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# MAX WEBER ON CHURCHES AND SECTS IN NORTH AMERICA: AN ALTERNATIVE PATH TOWARD RATIONALIZATION

COLIN LOADER AND JEFFREY C. ALEXANDER

The following essay by Max Weber, "Churches and Sects in North America," appears here in English for the first time, which is curious given the manifest relevance of its subject matter. The reason for this oversight would seem to be the existence of later, "revised versions" of the essay, especially "The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism."<sup>1</sup> The latter, regarded in the words of one leading interpreter as "the attempt to give a more comprehensive scope to his empirical observations [from "Churches and Sects"] and to give them a scientific underpinning,"<sup>2</sup> was among the first of Weber's essays to be translated.<sup>3</sup> The implication seems to be that the later version is more comprehensive and sophisticated, hence that the original is superfluous. We disagree, believing that the original is remarkable in a number of ways, and even, in certain important respects, far superior.<sup>4</sup> First, the essay sheds new light on Weber's intellectual biography and the contours of his scientific development. Second, it has significant implications for the interpretive debates which rage around the Weber corpus. Finally, it retains contemporary empirical and theoretical significance in its own right. Its implications for a range of different specialities are striking indeed.<sup>5</sup>

## I

Weber's trip to America in 1904 came at an important time in his life, just as he began to emerge from the debilitating mental illness that had forced him to withdraw from a promising academic career. In the year before his trip, he had written four major essays—two on methodology, one which continued his agrarian studies from the 1890's, and the first part (unpublished before the trip) of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*—all of which moved him further away from the academic mainstream in which his career had begun. Yet, while these studies declared his independence from the old order, Weber at this point had no positive alternative.

We believe that one potential positive programme crystallized for Weber on his American trip and that the residue of this crucial experience was formalized in "Churches and Sects," published in 1906. Certainly in Marianne Weber's account of the trip one can see that it marked an important shift in Weber's personal outlook (Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York 1975: 279–304). She records how the other German intellectuals accompanying the Webers were repulsed by the cold, impersonal products of the new world's "capitalistic spirit," which they contrasted to German "congeniality" (*Gemütlichkeit*). Weber, on the

other hand, enthralled by the new, held out for a more considered opinion. During the four months of his stay, he sought out ordinary Americans in all walks of life and almost every section of the country. The fruit of this activity, according to Marianne, was his discovery of the "moral kernel" beneath America's objectified shell. "Weber eagerly absorbed all this," she writes. "He was stimulated to give effortlessly of his own resources what was able to delight these simple people, and thus he unearthed in them the treasures of the experiences of a lifetime (p. 299)." Weber himself wrote that the trip had widened his scholarly horizons as well as improving his health. "Its fruits in this respect can, of course, not be seen for some time (p. 304)."

What did Weber see in America that stimulated him so? We believe that it was a glimmer of a way out of the "iron cage" of reified modern society. Modernity was depicted throughout the German university system<sup>6</sup> in dualistic terms similar to Ferdinand Tönnies's famous set of types, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The *Gemeinschaft* represented the traditional, pre-industrial "community," which was seen as an organic totality in which an elite governed in the name of values common to the entire group. The *Gesellschaft*, on the contrary, represented modern, industrial "society," a mechanistic grouping of individuals who felt no common will or values, sharing only a set of instrumental ends. The epitome of the *Gesellschaft* to most German academics was mass democratic society. Most importantly, the *Gesellschaft* was seen as something essentially negative<sup>7</sup>—as the decay of the *Gemeinschaft*, as the dissolution of the organic unity into an atomistic "sandpile" in which material interests became independent from the meaningful ideal realm. The process of modernization from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* was viewed, in these terms, as a tragic one in which something was irretrievably lost.<sup>8</sup> It was to resist this trend that mainstream academics sought to reinforce the traditional elites, which included, along with themselves, the nobility and the bureaucracy.<sup>9</sup>

