: it is creative, disruptive, revolutionary. The charismatic leader ‘preaches, creates, or demands new obligations’; he ‘transforms all values and breaks all traditional and rational norms’; he radically alters the ‘central attitudes and directions of action’ of his followers. In short, he creates a new value-orientation and strives to impose it on others. Charisma is thus a powerful force of historical change; in premodern times, it is ‘the great revolutionary force’. Because charisma is essentially creative and disruptive, the emergence of charismatic leaders always sharpens the clash of value-orientations. For every charismatic figure creates and promotes a new value-orientation that inevitably collides with existing ones (E&S, pp. 243, 245, 1115).

A second source of novel value-orientations is the need, experienced most urgently by intellectuals, to perceive the world as a meaningful totality. The intellectual ‘seeks in various ways, the casuistry of which extends into infinity, to endow his life with a pervasive meaning, and thus to find unity with himself, with his fellow men, and with the cosmos’ (E&S, p. 506). The intellectual search for meaning, like the charismatic generation of new value-orientations, is essentially creative. The individual cannot discover the meaning of life through conceptual or empirical analysis; he must forge such meaning himself through a free act of the human spirit. And like charismatic value-creation, intellectual value-creation is divisive: new value-orientations created by intellectuals inevitably collide with existing ones.

Both charismatic and intellectual value-creation, then, contribute to value conflict. Not much more than this can be said about the clash of value-orientations from an ahistorical point of view. Weber’s account of value conflict, however, is an historical one. The intellectual struggle for meaning and the charismatic creation of new value-orientations take place under very different conditions today than formerly. As political and economic rationalization progress, ‘discipline inexorably takes over ever larger areas [, a development that] . . . more and more restricts the importance of charisma’ (E&S, p. 1156).6 Rationalization, moreover, limits the significance not only of charismatic value-creation but of all individual value-creation, indeed of all individual action: ‘the waning of charisma generally indicates the diminishing importance of individual action’ (E&S, pp. 1148–9). But if rationalization diminishes the causal significance of individual acts of value-creation, it does not diminish their moral significance. Individual value-creators lose their power to bind communities together: the ‘prophetic pneuma, which in former times swept through the great communities like a firebrand, welding them together’ (FMW, p. 155), does not have this power in the rationalized societies of today. But value-creation by individuals retains its significance as a great divider of communities. The struggle between ultimate value-orientations in the modern world is not, as formerly, a struggle of entire solitary communities against one another: it is increasingly a struggle of small sects, and ultimately a struggle of individuals (cf. FMW, p. 282).

Rationalization, far from rendering insignificant the clash of
value-orientations, in fact sharpens this clash. At the same time
that it weakens the binding force of charisma, it accentuates the
urgency of the search for meaning by individuals:

As intellectualism suppresses belief in magic, the world's
processes become disenchanted, lose their magical significa-
cance, and henceforth simply 'are' and 'happen' but no longer
signify anything. As a consequence, there is a growing demand
that the world and the total pattern of life be subject to an
order that is significant and meaningful. (E&S, p. 306)

Instead of abating, the need for meaning becomes more acute
with the progress of rationalization, especially with the develop-
ment of the scientific world-view and the attendant 'disenchant-
ment' of the world. Yet at the same time that it becomes more
acute, the need for meaning becomes more difficult to satisfy, for
the scientific 'disenchantment' of the world carries with it the
message of its own barrenness as a source of meaning. Science
yields no value-orientations: individuals must create these
themselves. And so long as each individual is impelled to create his
own value-orientation, with no guidance from science, indeed
with no objective guidance at all, value-orientations will con-
tinue to conflict.

It is the essential subjectivity of value-orientations that assures
value conflict. Value-orientations are subjective in three distinct
senses. First, they are inner properties of individuals—complexes
of beliefs, attitudes, value commitments and dispositions. Thus
Weber remarks that a charismatic shift in value-orientations
involves a 'subjective or internal reorientation' (E&S, p. 245).
Secondly, value-orientations are subjectively generated. They
cannot be automatically imposed on individuals; they must be
created or actively embraced by individuals. The individual
may—indeed must, if his life is to be a truly human one—choose
his own 'fate': he must forge the 'meaning of [his] activity and
existence' (M, p. 18). 8

Finally, only a subjective validity can be claimed for value-
orientations. As general conceptions of the nature of life and the
world, as Weltanschaungen, value-orientations embody knowl-
edge claims; but these claims have no objective validity. Sci-
entific knowledge, for Weber, is objective: 'scientific truth is

precisely what is valid for all who seek the truth' (M, p. 84). The
'knowledge' embodied in value-orientations, in contrast, is valid
not for all who seek meaning and direction in life, but only for
each individual. Objective scientific knowledge is radically dis-
tinct from the metaphysical knowledge embodied in subjective
value-orientations: science yields no Weltanschaungen, and
value-orientations can claim no support from science. 'We
cannot learn the meaning of the world', Weber writes, 'from the
results of its analysis, be it ever so perfect' (M, p. 57). Not only
the knowledge claims but also, of course, the value commitments
embodied in value-orientations have only a subjective validity.
Science yields no value commitments (though it presupposes
some; cf. FMW, p. 143), and it is impotent to arbitrate between
conflicting value commitments. Weber is quite emphatic on this
last point:

Even such simple questions as the extent to which the end
should sanction unavoidable means ... or how conflicts
between several concretely conflicting ends are to be arbitrated,
are entirely matters of choice or compromise. There is no
(rational or empirical) scientific procedure of any kind what-
soever which can provide us with a decision here. (M, pp.
18–19, emphasis added)

Value-orientations, then, are subjective in a triple sense: they
are constituted by inner beliefs and dispositions, created out of
inner need independently of external causes, and endowed with
only a subjective validity.

This threefold subjectivity explains why conflict between
value-orientations cannot be rationally resolved. But the mere
existence of conflict implies nothing about its significance. The
clash of value-orientations, for example, might be interpreted as
analogous to the clash of interests in a pluralistic political system
or the clash of preferences in a market economy—as 'manage-
able' if not exactly benign. Neither conflicting political interests
nor conflicting economic preferences can be reconciled through
any scientific procedure. According to theories of the pluralistic
polity and the market economy, however, they can be 'har-
monized' through the mediating institutions of representative
government and the free market. Perhaps value conflict, like
political and economic conflict as conceived by theorists of pluralism, would be managed, mediated, sublimated: transformed, in short, into regulated competition through some neutral institutional mechanism which itself would stand above all conflict. (Some such neutral mechanism through which conflicts among value-orientations could be mediated is implied in the phrase ‘the marketplace of ideas’.) If this could be done, then the clash of value-orientations could be of limited significance. Individuals would continue to create divergent value-orientations, but these value differences could be easily accommodated: they would not threaten the social order.

