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Source: *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 85, No. 5 (Mar., 1980), pp. 1145-1179

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2778894>

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Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History¹

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Rationality has been recognized as perhaps the major theme in Max Weber's oeuvre. The commentators who have addressed this theme have generally constricted its polymorphous character. This article inventories Weber's usage of "rationality" and "rationalization" in *Economy and Society* and the *Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion*. Four types of rationality are identified and compared with one another: practical, theoretical, substantive, and formal. Only "ethical substantive rationality" introduces methodical ways of life. All four types become manifest in a multiplicity of rationalization processes orchestrated at all levels of societal and civilizational process. Long-term rationalization processes are seen to be rooted in values rather than in interests. The dominance of practical, theoretical, and formal rationalization processes in modern Western societies implies immense consequences for the type of person likely to live in these societies.

Although "rationality" and its diverse manifestations in historical rationalization processes have been universally acknowledged as a major, and perhaps *the* major, theme in Max Weber's corpus, only a few commentators have endeavored to investigate this theme or to relate the various types of rationality to one another. The attempts by Schluchter (Roth and Schluchter 1979, pp. 14–15) and Weiss (1975, pp. 137–38) are plagued by a common shortcoming: both note "usages" or "dimensions" of rationality that cannot be consistently traced back to the frequent discussions of "rationality" and rationalization processes in *Economy and Society* (*E&S*) and the *Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion*.

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented in September 1977 in Gottlieben, Switzerland, at a colloquium entitled "Max Weber und die Dynamik der gesellschaftlichen Rationalisierung." A German version will appear in Seyfarth and Sprondel (1980). I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Guy Oakes of Monmouth College; Winfried Brugger, Winfried Gebhardt, Klaus Koziol, Gerd Schmaltz, and F. H. Tenbruck in Tübingen; David Herr in New York; Toby Huff in Boston; Donald Levine in Chicago; Richard Münch in Düsseldorf; Karl-Heinz Nusser in Munich; Guenther Roth in Seattle; Wolfgang Schluchter in Heidelberg; and Constans Seyfarth in Frankfurt.

(*CESR*). Moreover, their definitions do not coincide with Weber's various historical-sociological analyses of the paths followed by rationalization processes in different civilizations. Donald Levine's (1979) recent discussion of Weber's notion of "rationality" avoids these difficulties by adhering largely to Weber's terminology, yet he does not comprehensively discuss this concept, nor does he touch on the issue of the manner in which the types of rationality combine or struggle against one another in history as separate rationalization processes. Furthermore, like Ulrike Vogel's (1973) and Ann Swidler's (1973) expositions, Levine's distinction between Weber's types of social action and his types of rationality is insufficiently differentiated.

Many explorations of Weber's understanding of "rationality" have failed to emphasize its multivalent embodiments. This approach is most clearly represented by the assertion that rationalization processes in Weber's corpus amount to nothing more than a "disenchantment of the world,"² bureaucratization, or an increasing lack of freedom. Other commentators have discussed rationalization as tantamount only to an increasing pervasiveness of the means-end (*zweckrational*) type of social action (Nelson 1973, p. 85; Münch 1980). Still other authors have limited their examinations of Weber's notion of "rationality" and its manifestations in historical rationalization processes to specific spheres of life, such as the religious sphere (Tenbruck 1975).

Weber himself is largely responsible for the lack of clarity that surrounds his analyses of "rationality" and the interplay of multifaceted historical rationalization processes. His scattered and fragmented discussions of this theme are more likely to mystify than to illuminate (e.g. [1946] 1958*f*, pp. 293–94 [266]; [1930] 1958*a*, pp. 26 [11–12], 77–78 [62]; 1968, pp. 30 [15], 85 [44], 424 [259], 809 [468], 333 [195–96]; 1951, p. 226 [512]; 1952, pp. 425–26, n. 1 [1–2]; see n. 2 regarding page numbers in brackets) and, despite its centrality, he nowhere offers a succinct explanation of this theme. His contorted style of writing also hampers all attempts to take an inventory of his major usages of "rationality" and "rationalization processes," as does his frequent carelessness: since the appropriate qualifying adjective often fails to precede "rational" in his