Weber never identified with this traditional position. The very forces which most academics saw as the antidote to the *Gesellschaft*—Protestant religious ideals, academic learning, the bureaucratic establishment and even the nobility—were described by him as contributors to the modernization process.<sup>10</sup> In "Churches and Sects," for example, he describes the established (Lutheran) church of Germany as indifferent to values, as rigidly institutionalized and overly abstract when compared to the highly committed sects. In placing a rather mystical ceremonial element beside an ambition for secular power, the

established church is seen by Weber as inherently hypocritical. Further, the church is identified with both the state bureaucracy and the German tradition of learning (*Bildung*), the basic components of the German elite.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, however, Weber was attracted throughout much of his work to the same dichotomizing framework as his traditional colleagues, and to the same vision of decline. Insofar as these powerful sympathies ruled his later work, he ascribed only instrumental motives to modern actors and groups, for values in modern society had become dissolved into reified forms. In such a modern society, ethical and moral problems are reduced to the existential concerns of heroic individuals. This treatment of modern society in Weber's later work, in other words, conforms to the *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* dichotomy.

In "Churches and Sects," however, one sees another view of modernity which stands more fully at odds with that of Weber's colleagues, a view which becomes very much muted in the later revised version of the essay. This aspect concerns the possibility of breaking through the iron cage. Weber, unlike most other German academics, did not seek to retreat to some kind of organic *Gemeinschaft*, traditional or "modern." Any attempt to combine an organic unity with modernity represented the same inherent hypocrisy he saw in the established German church. Rather, he sought a new type of *Gesellschaft* based on a more complex form of rational conduct,<sup>12</sup> a form which combined purposive rational action with an adherence to values. It was in "Churches and Sects" that this new form made its appearance, reappearing only occasionally in the subsequent years. Finally, at the end of Weber's life, it took on a new, explicitly political form.<sup>13</sup>

## II

We see three important elements in this essay: (1) the concept of "Europeanization," (2) the description of the American sect as a *Gesellschaft*, and (3) the relationship of the sect to the American democracy. These elements are almost completely absent from the revised version (see note 4).

Weber sees "Europeanization" as a form of secularization characterized by "church"-like moral indifference. To this phenomenon he contrasts an American form of secularization in which "sect"-like commitment is adopted by nonreligious clubs. Thus, "Europeanization" means not simply secularization but rather the encroachment of the "church" model of social organization upon a more sect-like one. He is not talking, in other words, about the *Gesellschaft* encroaching upon the *Gemeinschaft*, for he believed that America had no real organic traditional entity, but about the encroachment of one form of *Gesellschaft* upon another. For Weber, sect-like religion is not traditional, i.e., not *gemeinschaftlich*, a denial which is consistent with his assignment of its

origins to the Reformation. He distinguishes, then, between "modernization" and "secularization." While the two can be coterminous, they are not necessarily synonymous.

Because these two concepts are not identical for Weber, he believes that in modern societies the "functions" of religion can be maintained even while the institution is altered. These functions can be fulfilled by secular groups, whose role is largely defined by the nature of the religious community from which they grew. Historically prior religious communities, then, established the dominant cultural code or schema, and the succeeding forms embody this initial impulse. Thus, Weber wrote: "The tremendous flood of social structures which penetrates every nook and cranny of American life is constituted in accordance with the schema of the [religious] 'sect'" (p. 36). The ethical and moral identity of contemporary American institutions, particularly voluntary organizations like honorific orders and clubs, is determined by the moral and ethical qualities of America's earlier Protestant sects.

This unusual understanding of secularization leads to a decisive critique of the univocal rationalization thesis and, in turn, to an extensive elaboration of the decisive role played by religion in modernity. If contemporary institutions inherit an initial religious impulse, then rationalization, or modernization, cannot be seen simply as an objective development which possesses a purely universal, cross-national character. Modernization occurs within historically-specific "modes of life," modes which vary according to the religion which is hegemonic at the outset of the secularization process. Weber's concern here is particularly the contrast between America and Germany. It is "the fate of us Germans," he observes, that "the religious revolution at that time [i.e., the Reformation,] meant a development that favored not the energy of the individual but the prestige of the 'office'" (p. 39).<sup>14</sup> In America, these religious forces resulted in a "radical idealism" (Mommsen, *Max Weber*, p. 76) which fostered individualism, flexibility and democracy.