Weber, however, derides the ‘optimistic syncretism’ (M, p. 57) that minimizes the seriousness of value conflict; his vision of the clash of value-orientations—informed, no doubt, by his acute awareness of the great social conflicts of his time—is much darker than the one sketched above. For Weber, value-orientations are at the very core of the personality: they are serious, consequential, even fateful. The clash of value-orientations, since it can involve conflict over the most fundamental issues of social life, can threaten the cohesion and stability of the social order. There may be conflict, for example, over the legitimacy of the institutions of representative government— institutions that in the long run can only function to mediate conflict, as they are supposed to do in the pluralist world-view, to the extent that they are not the objects of conflict.

Because it may involve conflict over fundamental, all-embracing conceptions of the nature and meaning of life, then, the clash of value-orientations can indeed undermine social cohesion. Whether or not it will in fact do so at a particular time in a particular society cannot be determined a priori, for this depends on a number of empirical questions. First, what is the ‘incidence’ of value-orientations in the society? Not all individuals have value-orientations in Weber’s strong sense of the term: not all individuals systematically organize their action into a ‘direction of life’ based on a core of consciously integrated values and meanings (although, according to Weber, such an integrated value-orientation is what distinguishes a truly human life from a mere ‘event in nature’—see Chapter 4, Section 1).

Value conflict will be intensified or muted as more or fewer individuals create or adopt value-orientations.

Secondly, what is the degree of heterogeneity among value-orientations? There is a suggestion in Weber’s work that heterogeneity tends to increase over time as widely shared religious world-views are eroded by the progress of science, leaving individuals to create value-orientations on their own, and as new provinces of activity—Weber mentions specifically the esthetic and erotic spheres—come to be conceived as universes of ‘consciously grasped independent values which exist in their own right’ (FMW, p. 342; see the following section). The greater the heterogeneity of value-orientations, the more intense will be the conflict among them.

Finally, what is the social and political content of value-orientations? To what extent do value-orientations call into question the legitimacy of the political order? To what extent does value conflict concern basic structural and institutional features of the social order? The more salient the social and political content of value-orientations, the greater will be the strain on social cohesion.

THE CLASH OF VALUE SPHERES

In ‘Science as a Vocation’, Weber writes that the ‘value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other’ (FMW, p. 147). This claim differs sharply from his argument about the clash of value-orientations. The latter belongs to a well-defined philosophical tradition, that of ethical relativism and subjectivism (though Weber places more emphasis on comprehensive world-views and less on discrete value judgments than do most moral philosophers). The argument about value spheres, on the other hand, defies easy characterization or classification. Based on a quasi-philosophical, quasi-sociological analysis of the norms and values immanent in different ‘life spheres’, it is a difficult and obscure argument, but one nevertheless central to Weber’s vision of the world.

A value sphere, for Weber, is a distinct realm of activity which has its own inherent dignity, and in which certain values, norms, and obligations are immanent. Consider, for example, politics.
Whatever ends he pursues, the politician must be guided by an ‘ethic of responsibility’. This is not a value-orientation, nor does it imply any particular value-orientation. The ethic of responsibility is consistent with the pursuit of any political ends and the use of any means. It governs not what a politician should do, but how he should decide what to do. The ethic of responsibility is not a world-view: it is a conception of the mode of decision-making appropriate to, indeed obligatory for, a politician. This ethic requires two things of the politician: that he ‘give an account of the foreseeable results of [his] action’ (FMW, p. 120); and that, in full awareness of the conflict between what is required of him as a politician and what may be required of him from the point of view of some other value sphere, he be prepared to use morally questionable and, if necessary, violent means to realize political ends, thus endangering ‘the salvation of [his] soul’ (FMW, p. 126). In so far as an individual does not meet these responsibilities, in Weber’s view, he is not a true politician, though his conduct might be praiseworthy from the point of view of an extra-political value sphere.

The politician’s obligation to act according to an ethic of responsibility, according to Weber, is an objective one, arising from the specific nature of political activity—from the fact that ‘the attainment of “good” ends may require the politician to use the specific and “morally dubious” means available to him, namely “power backed up by violence” (FMW, pp. 119, 121). In what sense, though, does an obligation arise from this fact (assuming, arguendo, that it is a fact)? Can this be consistently argued by the man who tirelessly advocates a sharp fact–value distinction? I think it can. In the first place, the ethic of responsibility does not commit the politician to any substantive values or ends. The requirement that the politician take into account the probable consequences of his action is a purely formal one. Moreover, even this is not a categorical but a hypothetical requirement. Weber readily admits that ‘one cannot prescribe to anyone whether he should follow an ethic of conviction or an ethic of responsibility’ (GPS, p. 546; FMW, p. 127). If, however, an individual wishes to be a political actor—i.e. to pursue ends with means that are backed ultimately by violence—and if he wishes actually to achieve his ends, whatever they may be, then he must not allow his action to be guided solely by the goodness of his intentions or the intrinsic rightness of his means. To do so would be to condemn his action to failure in a world in which good intentions are not guaranteed to produce good results. Instead, he must estimate the probable consequences of alternative courses of action and act in full awareness of these probable consequences. Only in this way can his political action have a chance of succeeding.\[11\]

Politics is ‘inescapably bound to worldly conditions’ (FMW, p. 339)—especially to the fact that the world is ethically irrational, a place of ‘undeserved suffering, unpunished injustice, and hopeless stupidity’. In such a world, ‘it is not true that good can follow only from good and evil only from evil, but . . . often the opposite is true’ (FMW, pp. 122–3). Good intentions can fail to produce good results; irreproachable means can lead to disastrous consequences. The politician must therefore acknowledge the irreconcilable ‘tension between means and ends’; he must take account of the ‘average deficiencies of people’; he must not confuse ethics with efficacy; he must ‘give an account of the foreseeable results of [his] action’; he must be willing, if need be, to ‘pay the price of using morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones’ that may have ‘evil ramifications’; and he must assume the burden of deciding in concrete cases the extent to which an end ‘“justifies” the ethically dangerous means and ramifications’ (FMW, pp. 120–1). These obligations are immanent in political activity in the sense that effective political action, whatever the ends to which it is oriented, presupposes their fulfillment.