² This misinterpretation results in part from the frequent translation of *Entzauberung* as "disenchantment." *Entzauberung*—literally, "de-magification"—has a very specific significance for Weber: it is one of the two major axes followed by rationalization processes in the arena of religion (1951, p. 226 [512]; all references to Weber's texts give the English translation first, followed in brackets by the page numbers of the original German; bibliographic information about the latter appears in the list of references). It relates particularly to religious rationalization processes in the West, beginning with ancient Judaism, and characterizes especially the transformation from medieval Catholicism to Calvinism. "Disenchantment," a far more general term that conjures up images of the romanticist's yearning for the *Gemeinschaft* and an earlier, "simpler" world, has not the slightest relationship to Weber's usage of *Entzauberung*.

writings, the student of Weber is generally left with a choice between concluding that his usage is indeed unilinear and undertaking the unappealing task of systematically examining the hundreds of passages in which this term appears. Because of the varied translations of *Rationalismus*, *Rationalität*,³ and *Rationalisierung*, as well as related key terms in the numerous English editions of Weber's writings, the reader who does not have access to the German texts confronts a hopeless situation.

This article exhaustively surveys Weber's usage of "rationality" and "rationalization" as these terms appear in his major comparative-historical-sociological works written after 1904: *E&S* and the *CESR*.⁴ The selection of these writings, rather than the methodological or political essays, has been determined by another aim of this article: to reconstruct, *at the purely conceptual level*, Weber's vision of a *multiplicity* of rationalization processes that variously conflict and coalesce with one another at all societal and civilizational levels.⁵ Because the discrete types of rationality constitute the cornerstones for these rationalization processes, an inventory of their defining features and interrelationships as they appear in Weber's comparative sociology must serve as the necessary prerequisite for such a reconstruction.⁶ Before scrutinizing the types of rationality, however, a number of preliminary issues should be dealt with in order to avoid unnecessary confusion.

I. GENERAL FEATURES OF WEBER'S TYPES OF RATIONALITY AND RATIONALIZATION

The conceptual status of Weber's four types of rationality in relation to his four types of social action will be clarified in this section, as well as

³ This and the preceding term are used synonymously by Weber. They have been generally translated as "rationality," though occasionally as "rationalism." "Rationality" as well as "irrationality" will be repeatedly placed in quotation marks in this article in order to emphasize the exclusive concern here with Weber's distinctive usage of these terms.

⁴ This three-volume work includes *The Religion of China*, *The Religion of India*, *Ancient Judaism*, and *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as well as the "Author's Introduction." It also includes three essays printed in Gerth and Mills's *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (see Weber [1946] 1958c, 1958d, and 1958f): "The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism," "The Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," and "The Social Psychology of the World Religions."

⁵ This article, therefore, does not investigate Weber's distinction between "rational" and "empathic" understanding as it relates to the process of interpretative understanding. For a discussion of this distinction, see Weber 1968, pp. 5–14 [2–7]; Levine 1979, pp. 10–11; and Weiss 1975, pp. 48–50.

⁶ Whereas "rationality" and all "types of rationality" always refer, for Weber and in this article, to a condition, "rationalization" or "rationalization process" refers to a development. The "types" (*Arten*, *Formen*; see, e.g., [1946] 1958f, p. 293 [266]; [1930] 1958a, pp. 26 [12], 30 [15]) of rationalization are all based on the types of rationality.

two general characteristics of the types of rationality and of rationalization processes: their universality and their "sphere-of-life" specificity.

The Types of Social Action and the Types of Rationality

Weber's fourfold typology of social action—*affectual*, *traditional*, *value-rational*, and *means-end rational* action—refers to universal capacities of *Homo sapiens*. Instead of depending for their existence on societal, cultural, or historical constellations, these types of social action stand "outside of history" as anthropological traits of man.

Against 19th-century French anthropology, Weber argued that man did not acquire his "rationality" with the Enlightenment and that individuals in all previous epochs were not incapable of rational action. On the contrary, even everyday actions of "primitive" man could be *subjectively* means-end rational, as, for example, when specific religious rituals were performed with the aim of receiving favors from a god. In Weber's eyes, this pure exchange relationship as it existed in sacrifice and prayer (1968, p. 424 [258–59]; [1922] 1973, pp. 432–38) was identical in form to the modern businessman's calculation of the most efficient means to acquire profit. Likewise, the fact that the values in premodern societies diverged widely from modern values did not, for Weber, call into question the basic capacity of man to orient his actions rationally on the basis of values. On the other hand, traditional and affectual action were not uprooted and swept away to the degree that modernization movements advanced.