Weber sees in church and sect life, therefore, deeply contrasting modes of modern social organization, modes which are established in the first instance by the cultural codes of religious life. But Weber also traces in this essay on American society certain more specific consequences of the sect tradition. Its implications for economic life are widely known from his more famous works, for example, from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In light of "Churches and Sects", it is worth noting one theme in that famous work which deserves greater emphasis. Weber is more concerned with the institutionalized forms that ideas take and the relationship of conduct to those forms than he is with religious and intellectual history per se. When discussing the sects' dedication, for example, Weber admits that they often display indifference (p. 30); but he insists that this is an indifference to dogma rather than to reli-

giously-inspired ethical commitments per se.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, when describing the baptism of the would-be banker in North Carolina (p. 29), he is concerned not with the man's hypocrisy in terms of dogma but with his willingness to adopt the standards of ethical conduct required for sect membership and business success.

This focus on institutionalization, moreover, makes it more clear here than in most of his other discussions that Weber sees capitalism merely as one form of modern and rational activity among many; as such, the social and cultural conditions of modernity must be established on more general grounds than by pointing to the needs of capitalist development. True, participation in Baptist or Quaker sects provided would-be businessmen with respected credit-ratings. This should not be seen, however, as the main function of the Protestant ethic, but rather as one particular institutionalization of a general cultural form.

This general cultural form ensures that even in the most modern society there will be "on-going inquiries about moral and social conduct." Such inquiries guarantee that the individuals with whom one interacts have the proper "social qualities," qualities which are linked to achievement. Organizations set standards for membership which are geared to specific types of action, not to qualities generated by birth. Membership, then, is open, and it is such membership, or "achieved quality," that guarantees the honorableness of the individuals with whom one interacts. "The old 'sect spirit' holds sway with relentless effect in the intrinsic nature of such associations," Weber writes, for the sect was the first mass organization to combine individual and social in this way. In the sect, the religious qualifications bestowed on the individual by God could be evidenced only by this—worldly action: "Life-long sober diligence in one's 'calling' appears as the specific, indeed, really the *only*, form by which one can demonstrate his qualification as a Christian and therewith his moral legitimation for membership" (p. 30). In sect society, grace is an achievement by individuals, an achievement, ironically, which guarantees sociability. Sect-like organization, therefore, is the only way to ensure trust in a differentiated and mobile society.

### III

It is important that in assigning the sect to one of Tönnies's institutional ideal types, Weber chooses the *Gesellschaft* rather than the *Gemeinschaft*. He writes:

The individual [sect member] seeks to maintain *his own* position by becoming a member of a social group. . . . The social association to which the individual belongs is for him never something "organic," never a mystical total essence which floats over him and envelops him. Rather, he is

always completely conscious of it as a mechanism for his own material and ideal ends (*Zwecke*). (p. 38)

Accordingly, Weber emphasizes the rational individualism fostered by American sects. Membership in the sect was voluntary rather than ascribed, and was based on the individual's religious "qualification," i.e., his ability to uphold certain ethical standards. Again, the example of the North Carolina banker is enlightening. He was not born into a religious group in which he felt some kind of organic oneness with the other members. Rather, whatever his motives—commercial, religious or a mixture of the two—he made a conscious decision to join the sect and uphold its ethical standards. While he will reap certain advantages from his position, he will also accept the responsibility to constantly "prove" his worthiness. Should he fail to meet these individual responsibilities, the contract is broken and he is excluded. His conduct reflects "cool objectivity" (*Sachlichkeit*) and "purposive activity" (*Zwecktätigkeit*). The sect itself, then, is not an institution which is somehow greater than the sum of its parts. Rather it is a collection of individuals who engage in reciprocal acts of "probation" for the sake of certain individual ideal and material ends. In this sense it is a classic *Gesellschaft*.