The obligations of the politician, then, are not ethical obligations. The ‘must’ in ‘the politician must act according to an ethic of responsibility’ is not a specifically moral or ethical ‘must’. It is rather a pragmatic ‘must’, based not on an ethical theory but on a theory of the conditions for successful political activity. Acting according to an ethic of responsibility, for Weber, is an indispensable means to all specifically political ends. Weber thus does not violate his fact–value distinction in deriving obligations from certain general ‘facts’ about political activity. These facts may be disputed, but the logic of the argument is unimpeachable.
Weber’s account of politics illustrates three significant aspects of his conception of value spheres. First, value spheres, unlike value-orientations, are not created by individuals: they exist independently of and prior to the individuals who participate in them. Value spheres have an objective existence, based on the objective requirements of particular ‘forms of life’. They may evolve over time as new forms of social life emerge; but the individual confronts them as given, as existing independently of his own action.

Secondly, there is no ‘ultimate’ value sphere from which to arbitrate between conflicting obligations immanent in different spheres. Consider, for example, the value spheres of politics and brotherly conduct. Immanent in the political sphere is an ethic that requires the individual to calculate the consequences of his action before acting; immanent in the value sphere of brotherly conduct, by contrast, is an ethic that requires the individual to act lovingly toward his neighbor, and ultimately even toward his enemy, regardless of the consequences (FMW, p. 330). The conflict between political rationality and brotherly love is irreconcilable: it cannot be resolved within any higher order value sphere, for no such higher order sphere exists. Every value sphere is a particular realm of activity in which particular norms are immanent. There are no universal value spheres—and hence no universal norms deriving from them. Torn between conflicting obligations deriving from different value spheres, the individual must simply choose: ‘According to our ultimate standpoint, the one is the devil and the other the God, and the individual has to decide (entscheiden) which is the God for him and which is the devil’ (GAW, p. 546; FMW, p. 148). Weber emphasizes the naked non-rationality of this choice. It cannot be guided by science; nor can it be determined by the norms of a higher value sphere, for choice is the task of life itself, not of any particular realm of life.

Thirdly, that the individual must choose which value sphere to serve does not imply that conflict between value spheres is subjective. Value-orientations are subjective, and conflict among them reflects the different ways in which individuals satisfy their need for meaning. But value spheres exist and conflict independently of the conflict of individual value-orientations. The clash between the political value sphere and the sphere of brotherliness, for example, is inherent in the respective inner logic of political and brotherly conduct; it is independent of any conflict that might exist between the value-orientations of particular politicians and those of individuals committed to an ethic of brotherly love. The clash of value-orientations is subjective in the sense that it arises out of the ever-shifting differences in individuals’ fundamental beliefs and dispositions; the clash of value spheres, on the other hand, is objective in the sense that it arises out of differences in the inner structure and logic of different forms of social action.

Weber’s understanding of the social world as composed of a plurality of value spheres, each with its own immanent and autonomous norms, is similar to the vision of society implicit in Hindu metaphysics and ethics:

The Hindu order of life made each of the different occupations an object of a specific ethical code, a Dharma… The caste order allowed for the possibility of fashioning the Dharma of each single caste, from those of the ascetics and Brahmins to those of the rogues and harlots, in accordance with the immanent and autonomous laws of their respective occupations. War and politics were also included… This specialization of ethics allowed for the Indian ethic’s quite unbroken treatment of politics by following politics’ own laws. (FMW, p. 123, emphasis added)

But while the Indian vision conceives the various value spheres as harmoniously integrated into a rational social and cosmic order, Weber conceives them as locked in irreconcilable conflict with one another. There are two reasons for this sharp difference in perspective.

First, Weber’s conception of the relation of the individual to the value spheres differs radically from the Indian conception. The individual, in the Hindu vision, never need choose between conflicting obligations arising from different value spheres. The obligations he must fulfill are unambiguously dictated by the caste position into which he is born. According to the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, however, the individual who fulfills the obligations of his caste will be reborn in a higher caste; the
individual who does not will be reborn in a lower caste. An individual's caste position is thus merited, if not exactly chosen. Because the hierarchy of castes is clearly defined, so is the individual's long-term self-interest: to improve his caste position in subsequent incarnations. The individual is never torn by choice. He is born into a value sphere—into a distinct set of caste-based obligations—and it is in his own interest to fulfill these duties, and these alone, so as to assure his spiritual progress.

In Weber's conception, by contrast, the individual cannot escape the burden of choice. Because of the dissolution of ascriptive ties, he must forge his own relationship to the various value spheres. Because the spheres 'cross and interpenetrate' (M, p. 18), he must often choose between irreconcilable obligations. And because the spheres are not arranged into a universally recognized social and cosmic hierarchy, the individual can rely on no universally valid standard to guide his choice between conflicting demands. Though the value spheres have an objective existence, conflicts among them can be resolved, for any given individual, only through purely subjective choice.

Secondly, and more important, Weber postulates an intrinsic connection between the historical process of rationalization and the intensification of antagonisms among the value spheres. One aspect of rationalization is an increasing consciousness of what Weber calls the 'innere Eigengesetzmäßigkeiten der einzelnen Sphären'—meaning an increasing awareness of the causal, axiological, and normative autonomy of the various value spheres, or in other words an increasing awareness that conduct in each value sphere takes place according to its own laws, has its own inherent dignity or value, and generates its own norms and obligations. This growing consciousness of the autonomy of the various value spheres intensifies the tensions among them:

The rationalization and the conscious sublimation of man's relations to the various spheres of values, external and internal, religious and worldly, have pressed towards making conscious the internal and lawful autonomy [Eigengesetzmäßigkeit] of the individual spheres, thereby letting them drift into those tensions which remain hidden to the original naive naturalness of man's relation to the external world. (GAR, p. 541; FMW, p. 328)

This dense and difficult passage announces the central theme of 'Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions' (FMW, pp. 323–59), Weber's final and most thorough discussion of value spheres: that rationalization in the religious, economic, political, esthetic, erotic, and intellectual realms engenders a growing consciousness of the autonomy of these spheres of value, thereby intensifying the 'antagonism of inner meanings' (Sinneideschaft) among them. Here I give a schematic account of Weber's (already highly schematic) discussion.