However universal the four types of social action may be, Weber confined the application of this typology to specific and delineated actions. As a comparative-historical sociologist, however, he wished to examine "more" than simply fragmented action orientations; regularities and patterns of action were of far greater interest to him. Patterns could occur at a plurality of levels of sociocultural processes, from those manifest in the dominant paths followed by entire civilizations to others that characterized long-term historical developments or short-term societal movements. Regularities of action surfaced as well within institutions, organizations, strata, classes, and groups in all societies. The typology of the types of rationality, a classification that must be sifted out of Weber's writings, is one of many conceptual schemes he utilizes to analyze such regularities and patterns. "Practical," "theoretical," "formal," and "substantive" rationality constitute this typology. The *conscious* regularities of action that all of these types of rationality introduce serve to master (*beherrschen*) fragmented and disconnected realities.

Since these types of rationality are anchored in means-end rational and

value-rational action,⁷ the patterns of civilizational and societal processes they identify involve simply conscious regularities of action orientations on the part of individuals⁸ and, in some cases, “ways of life” (*Lebensfuehrungen*).⁹ Like sociocultural processes, ways of life—or consistent “attitudes” that penetrate the entire organization of life—diverge widely in the extent to which they involve methodical action ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 293 [266]). Their broad range of diversity depends ultimately, for Weber, on a multitude of interacting ideas, values, interests, and economic, political, sociological, and historical factors. Rationalization processes of historic significance in societies and in entire civilizations have often originated when a constellation of factors crystallized that rewarded *methodical* rational ways of life. As will be noted below, Weber argues that precisely these ways of life were based on values rather than on interests.

The Universality of the Types of Rationality and of Rationalization Processes

The types of rationality and the various rationalization processes are often discussed by Weber in reference to Western civilization's distinctive modernization path. This predominant orientation is most clearly evident in the “Author's Introduction” to the *CESR*. In this essay, as well as in the *CESR* as a whole, Weber intends, above all, to address the issue of why the Chinese, Indian, and ancient Near East civilizations did not adopt those types of rationalization processes that characterize the European-American civilization.

Although Weber oriented these investigations to the question why “rationalized societies” arose only in the West, the types of rationality and

⁷ Theoretical rationality, which is rooted in cognitive processes rather than in action, is the only type of rationality not based on either means-end rational or value-rational action. It can, however, influence action indirectly, as is explained below. The relation between the types of rationality and the types of social action is discussed further in Section III below.

⁸ That individual action is, for Weber, the fundamental “atom” in all societal and civilizational processes must be kept in mind throughout this article. Even collective concepts are understood by Weber to be specifiable common action orientations of individuals in groups (1968, pp. 4 [1], 8 [3], 19 [8–9]; [1922] 1973, pp. 429, 439). Such social phenomena as a business corporation, a neighborhood, a family, or feudalism are constituted from the common subjective “meanings” given to them by groupings of individuals, as is even a bureaucratic structure of domination and a compulsory institution (*Anstalt*) such as the modern state. Collective entities are not themselves capable of “acting”; on the contrary, they exist simply as a consequence “ultimately of a certain kind of development of actual or possible social actions of individual persons” (1968, p. 14 [6–7]; emphasis in original, translation slightly altered).

⁹ It is impossible to trace Weber's usage of *Lebensfuehrung* in the translations. It often appears, particularly in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, as “conduct,” though also as “style of life,” “type of attitude,” or simply “life.”

rationalization processes take shape, in greater or lesser degrees, universally. The "Author's Introduction" itself provides the most unequivocal evidence of this universality. In referring there to the particular types of rationality and rationalization processes that appeared in Western civilization, Weber implies that rationalization, albeit often of a different kind, takes place in non-Western civilizations as well ([1930] 1958a, pp. 25–26 [11], 30 [15]). He further frequently notes, for example, the "rationalism" of ancient Judaism (1968, pp. 610 [367], 618–19 [372]) and of Confucianism (1951, pp. 226–49 [512–36], 164 [452]; 1968, pp. 538–39 [326–27]) and the rationalization of mystical contemplation ([1930] 1958a, p. 26 [11]).