Yet, the sect differs from the mainstream German academic conception of *Gesellschaft* in that it is not barren of values.<sup>16</sup> While the conduct of the sect members is rational, it is also strongly tied to values. The best example Weber provides is that of the Quakers, who are willing to undergo great humiliation rather than compromise their values. This vision of a modern actor whose very rationality is rooted deeply in value standards allows us to understand a nonutilitarian aspect in Weber's later discussions of rationality. In much of Weber's later writings, rational action takes on anti-valuative tones, just as terms like "objectivity" (*Sachlichkeit*) take on an aura of reification. But even in his later writings there is another vision of modern life which competes with this prophesy of the iron cage. The antithetical notion is articulated by the concept of complex rationality, which embodies a substantive moral definition of rational action. Not until "Politics as a Vocation" can one gain such insight into this conception of rational conduct as in "Churches and Sects."<sup>17</sup>

Our connection of these two essays is not arbitrary, for with its treatment of the sects' relationship to American democracy, "Churches and Sects" also makes a contribution to the discussion of Weber's political ideas. His description of the latter is especially positive, rejecting the assertions of those who see democracy as "a mass fragmented into atoms." Rather, he writes, American democracy is filled with exclusivities which promote high individual standards and responsibilities. Democracy allows for fluidity, so individuals are constantly confronting new

situations for which there is no authoritative interpretation and new individuals with whom there is no ascribed status relation. New forms of control are demanded which are neither top-down nor rigid, but which are real and constraining nonetheless. Democracy allows for the possibility of face-to-face organization in a differentiated society. Only the sect-form could provide the control mechanism which allowed this possibility to be realized.

The atomization decried by the German romantics, Weber wrote, arose not from democratization but from bureaucratization. Here again one sees Weber turning the tables on mainstream academicians by attributing the reified type of *Gesellschaft* to a bureaucratic structure (as in Germany) rather than to a democratic one. In the essay's only footnote (p. 44) he refutes his friend Troeltsch's attempt to equate "aristocracy," i.e., an exclusivity based on certain standards, with traditional institutions (conservatism). Rather, he implies, there is a traditional form of exclusivity, based on ascribed status, and a modern one, based on "personal qualities and achievements." The latter he sees characteristic of American democracy.

The sects, Weber writes, gave "American democracy its own flexible structure and individualistic stamp." But how did they do so? And how does this square with Weber's essentially negative description of American machine politics (so visible and widely-remarked upon in "Politics as a Vocation")? Weber's answer to the first question is that sect organization produces the kind of individual responsibility and complex rationality which, when transferred to the sphere of politics, becomes the cornerstone of democracy. Only sects, moreover, were able to instill these values in broad masses of people, especially in the working classes. Ironically, it is this very radicalism of the sect which allows the democracies it nourishes to be more firmly integrated, for in these nations critical and anti-authoritarian tendencies are positively incorporated into established communities. Church-organized politics, by contrast, have forced anti-authoritarianism "along the path of hostility to the religious communities" (p. 39).

Sects, however, do not become directly involved in politics. In fact, they are purposely apolitical, refusing to grant any divine legitimation to the political structure or to court favor from the secular authorities. Weber sees the sects' demand for a constitutional guarantee of freedom of conscience as one of their great contributions to modernity. (Mommsen, *Max Weber*, p. 76). He realized that such a position could allow for machine politics, which was governed by *zweckrational* efficiency and was as devoid of values as the bureaucracy which Germans contrasted with it. Yet, what comes through much more clearly in this essay than in his later treatments is that Weber did not perceive the American political machine as dangerous to individual responsibility. Why not? Because this aspect of political life could not be "consecrated" by an idealist system of values.

It is the German established church, Weber notes here, which subordinates individual values to the bureaucratic state, granting the state legitimation in return for certain privileges. The German bureaucracy was a reified system disguised as a moral one. The city machine, on the other hand, has no such pretensions; devoid of moral legitimation, it does not represent the same threat to the ethical conduct of the individual.

American sect organization produced at least two important qualities that Weber saw as crucial for the political rejuvenation of Germany: a strong individualism and a tendency to form cohesive social groups open to all social strata. The sect, for Weber, was a mass organization whose cohesiveness was based neither on an organic spiritual unity nor on a materialistically organized interest; rather it was based on individual achievement and responsibility. When, at the end of his career, Weber returned to this critical study of comparative political morality, this sect-inspired quality emerges as the now famous "ethic of responsibility"—the only substantively rational norm that can guide the modern political vocation. Sect-like qualities were necessary if democratic political institutions characterized by a union of moral commitment and rational perspective were to emerge in Germany. For this to happen, the existing bureaucratic system—the iron cage—would have to be dismantled, a task Weber now assigned to charismatic political leadership. Weber's theoretical ambivalence, and the applied, programmatic nature of this later work, led him to discuss the sources of democratic change in this purely political, acultural way. Yet it seems clear that one lineage of his "ethic of responsibility" goes back to his earlier emphasis on the role of sects. The failures of his later theory of plebiscitary democracy, in fact, may be connected to Weber's inability to make this link explicit and distinct.<sup>18</sup>