Rationalization is the leading theme of Weber's studies of religion, as of his empirical work as a whole. Religion, according to Weber, arises out of magic and is originally indistinguishable from it: both magic and primitive religion are means of securing worldly goods—riches, health, long life, good harvests. As it is rationalized, however, religion comes to be conceived as an autonomous value sphere, explicitly distinguished from and opposed to magic and other worldly value spheres. Rationalization creates and progressively intensifies tensions between religious and 'worldly' values and obligations. In practice, of course, religion is continually forced to accommodate to worldly demands, to make concessions, for example, concerning economic, political, intellectual and sexual conduct. But despite these compromises, the principled and conscious antagonism between religious and worldly values that emerges as religion is rationalized has decisively shaped the consciousness—and the conscience—of modern man.

The religious 'rejection of the world' emerges not from rationalization as such—for many different and even contradictory religious developments are in some sense rationalizations—but from the distinctive pattern of rationalization associated with religions carried by prophets promising salvation from earthly distress. This pattern of rationalization has four salient features. First, the hope for salvation is displaced from this world (Diesseits) to a world to come (Jenseits). As this happens, 'worldly' obligations and activities are devalued:

life in this world comes to be regarded as a merely provisional form of existence ... action in this world becomes oriented to
one's fate in the world beyond ... [and] the problem of the basic relationship of god to the world and its imperfections presses into the foreground of thought. (W&G, p. 407; E&S, p. 521)

Secondly, a systematically unified world view develops:

To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning, to which man's conduct must be oriented if it is to bring salvation and after which it must be patterned in an integrally meaningful manner. (E&S, p. 450)

The conflict between this 'conception of the world as a meaningful totality' and the apparent irrationality and meaninglessness of much of empirical reality, between the world as it ought to be and as it actually is, 'produces the strongest tensions in man's inner life as well as in his external relationship to the world' (E&S, p. 451).

Thirdly, rationalization involves the systematic unification of religious ethics. The 'complex of heterogeneous prescriptions and prohibitions' (E&S, p. 437) that make up a religious ethic in its early stages gives way to a single requirement: that the individual maintain the permanent disposition (Dauerhabitus) necessary and sufficient to assure his salvation (or to assure one who believes in predestination—a Calvinist, for example—of his salvation). Every genuine religious prophet promotes an ethical systematization of this kind by commanding that an individual's total way of life (Lebensführung) be oriented to the pursuit of a single sacred value (Heiligut) rather than to the pursuit of various worldly goods (weltliche Guter) (GAR, pp. 540–1; FMW, pp. 327–8).

Finally, rationalization involves what Weber calls the 'sublimation of piety' (E&S, p. 438). By sublimation Weber means the increasing concern of religious ethics with the inner state (Gesinnung) of the individual and the decreasing concern with the external course of action. To the extent that such a 'sublimation' occurs, the particular actions of an individual are not scrutinized separately for their conformity to discrete ritual or ethical prescriptions but are instead treated as 'symptoms and expressions of an underlying ethical total personality' (ethischen Gesamtpersonlichkeit): individual conduct is judged not by the correctness of external actions but by the 'value of the total personality pattern' (E&S, pp. 533–4).

This rationalization of religious ethics reveals an irreconcilable tension inherent in the concept of rationality. The rationality demanded by 'sublimated' religious ethics places the ethical value of an act solely in the actor's inner disposition (Gesinnung) and not at all in the act's consequences (Folgen); the actor is not ethically responsible for the consequences of his action, but must simply maintain the proper Gesinnung and leave the consequences to God (M, p. 16; FMW, p. 339). The religious demand that one act in this wertrational or value-rational manner (see Chapter 2, pp. 51–2) is wholly incommensurable with the pragmatic requirement, inmanent in all 'worldly' action, that one act in a zweckrational or instrumentally rational manner. Wertrational action strives for inner purity, guided by a conscious belief in the intrinsic value (Eigenwert) of a certain inner state, whatever its consequences; zweckrational action strives for external success, guided by a conscious weighing of ends, means, and unintended but foreseeable secondary consequences.

The opposition between Wertrationalität and Zweckrationalität finds concrete expression in the antagonism between the religious ethic of brotherliness and the objective necessity for zweckrational conduct in the economic and political spheres. Rational action in these spheres, if it is to stand any chance of 'succeeding', i.e. of achieving the desired results, whatever these may be, is 'inescapably bound to worldly conditions, conditions which are remote from brotherliness' (GAR, p. 552; FMW, p. 339). Rational economic conduct, for example, is inextricably bound up with market struggles, which, in their consummate impersonality, are the epitome of unbrotherliness. Calculation is 'required' in the sense that whoever scorns it must face 'economic failure and, in the long run, economic ruin' (E&S, p. 585). Purely zweckrational behavior is not optional: it is 'prescribed by objective situations ... under penalty of economic extinction' (W&G, p. 900; E&S, p. 1186). Yet the 'absolute depersonalization' of this calculating attitude is 'contrary to all the elementary forms of human relationships' and is 'fundamentally alien' to the
religious ethic of brotherliness (E&G, pp. 636–7). Similarly, rational political action has its own ‘objective pragmatism’, follows its own ‘external and internal laws’. The more it is rationalized in terms of its own autonomous laws—the more matter of fact and calculating politics is, and the freer of passionate feelings, of wrath, and of love it becomes”—the more politics is estranged from the demands of the religious ethic of brotherliness (FMW, pp. 334–5).

In practice, of course, religious ethics have always had to make compromises with the demands of economic and political life. But despite these compromises, the tension between the religious and the economic and political value spheres has steadily intensified as a result of diverging processes of rationalization: the substantive rationalization of religious ethics in the direction of a Gesinnungsethik and pure Wertrationalität, and the formal rationalization of economic and political action in the direction of increasing calculability and pure Zweckrationalität.