In an analysis of religious rationalization, F. H. Tenbruck (1975) has come to the same conclusion. After examining the original 1905 edition of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (PE) and his later "Author's Introduction," "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," and the "Religious Rejections of the World," Tenbruck argues that the most significant thematic development here involves a broadening of Weber's understanding of "rationality" and rationalization processes (1975, pp. 669, 677–79). In the first edition of the PE, Weber's interest, in keeping with the prevalent intellectual currents of his time, focused exclusively on rationalization in the West. By the time he wrote the later essays, however, he had enlarged his notion of rationalization to universal-historical dimensions that included civilizational developments in the Orient as well (Nelson 1969, p. 6; 1974, p. 272; Parsons 1937, pp. 567, 752; 1963, pp. xxxii–iii; Bendix 1965, pp. 11–12; Münch 1980; Levine 1979, pp. 8–9).

The Sphere-of-Life Specificity of "Rationality" and "Rationalization" Processes

Weber does not employ the concepts of "rationality" and "rationalization" in a global manner to refer merely to a general unfolding of civilizations. Instead, qualitatively different rationalization processes that potentially advance at their own indigenous rates take place at various sociocultural levels and in different life-spheres, both in those relating to the "external organization of the world," such as the realms of law, politics, economics, domination (*Herrschaft*), and knowledge, and in the "internal" spheres of religion and ethics. Rationalization processes may be found also in the aesthetic and erotic arenas.¹⁰

Weber's conviction that rationalization occurs in diverse spheres of life

¹⁰ "Arenas," "realms," and "spheres" are used here synonymously (*Lebensbereiche*, *Lebenssphäre*). Spheres of life, such as those just noted, are often referred to by contemporary sociologists as "institutional orders."

compelled him to examine the degree to which a single realm could be designated as the "carrier," behind which all other rationalization processes fell in line to a greater or lesser degree. In posing this question, he wished primarily to scrutinize the Marxian emphasis on the economic sphere as the substructure for all others. In this regard, Weber found the Marxian stress wanting: for him, rationalization processes can take place in each arena independently from the others and at their own rates. A "rational" form of lawmaking, for example, did not originate in those countries that first introduced modern forms of capitalism. Instead, it arose and attained a highly rationalized form in ancient Rome. It was taken over in the Catholic countries of southern Europe long before the onset of industrialization in that area rather than by England, the earliest country to industrialize. Likewise, purely this-worldly "rational" philosophies emerged earliest in France with the Enlightenment rather than in England or Holland where economic "rationalism" had reached its highest stages. Moreover, after comparing the intense capitalistic activity in 14th- and 15th-century Florence with the economic backwardness of 18th-century Pennsylvania, Weber concluded that modern capitalism alone could not have given birth to an "economic ethic" ([1930] 1958*a*, pp. 74–77 [60–62], 25 [11]). Thus, he came to doubt all those theories that understood the advance of "rationality" as a unilinear evolutionary process occurring with equal intensity in all societal spheres. He then began to investigate the manner in which action was rationalized in particular arenas.

These preliminary remarks on the general features of Weber's types of rationality and rationalization processes have aimed only to provide a loose framework within which these concepts can be defined and examined for their interrelationships. Weber himself, particularly in his later writings, repeatedly admonished his readers to attend to the multivocality of his usage of "rationality" and "rationalization" ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 293 [266]; 1968, p. 998 [576]; [1930] 1958*a*, pp. 26 [11–12], 77–78 [62]).

II. MAX WEBER'S TYPES OF RATIONALITY: PRACTICAL, THEORETICAL, SUBSTANTIVE, AND FORMAL

In surveying the types of rationality, this section aims above all to demonstrate the polymorphous character of "rationality" in Weber's oeuvre. The Weberian axiom that very different patterns of action and ways of life may be "rational" will be repeatedly underlined.

Practical Rationality

Weber designates every way of life that views and judges worldly activity in relation to the individual's purely pragmatic and egoistic interests as practical rational ([1930] 1958*a*, p. 77 [62]). Instead of implying pat-

terns of action that, for example, actively manipulate the given routines of daily life in behalf of an absolute value system, a practical rational way of life accepts given realities and calculates the most expedient means of dealing with the difficulties they present. Pragmatic action in terms of everyday interests is ascendant, and given practical ends are attained by careful weighing and increasingly precise calculation of the most adequate means ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 293 [266]). Thus, this type of rationality exists as a manifestation of man's capacity for means-end rational action.