The reasons for the eventual attenuation of Weber's sect-church dualism can be linked to the predicament Weber faced in 1906. Despite his admiration for sect-democracy and American political life, Weber saw no way of transforming the socio-religious conduct of Germany in a similar way. His optimism about the American *Gesellschaft* is matched by his pessimism about the German one. At the same time, Weber saw the American sect-like institutions being threatened by "Europeanization," a fear that became greater toward the end of his life.<sup>19</sup> In the American religious sects he had discovered a unique creature which, despite its importance, was faced with extinction from the form of modernization that Europe represented. Weber's earliest hope seems to have been to find a home for that creature in Germany—indeed, to use his knowledge of the true underpinnings of American democracy to transform Europe itself. This hope lay dormant until the turmoil at the end of the First World War. Ironically it was at this later time that the revised version of "Churches and Sects" appeared. In this later essay, some of the most

important elements we have discussed were omitted, and the main effects of the sect phenomenon were placed distinctly in the past.

## NOTES

1. "Churches and Sects" first appeared in April, 1906, in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, vol. 50, nos. 102 and 104, about sixteen months after Weber's return from America. Three months later it appeared in a revised version in *Christliche Welt*, vol. 20, nos. 24 and 25 (June, 1906). The revisions consisted of the addition of the last two paragraphs of the present translation, the long footnote on Troeltsch and some minor additions throughout the text. The text translated here is the later, most complete version. "The Protestant Sects" appeared in 1920 in the first volume of the *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion*.
2. Wolfgang Mommsen, *Max Weber: Gesellschaft, Politik und Geschichte* (Frankfurt A.M., 1974), p. 80. See also the comment of Guenther Roth, the editor of the authoritative edition of *Economy and Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1978), which refers to "Churches and Sects" as "an earlier (1906) and shorter version" of "The Protestant Sects" (p. 1211). Stephen Berger, in "The Sects and the Breakthrough into the Modern World: On the Centrality of the Sects in Weber's Protestant Ethic Thesis," *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 12 (1971), pp. 456-499, writes that Weber's "later analysis of the Protestant sects is a clearer and subtler continuation of [the] earlier work" (p. 489). David Beetham, in *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics* (London, 1974), p. 214, similarly, refers to "The Protestant Sects" as a "later reworking" of "Churches and Sects."
3. In *From Max Weber*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York, 1946), pp. 302-322. Also see *Economy and Society*, pp. 1204-1211.
4. The piece in *Economy and Society* is much briefer than "Churches and Sects." Moreover, while it has the advantage of placing the issue into the systematic conceptualization of Weber's later work, it speaks mainly of the political implications of sect life and makes little reference to American society as such. It also locates the effects of the sect phenomenon more in the past than does "Churches and Sects." In "Protestant Sects," America becomes the exclusive focus, but the essay deals almost entirely with economic implications and places the effects of the sect phenomenon almost completely in the past. Neither essay—and this is perhaps the most important difference—achieves the kind of generalized mediation of modernity which would seem to be the most distinctive quality of "Churches and Sects."
5. In light of these considerations, it is a surprising fact that, with the exception of the works by Berger, Beetham and Mommsen cited above, Weber's theory of sect-life and its relationship to modern social structure has received virtually no attention. Beetham refers to the topic only in a summary of Weber's work on Russia and never discusses it in its own right (see note 18 below). Mommsen discusses the importance of sects to America but does not develop its implications either in his article or in his more comprehensive works. Berger discusses the sects merely as the institutional form of the Protestant Ethic, emphasizing only their role in the destruction of a "tenacious"

traditional society. In taking this tack he not only fails to add anything new to the Protestant Ethic debate, but he fails to see the fundamental role of sect-life for post-traditional society.