Tension among value spheres is complicated and intensified by the rationalization and conscious cultivation of esthetic and erotic enjoyment, which develops in reaction to the formal rationalization of economic and political action and in competition with the substantive rationalization of religious ethics. As the world is increasingly intellectualized and rationalized, art and eros, because of their ‘essentially non-rational or anti-rational character’, receive an ever-stronger value accent (Wertakzent) as life-enhancing antidotes to the deadening dominance of Zweckrational action and intellectual culture. Art and eros emerge as autonomous value spheres, as realms of ‘ever-more consciously grasped independent values’. The more these values are consciously-elevated to the level of absolute values, and the more they are conceived as harboring the ‘most real kernel of life’ (realsten Lebenskern), the more esthetic and erotic enjoyment takes over ‘the function of a this-worldly salvation from the routines of everyday life and, above all, from the increasing pressures of theoretical and practical rationalism’ (GAR, pp. 554–5; FMW, pp. 341–2, 345). This attempt to escape the anesthetizing influence of economic, political and intellectual rationalization, however, is in one sense doomed to failure, for

the accentuation and conscious cultivation of esthetic and erotic values is itself a form of intellectualizing rationalization. Weber hints at this self-defeating result—another instance of the paradox of unintended consequences—when he writes that

the spheres of the irrational, the only spheres that intellectualism has not yet touched, are now raised into consciousness and put under its lens. This modern intellectualist form of romantic irrationalism ... may well bring about the very opposite of its intended goal. (GAW, p. 540; FMW, p. 143)

As a method—even if ultimately self-defeating—of achieving a this-worldly salvation from ‘mechanisms of rationalization’ (FMW, p. 345), the conscious cultivation of esthetic and erotic enjoyment collides with religion and its promise of an other-worldly salvation. It is true that some esthetic and erotic experiences may have a psychological and even a physiological affinity with certain religious experiences (FMW, pp. 342–3, 347–9), but this affinity only intensifies their ‘antagonism of inner meanings’ (Sinnfeindschaft) (FMW, p. 348).

Consider finally the intellectual value sphere. The intellectual realm emerges as an autonomous value sphere in ancient Greece with the development of self-consciousness about concepts:

In Greece, for the first time, appeared a handy means by which one could put the logical screws upon somebody so that he could not come out without admitting either that he knew nothing or that this and nothing else was the truth, the eternal truth that never would vanish ... That was the tremendous experience which dawned upon the disciples of Socrates. And from this it seemed to follow that if one only found the right concept of the beautiful, the good, or, for instance, of bravery, of the soul, ... that then one could also grasp its true being. And this, in turn, seemed to open the way for knowing and for teaching how to act rightly in life and, above all, how to act as a citizen of the state; for this question was everything to the Hellenic man, whose thinking was political throughout. (FMW, p. 141)

Through this ‘realization of the significance of the concept’
The Limits of Rationality

(FMW, p. 141), the intellectual realm emerges as not only an autonomous but also an imperialistic value sphere, claiming to show men 'the “way to true being”, the “way to true art”, the “way to true nature”, the “way to true God”, the “way to true happiness” ' (FMW, p. 143)—claiming, in short, for conceptual analysis the power to make all of human life conform to reason.

The rise of modern science at once enriches and diminishes the autonomy of intellect and its power to shape conduct. Modern science ‘disenchants’ the world by construing it as a rationally calculable and manipulable causal mechanism (FMW, p. 350). On the one hand, the theoretical understanding of the disenchanted world as a causal mechanism subject to no ‘mysterious incalculable forces’ makes possible its practical manipulation. It is intellect that rules the disenchanted world, a world in which ‘one can, in principle, master all things by calculation’ (alle Dinge durch . . . Berechnen beherrschen) (FMW, p. 139). Disenchantment in this sense dramatically enhances the power of intellect. On the other hand, disenchantment divests the world not only of ‘mysterious incalculable forces’—i.e. of obstacles to instrumentally rational action—but also of its meaning. For to the extent that science conceives the world as a causal mechanism operating in accordance with wholly non-ethical laws, it ‘develops refutations of every intellectual approach which in any way asks for a “meaning” of worldly occurrences’ (GAR, p. 564; FMW, p. 351). The cosmos of natural causality postulated by science cannot be reconciled with the cosmos of ethical meaning required by religion—and, more generally, by intellect. Disenchantment in this respect diminishes the autonomy of intellect by withdrawing the imprimatur of scientific legitimacy from intellect’s prime ambition: to show the ‘way to true being’ by discovering the meaning of the world and guiding conduct in accordance with this meaning.

Disenchantment radically transforms the intellectual value sphere. If ‘we cannot learn the meaning of the world from the results of its analysis’ (M, p. 57)—the lesson of disenchantment—then the value of intellectual activity becomes problematic. For Socrates and his followers, the value of intellectual activity was profoundly social: conceptual analysis could show men ‘how to act rightly in life and, above all, how to act as a citizen of the state’ (FMW, p. 141). For modern man, however, the value of intellectual activity is essentially individual: intellect cannot guide the life of a society; it can only enrich the lives of individuals. No longer a means of discovering true being and guiding right conduct, intellectual activity comes to be pursued as an end in itself. Intellectual (and, more broadly, cultural) values are increasingly understood as values to be appropriated by individuals striving for a worldly self-perfection (innerweltlichen Selbstvervollkommung). The pursuit of these ‘highest worldly goods’, like the pursuit of esthetic or erotic values, assumes the function of providing a this-worldly salvation—a salvation through self-perfection from the routines of workaday existence in a world denuded of its meaning (GAR, pp. 568–9; FMW, pp. 354–6). But this worldly striving for ‘salvation’ through the creation or appropriation of intellectual and cultural values is entangled in a web of tensions. As a quest for salvation through rational intellectual activity, it collides with the search for salvation from rationalization and intellectualism through the pursuit of esthetic and especially erotic enjoyment. As a striving for salvation through an accumulation of worldly values, it collides with the religious quest for an otherworldly salvation. And as a form of self-cultivation, it creates an ‘unbrotherly aristocracy that is independent of all personal ethical qualities of man’ (GAR, p. 569; FMW, p. 355) and thus collides with the value sphere of brotherly conduct.16

Apart from these tensions with other value spheres, the striving for salvation from meaninglessness through intellectual cultivation is condemned to fail even in its own terms:

The Ethical Irrationality of the World

The peasant, like Abraham, could die ‘satiated with life’. The feudal landlord and the warrior hero could do likewise. For both fulfilled a cycle of their existence beyond which they did not reach . . . But the ‘cultivated’ man who strives for self-perfection, in the sense of acquiring or creating ‘cultural values’, cannot do this. He can become ‘weary of life’ but he cannot become ‘satiated with life’ in the sense of completing a cycle. For the perfectibility of a man of culture in principle progresses indefinitely, as do the cultural values. And the segment which the individual and passive recipient or the active co-builder can comprise in the course of a finite life becomes
the more trifling the more differentiated and multiplied the cultural values and the goals for self-perfection become. Hence the harnessing of man into this external and internal cosmos of culture can offer the less likelihood that an individual would absorb either culture as a whole or what in any case is 'essential' in culture. Moreover there exists no definitive criterion for judging the latter. It thus becomes less and less likely that 'culture' and the striving for culture can have any inner-worldly meaning for the individual. (FMW, p. 356)

Self-perfection through intellectual cultivation thus not only collides with the demands of other value spheres: it is also impossible in principle. It is with this bleak assessment of the meaning of intellectual culture that Weber concludes his discussion of the irreconcilable antagonisms among the main value spheres of the modern world.

VALUE CONFLICT AND WEBER'S DIAGNOSIS OF MODERNITY

'Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions' (FMW, pp. 323–59) is widely recognized as a key text, as the final expression of Weber's 'diagnosis of modernity and its problems of meaning' (Schlicchter, 1979, p. 64). The heart of this diagnosis is the claim that 'the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other' (FMW, p. 147). But what is the status of this diagnosis? Is it a metaphysical diagnosis, an expression of Weber's personal world-view, his personal value-orientation? Or is it an empirical diagnosis, a scientific account of value conflict in the modern world?

Weber's tantalizing introduction to 'Religious Rejections' suggests that his theory of the clash of value spheres is neither a metaphysical nor an empirical diagnosis of modernity but merely an ideal-typical conceptual scheme. Not metaphysical: Weber insists that his schematic analysis of value spheres 'does not teach a philosophy of its own'. Nor empirical: he admits that the 'individual spheres of value are prepared with a rational consistency which is rarely found in reality'. The value spheres are not actually existing phenomena but 'theoretically constructed [ideal] types of conflicting "life orders"', and the conflicts among them are not actual but possible conflicts: they are conflicts that would occur if 'certain rational conclusions, which can be established theoretically, [were] drawn in reality', if rules of conduct were deduced with perfect consistency from divergent ultimate values. Like all ideal-typical constructions, the ideal-typical presentation of value spheres makes it possible to 'determine the degree of approximation of the historical phenomenon to the theoretically constructed type'. To this extent, as Weber readily concedes, the ideal-typical construction of value spheres is 'merely a technical aid which facilitates a more lucid arrangement and terminology' (FMW, pp. 323–4).

Is Weber's theory of the clash of value spheres, then, not a theory at all, but merely a heuristic device? Is the burgeoning literature on Weber's diagnosis of the plight of man in modern society much ado about nothing? Certainly the tone of much of this literature, especially that which focuses narrowly on the Angst-ridden perorations to Weber's speeches on politics and science as vocations, is unduly portentous. But Weber's ideal-typical construction of conflicting value spheres is more than a mere technical aid. Though it is not an empirical account of actually existing value conflict, it is an account of real tendencies toward irreconcilable value conflict—tendencies inherent in the dynamic of rationalization that has shaped and that continues to shape the modern world. For rationalization leads to a growing consciousness of the autonomy (Eigengesetzlichkeit) of the individual value spheres, thus creating latent tensions among them which may develop—under conditions Weber does not specify—into overt conflicts.

The meaning of Eigengesetzlichkeit, however, is far from clear, mainly because Weber does not distinguish the causal, axiological, and normative dimensions of the concept from one another. A value sphere may be 'autonomous' in three distinct senses: conduct within that sphere may take place according to its own laws (causal autonomy), may have its own inherent dignity or intrinsic value (axiological autonomy), or may generate its own norms and obligations (normative autonomy). The three senses are logically independent of one another. Thus, for example, causal autonomy does not entail axiological autonomy. The fact that conduct within the economic sphere follows distinctively
economic laws—laws based on the functioning of markets—does not bestow a special dignity or intrinsic value on economic conduct. Nor does causal autonomy entail normative autonomy, except in a very restricted sense. The fact that economic action follows laws of its own does mean, in a certain sense, that the economic actor ‘must’ obey certain specifically economic norms—norms requiring him to act according to calculations of economic advantage. If he fails to obey these norms, he risks economic ruin. Prudent self-interest, then, ‘requires’ him to obey these norms. But he is under no obligation to obey them—no obligation, that is, arising from any value other than mere self-interest. Only when a value sphere generates obligations not reducible to self-interest does it have normative autonomy in a strong sense.

The economic sphere, in short, is autonomous in the causal sense—to the extent that economic action does in fact follow laws of its own—but not in the axiological or the normative sense. Not necessarily, that is. For the norms of economic action might be experienced as binding obligations. Thus for the ascetic Puritan entrepreneurs of early modern capitalism, the pursuit of wealth was a sacred obligation, an obligation wholly independent of, indeed fundamentally iminimal to, rational eudaemonistic self-interest.\(^{17}\) Whether or not a sphere of action is autonomous in the normative or axiological sense, then, depends on how the activity is experienced by participating individuals, which in turn depends on their fundamental beliefs and value commitments, i.e. on their value-orientations. Economic activity was experienced as axiologically and normatively autonomous by Puritan ascetic entrepreneurs, but it is not experienced in this way by hedonists. Similarly, the intellectual sphere was experienced as autonomous in these senses by Socrates and his disciples, but not by the Sophists, for whom intellectual activity was a means to extra-intellectual ends. Axiological and normative autonomy, in short, are subjective properties, dependent on and relative to the experience of particular individuals, as shaped by their beliefs and value commitments. Causal autonomy, on the other hand, is an objective property. The extent to which a given sphere of activity follows laws of its own can, in principle, be objectively determined, however difficult this may be in practice.

If Weber’s conception of autonomy (Eigengesetlichkeit) is ambiguous, his conception of value spheres is equally ambiguous. His use of the single term ‘value sphere’ to include the economic and political spheres on the one hand and the religious, intellectual, cultural, esthetic, and erotic spheres on the other obscures crucial differences between the two groups. The former are autonomous in the causal sense, the latter in the axiological and normative sense. The former emerge as autonomous spheres through processes of objectification, the latter through processes of internalization and conscious cultivation. The autonomy of the former is objective and self-perpetuating, that of the latter subjective and dependent on continually renewed value commitments of individuals. The norms of the former constrain conduct ‘from without’ (cf. E&S, p. 1116), requiring an individual to act in a purely zweckrationale (instrumentally rational) fashion so as to be successful in his pursuit of economic or political ends; the norms of the latter constrain conduct ‘from within’, requiring an individual to act in a purely wertrationale (value-rational) fashion so as to be consistent in his pursuit of ultimate values.\(^{18}\)

‘Value sphere’, then, used in reference to the economic and political realms, is misleading, for these objectified institutional orders leave no room for the systematic subjective orientation of conduct to some consciously upheld ultimate value—yet such an orientation is precisely what constitutes the religious, intellectual, cultural, esthetic, and erotic realms as autonomous value spheres.