6. The best description of the German university system is in Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), especially chapters one and two.
7. See Rene König, "Die Begriffe Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft bei Ferdinand Tönnies," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, vol. 7 (1955), p. 407.
8. Many German academics did not actually use the terminology of Tönnies's 1887 book until shortly before World War One—although Weber himself does use the terms in this essay. We have simplified the use of terms in order to emphasize the essence of what was at issue. An important sub-theme in the German discussion was the role of "society" as distinct from the typologized *Gesellschaft*. Many academics saw society as a level properly subordinated to the ideal realm of values, which was embodied in the spheres of culture and/or the state. Society, to them, consisted basically of material interests and the relationships resulting from those interests. When such forces escaped from their subordination to the ideal spheres of culture and the state, they ceased to be simply society and instead became the *Gesellschaft*, a negative alternative to the ideal, organic sphere. For discussions of different aspects of this issue, see Dieter Lindenlaub, *Richtungskämpfe im Verein für Sozialpolitik* (Wiesbaden, 1967); Colin Loader, "German Historicism and Its Crisis," *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 48 (1976), *On-Demand Supplement*, pp. 85-119; Kurt Lenk, *Marx in der Wissenssoziologie* (Neuwied, 1972), chapter one.
9. In addition to Ringer, see Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, 1969).
10. One concept missing from Weber's work is "Manchesterism," with its implication that modern industrial society was a foreign thing invading Germany.
11. Two important symbols of this identification used by Weber are the *Fideikomiss* and Adolf Stoecker. Stoecker (1835-1909) was the Lutheran court chaplain, founder of the short-lived Christian-Social Party and an anti-Semitic demagogue. He was among a group of conservatives who gained the ear of the new emperor, Wilhelm II, and helped turn him against his chancellor, Otto von Bismarck. (Part of their strategy was to gain the selection of one of their own as the successor to the chief of the general staff, Moltke.) As we shall see, Weber attacked this yearning for secular power on the part of the church. On one issue Bismarck and Stoecker did agree—the protection of the traditional establishment against the forces of modernity, especially the workers' movement. While their methods differed (Bismarck preferring the "stick" of repression, Stoecker the "carrot" of social reform and demagogy), both represented paternalistic authoritarianism rather than the voluntarism Weber so admired in the American sects.

The *Fideikomiss* was a system of entailed land by which an estate had to remain in the hands of the aristocratic family that owned it. Just prior to his American trip, Weber criticized this institution as a force taking land out of the market system and encouraging the pseudo-aristocratization of middle class landowners. In short, it promoted the identification of the middle class with the traditional estab-