More importantly, Weber’s use of the term ‘value sphere’ to include the economic and political realms as well as the religious, intellectual, cultural, esthetic, and erotic spheres obscures his analysis of the tensions inherent in the modern social world. It implies that these are primarily tensions among conflicting ultimate values. This, however, is not the case. More significant than tensions among ultimate values, in Weber’s diagnosis of modernity, are tensions between ultimate value commitments on the one hand and the requirements of successful economic and political action, requirements that are alien to all questions of ultimate value, on the other. In the technical idiom of Economy and Society, it is not conflict between different forms of wert-rationale action that Weber emphasizes in his diagnosis, but
conflict between the purely zwekrational action required in the economic and political realms and the wertrational action demanded by every commitment to ultimate values. Conflict among values is overshadowed by conflict over the meaning of rationality—over whether rationality is or should be divorced from ultimate values, as are formal rationality and purely zwekrational action, or whether rationality is essentially linked to ultimate values, as are substantive rationality and purely wertrational action.

The 'world dominion of unbrotherliness' that Weber emphasizes at the end of 'Religious Rejections of the World' results not from irreconcilable conflict among ultimate values but from the impossibility of living up to the norms of brotherly conduct in a society dominated by formally rational economic, administrative and political structures:

in the midst of a culture that is rationally organized for a vocational workaday life, there is hardly any room for the cultivation of acosmic brotherliness, unless it is among strata who are economically carefree. Under the technical and social conditions of a rational culture, an imitation of the life of Buddha, Jesus, or Francis seems condemned to failure for purely external reasons. (FMW, p. 357)

Impersonal calculating conduct, which requires the individual to treat others as means to his own ends, is objectively necessary in the economic and political spheres; brotherly conduct, as a result, can flourish only in the interstices of the modern social order. This severe restriction of the scope and significance of brotherly conduct results not from a tension between conflicting ultimate values, between conflicting standards of substantive rationality, but rather from the impotence of demands for substantive rationality in a society dominated by objectified economic and political structures that perpetuate themselves according to an inexorable logic of purely formal rationality, a logic that excludes all considerations of substantive rationality, all questions of ultimate value. Weber's casual use of 'value sphere', in short, together with his shorthand pronouncements to the effect that the 'gods' and values of the various social spheres are locked in an 'irreconcilable death-struggle' (M, p. 17), obscures rather than clarifies his diagnosis of modernity.

The tensions inherent in the modern social order, then, are not primarily tensions among conflicting ultimate values. Still, tensions between formal and substantive rationality, between Zweck- and Wertrationalität, between value-drained worldly tasks and the pursuit of ultimate values mean the same thing for the individual as tensions between conflicting standards of substantive rationality, between conflicting maxims of Wertrationalität, between conflicting ultimate values. Both types of tensions—the former deriving from the special nature of modern economic and political structures, the latter from an increasing awareness of the incommensurability of ultimate value standpoints—force the individual who wishes to consciously guide his life to choose between competing definitions of rationality. Whether it is a choice between formal and substantive rationality or between conflicting standards of substantive rationality, between Zweck- and Wertrationalität or between conflicting maxims of Wertrationalität, this choice cannot itself be a rational one, for it is precisely criteria of rationality that must be chosen. Modern man, then, cannot escape making a criterionless and therefore non-rational choice about the very meaning of rationality. Weber's diagnosis of modernity, of what it means to live in a pervasively rationalized world, thus calls into question the very notion of leading a rational life. How can man live rationally if the very meaning of rationality is something that must be freely and arbitrarily chosen? It is these dilemmas that I explore in my final chapter.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3


2 The exact term 'value-orientation' is not Weber's. But since the notion, variously expressed, of an 'orientation to certain integral values' (Orientierung an einheitlichen Werten) (E&S, p. 528) that guides conduct and gives meaning to the world is developed by Weber in his discussions of both prophecy and personality, it seems reasonable to designate this concept with the more economical expression 'value-orientation'.

3 Weber employs two distinct though related conceptions of meaning. On the one hand, meaning is that aspect of every concrete action that makes the
The Limits of Rationality

action *intelligible* to the actor himself, to fellow actors and to observers. That action is meaningful in this sense is a presupposition of sociology—at least of the mainstream (Verstehende) sociology advocated by Weber. On the other hand, Weber is concerned not only with the meaning of concrete individual actions but also with 'ultimate meaning', with the meaning of life as a whole. Meaning in this sense is an integrated complex of beliefs and dispositions that imposes coherence and direction on the chaos of immediate experience. That an individual's life be meaningful in this sense, according to Weber, is a presupposition of a truly human (as opposed to a merely natural) existence (see Chapter 4, Section 1). A value-orientation endows an individual's life with meaning in this second, broader sense.

4 I am indebted to Robert K. Merton for this formulation.

5 See Camic (1989) for a closely reasoned discussion of the varieties, preconditions, and consequences of charisma—a discussion that begins with a critical examination of Weber's use of the concept.

6 Recent history, to be sure, calls into question Weber's emphasis on the decreasing causal significance of charisma in rationalized societies. See, for example, Neumann (1944, pp. 83ff.) for a discussion of the charismatic foundation of the German National Socialist state.

7 The development of 'brainwashing' techniques in cults and prisoner-of-war camps suggests that, under some circumstances, value-orientations can be imposed on individuals. For Weber, though, an imposed value-orientation would not be a 'genuine' one. This points up the unresolved tension between empirical and normative elements in Weber's conception of value-orientations.

8 Here, of course, Weber diverges from Marx—or at any rate from 'vulgar Marxism'—in insisting that value-orientations, though often displaying a marked affinity with class interests, are not mere epiphenomena of them (M, p. 56). Despite his explanation of many religious ideas—and of course secular ideologies as well—in terms of the class-based need to legitimate one's good (or ill) fortune (cf. FW, pp. 270–7), Weber holds that conflict between Weltanschauungen is independent of conflict between class interests. Class interests determine the range of value-orientations that may most comfortably and conveniently satisfy the 'metaphysical need for a meaningful cosmos' (FW, p. 281); they may determine, in other words, the path of least resistance. But they do not unequivocally determine value-orientations: these are freely created or freely adopted by individuals. Indeed, experience shows that individuals of the same class—especially intellectuals—can create or subscribe to radically different world-views and that these world-views can shape their practical activities in radically different ways. A corollary of Weber's anti-Marxian view that value-orientations are subjectively generated, of course, is that value conflict would persist even if class conflict were eliminated.

9 Mitzman (1971, p. 3) stresses this theme: 'At the heart of Weber's vision lies only the truth of his epoch, his country and his station, the truth of a bourgeois scholar in Imperial Germany'.

10 'Life spheres' and 'value spheres' are here used interchangeably. The ambiguity in the notion of value sphere is examined in pp. 82–7.

11 This does not mean that a politician must take into account *nothing but* probable consequences. Faced with a situation in which the attainment of a good end requires the use of ethically dubious means (e.g. deception or violence), the politician must choose between the importance of the end and the gravity of the contemplated violation of ethical norms. As a politician, he strives to eliminate ethics from political reasoning (FMW, p. 334); but as a moral agent, he must act in accordance with the authority of the ethical norms that he may have to violate. Confronting such a choice between achieving an important political end and adhering to an ethical norm, the politician 'somewhere . . . reaches the point where [following Luther] he says: "Here I stand; I can do no other" '. The dignity and pathos of politics lies in the politician's assumption of the heavy responsibility for such a choice, which no rules can guide: to assume this responsibility, in Weber's view, 'is something genuinely human and moving' (FMW, p. 127).

12 Though concerned primarily with the *economic* consequences of religious rationalization—with the way in which different paths of rationalization promote or hinder the development of capitalism—Weber also explores its *moral* and *psychological* consequences. I discussed the former in Chapter 1, pp. 22–9; here I am concerned with the latter.

13 'Prophets and priests', Weber writes, 'are the twin bearers of the systematization and rationalization of religious ethics' (E&S, p. 439). However, they tend to rationalize religious ethics in different directions. (See Schluchter, 1979 and 1981, for a systematic analysis of the different paths of religious rationalization distinguished by Weber.) Prophecy produces a 'centralization of ethics under the aegis of religious salvation' (E&S, p. 438) and attempts to organize life through an *inner* ethical systematization (einsichtsreiche Systematisierung) (GAR, p. 367). Priests, on the other hand, bring about through preaching and pastoral care the 'routinization of prophetic demands into specific prescriptions'. Casually elaborated, these specific prescriptions are in one sense 'more rational' than the prophetic ethic. But at the same time, they lack the inner unity ('inneren Einheit') that the prophet introduces into ethics. Priests are more concerned with the 'external appearance of a single act', prophets with the 'meaningful significance of each act' for the moral relationship to the god' (E&S, p. 465). The ethical rationalization carried by prophets intensifies tensions between religion and worldly value spheres; that carried by priests reduces these tensions by legitimizing compromises between religious and worldly obligations. Here I give an ideal-typical account of the way in which the ethical rationalization promoted by prophets intensifies tensions between religious demands and worldly activities: I ignore the factors that tend to mitigate these tensions.

14 Rational religious ethics must reject the esthetic sphere, to the extent that the latter claims to provide a 'this-worldly, irrational salvation', as 'a realm of irresponsible indulgence and secret lovelessness . . . To the creative artist, however, as well as to the esthetically excited receptive mind, the ethical norm as such may easily appear as a coercion of their genuine creativity and innermost selves' (GAR, pp. 555–6; FMW, p. 342). And here is Weber on the 'antagonism of inner meanings' between religion and sexual love: 'The euphoria of the happy lover . . . always meets with the cool mockery of the genuinely religiously founded and radical ethical of brotherliness . . . In the eyes of this ethic, the most sublimated [i.e. consciously cultivated] eroticism is the counterpart of all religiously oriented brotherliness, in these aspects: it must necessarily be exclusive in its inner core; it must be subjective in the highest imaginable sense; and it must be absolutely incommunicable'. The lover, however, 'realizes himself to be rooted in the kernel of the truth, of the truth loving, which is eternally accessible to any rational endeavour', religious or secular (GAR, pp. 561–2; FMW, pp. 347–9).

Weber notes that ‘the barriers of education and of esthetic cultivation (Bildungs- und Geschmackskultur-Schränken) are the most intimate and the most insuperable of all status differences’ (FMW, p. 354).

For Weber’s remarks on the peculiar irrationality, from the standpoint of self-interest, of the Puritan entrepreneur’s attitude toward wealth, see PE, pp. 53, 70, 78.

This contrast, to be sure, is overdrawn. The intellectual value sphere, for example, does not fit neatly into the second category. For in so far as the ‘objective world’ constrains individual scientists ‘from without’, requiring them to act in a zweckrational fashion in order to establish successful knowledge claims, science is formally similar to politics and economics. (I am indebted to Robert K. Merton for this observation.)

Not only brotherly conduct, oriented to the ultimate value of caritas, but all conduct oriented to ultimate values can flourish only in the intersices of the formally rational social and economic order. This seems to be what Weber is suggesting at the end of ‘Science as a Vocation’:

Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendent realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations. It is not accidental that our greatest art is intimate and not monumental, nor is it accidental that today only within the smallest and most intimate circles, in personal human situations, in pianissimo, that something is pulsating that corresponds to the prophetic pneuma, which in former times swept through the great communities like a firebrand, welding them together. (GAW, p. 554; FMW, p. 155)

Weber’s Moral Vision

Weber presents himself as an empirical scientist, not as a moral philosopher. It is true that he has no moral philosophy in the traditional sense. He elaborates no rules of individual conduct, harbors no vision of an ideal society. And the standard terms of moral argument—good, right, ought, should—are conspicuously absent from his vocabulary. Yet the whole of his scientific work is informed by a fundamentally moral impulse—by a passionate concern with the ‘fate of man’ in contemporary capitalist civilization (Löwith, 1982, p. 20). This concern is embodied in Weber’s empirical interpretation of modernity in terms of its ‘specific and peculiar rationalism’ and in his moral response to this rationalized world. The former I have explored in the preceding chapters; the latter—the set of ideas and ideals comprising Weber’s moral response to modernity—I explore in this chapter.

Weber’s moral thought is highly idiosyncratic, and it invites criticism in a number of respects. In this chapter, however, my aim is neither to criticize nor to defend Weber’s views but simply to reconstruct them from his very sketchy remarks on the subject and to present them in a clear and systematic manner. I focus on his conception of the nature and limits of moral rationality, and on his view of the relation between the freedom and moral rationality of the individual and the supra-individual rationality of the modern social order.

THE ETHIC OF PERSONALITY: FROM PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY TO MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Weber’s fact-value distinction is perhaps his best known contribution to moral philosophy. Echoing Hume, who was the first