- lishment and thus hindered the development of political responsibility. When Weber refers to the German church as a divine endowed foundation (*Fideikommissionstiftung*), he is identifying it with the traditional political establishment. He is also emphasizing its lack of voluntarism. The owner of an entailed estate could not voluntarily part with it, just as the church was bound to its members.
12. Our argument, then, differs fundamentally from the one put forward by Arthur Mitzman in *The Iron Cage: An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber* (New York, 1970), which holds that Weber's efforts to escape from the "iron cage" of contemporary Germany were directed in an entirely anti-ascetic direction. Mitzman believes, moreover, that it was this kind of proto-mystical attack on the Protestant ethic which inspired Weber in the immediate post-breakdown period after 1903. "Churches and Sects" reveals, to the contrary, that it was Weber's very enthusiasm for one form of ascetic Protestantism which provided such inspiration, and that Weber certainly glimpsed at least one significant way to escape from the iron cage which did not involve rejecting this tradition. In terms of the conceptualization of Weber's later writings, Mitzman is correct that Weber sought some way of re-injecting charisma into routinized modern life, but in the line of his thought that we are concerned with here he conceived of this as follows: a national tradition of sect-organization reinvigorates and democratically redefines the "office charisma" upon which modern rational-legal authority rests. See especially *Economy and Society*, pp. 1204–1211.
  13. The reference to a "new political form" is to "Politics as a Vocation," which will be discussed in section III below.
  14. In 1906, Weber wrote to Adolf von Harnack: "It is an inherently difficult and typical situation that none of us [Germans] can be a sect-person, Quaker, Baptist, etc. Each of us must notice at first glance the dominance of, basically, the institutional church measured by non-ethical and non-religious values." Quoted in Mommsen, *Max Weber*, pp. 83–84.
  15. Berger's (n.2, above) assertion that Weber's sect-theory is "structural-organizational" rather than "psychological or cultural" (p.486) completely misses the subtlety of this distinction, which is surely a refinement within cultural interpretation.
  16. Ironically, Mitzman uses Weber's classification of the sect as a *Gesellschaft* to support his argument that Weber became increasingly taken with acosmic mysticism (pp. 194–201). He cites Weber's discussion of a presentation by Troeltsch at the German Sociological Convention of 1910 in which Weber places mysticism at the opposite pole from sect-rationality. See "Max Weber on Church, Sect, and Mysticism," *Sociological Analysis*, vol. 34 (1973), pp. 140–149. However, here Weber does not advocate one pole over the other, but simply elaborates on Troeltsch's typology. Mitzman's error would seem to be a faulty syllogism: the *Gesellschaft* is an iron cage; the Protestant sect is a *Gesellschaft*; therefore, the Protestant sect is an iron cage. The acosmic mystic *Gemeinschaft* stands opposed to this *Gesellschaft* and thus represents the alternative to the reified iron cage. While Mitzman points to the existence of more than one form of *Gemeinschaft* in Weber's thought, he seems unwilling to do the same for *Gesellschaft*. The result of this lack of appreciation for complex rationality is that Mitzman is forced to treat the "ethic of responsibility" almost as an anomaly. We, to the contrary, will describe it below as a central concept in Weber's later work.
  17. It is difficult to relate exactly this type of "complex rationality" to the formal conceptual distinctions among the types of rational action that Weber introduced in the first part of *Economy and Society*, in part because of the very problem we are pointing to here: it was much less conspicuous in Weber's theorizing and empirical work during the years between 1906 and the post-war period. This complex rationality could be considered a form of "value-rationality" (*Wertrationalität*), though Weber generally conceived of this term as relating to rationalized forms of religion, like Puritanism, which were precursors of truly "modern" rational action. On the other hand, this complex rationality might be considered a form of "purposive-rationality" (*Zweckrationalität*). Yet, while Weber certainly intended that this form refer to contemporary rational action, he tended to define this as instrumental rationality in a utilitarian sense.
- The very ambiguity of these two types reflects the difficulty Weber had in conceptualizing a complex rationality that was both informed by values and disciplined by the universalistic, contingent and empirical commitments of the secular age. Donald N. Levine, in "Rationality and Freedom: Weber and Beyond," *Sociological Inquiry*, vol. 51 (1981), pp. 5–26, and Steven Kalberg, in "Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 85 (1980), pp. 1145–1179, both have recently provided extensive accounts of the "multi-valent" character of Weber's conception of rationality. Neither account, however, appreciates the profound ambiguity that permeates Weber's treatment and the contradictory characterizations of rationality that result. Both miss the historicist aspect of Weber's characterization, and the way in which his anxiety about modern rationality creates difficulties in his conceptualization. For the shifting quality of Weber's rationality definition, see Jeffrey Alexander, *The Classical Attempt at Synthesis: Max Weber*. Volume three of *Theoretical Logic and Sociology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983).
18. It is the failure to see the relatively submerged theme of sect-democracy that mars David Beetham's fine study of Weber's "applied" political theory. Beetham argues that in the writings Weber dedicated explicitly to topical political issues—in contrast to his scholarly and systematic writings on politics—he emphasized the relation between politics and class forces to the exclusion of the "importance of ideas." (See, for example, Beetham, *Max Weber*, p. 201.) Yet, Beetham acknowledges that Weber, in his major discussion of the Russian revolution of 1905, listed the failure of sect-religion as one of the three major reasons for the failure of Russian democracy (*ibid.*, p. 205). It is true, of course, that Weber's approach to these issues was the instrumental one of *Realpolitik*. Nonetheless, "Churches and Sects" demonstrates quite clearly that Weber's thinking about reform did contain another element, albeit one that became increasingly submerged.
  19. See Weber, "Socialism," in *Max Weber: The Interpretation of Social Reality*, ed. J.E.T. Eldridge (New York, 1980), p. 197.