Wherever the bonds of primitive magic have been severed, the "capability and disposition" of persons for practical rational patterns of action appears, whether in ages deeply imprinted by ethical salvation religions or in fully secular epochs ([1930] 1958*a*, p. 26 [12]). Variations in practical rational regularities of action arise, for Weber, from differences in the relative sophistication of the means available to master daily problems ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 284 [256]; 1968, p. 30 [15]) and in the extent to which ethical religious doctrines intensify specific practical patterns of action by placing "psychological premiums" on them (1951, p. 247 [533]; 1968, p. 551 [334]; see below, Sec. III). As a result of their typical activities, all "civic" strata, in particular—merchants, artisans, traders—show a definite tendency to order their ways of life in a self-interested, practical rational manner ([1946] 1958*f*, pp. 279 [251], 284 [256]). This way of life particularly characterizes the daily action of "the people of the *Liberum arbitrium*, such as the Italians and the French" ([1930] 1958*a*, p. 77 [62]).

The pragmatic and this-worldly predisposition of practical rational patterns of action implies a subordination of individuals to given realities and a concomitant inclination to oppose all orientations based on transcendence of daily routine. Such persons often mistrust not only all striving after the impractical values of "the beyond," whether religious or secular utopian, but also the abstract theoretical rationality of all intellectual strata.

Theoretical Rationality

This type of rationality involves a conscious mastery of reality through the construction of increasingly precise abstract concepts rather than through action. Since a cognitive confrontation with one's experience prevails here, such thought processes as logical deduction and induction, the attribution of causality, and the formation of symbolic "meanings" are typical. More generally, all abstract cognitive processes, in all their expansive active forms, denote theoretical rationality ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 293 [265–66]).¹¹

¹¹ Weber also refers to this type of rationality as "intellectual rationality."

Weber discovered a great variety of systematic thinkers who practiced this type of rationality. In the earliest stages of history, sorcerers and ritualistic priests sought abstract means of taming nature and the supernatural. With the appearance of ethical salvation religions, ethical priests, monks, and theologians rationalized the values implicit in doctrines into internally consistent constellations of values, or world views (*Weltbilder*), that offered comprehensive explanations for the perpetuation of suffering. Philosophers of all shades have also pondered nature and society and have repeatedly refined conceptual schemes that “explained” their workings. Theoretical rationalization processes may also be carried out by judges who interpret the incipient world view found in political constitutions or by the disciples of a revolutionary theorist, such as those that have continually arisen to refine Marxian doctrine. Systematic thinkers have often been scientists dedicated to the theoretical rationalization of the scientific world view in the decades since Weber’s death that have been devoid of either revolutionary hopes or religious fervor. Since it always seeks interrelationships and the construction of comprehensive “holistic” explanations, theoretical thought stands in a relationship of antagonism to the fragmented character of magic in particular.

Unlike the means-end rational action that provides the foundation for purely adaptive practical rationality, theoretical rationalization processes are undergirded and given their momentum, Weber argues, by the natural “metaphysical need” and “irrepressible quest” of thinkers and systematizers to transcend sheer given routine and to supply the random events of everyday life with a coherent “meaning” ([1946] 1958f, pp. 279–81 [251–54]; 1968, pp. 505–6 [307–8]). These persons have been motivated ultimately by their search for an answer to the question that has stood at the base of all metaphysics: “If the world as a whole and life in particular were to have a meaning, what might it be, and how would the world have to look in order to correspond to it?” (1968, p. 451 [275]). This conundrum, whether dealt with in its religious or its philosophical forms, has, Weber believes, played an immeasurably significant role in the efforts of intellectuals to break through daily realities and to understand the world as a “meaningful” cosmos. In the 20th-century theoretical rationalization processes, this question has been visible in only its most constricted forms.

Weber is convinced that a theoretical confrontation with reality can react back on the thinker’s action and introduce new regularities of action, though this does not always occur. The modern scientist’s alteration of a mathematical equation, for example, generally leaves scarcely an imprint on his routine action. On the other hand, the sorcerer’s rational deduction, from common experience, that evil, metaphysical powers reside within or lurk behind trees, rocks, and other natural objects required new modes of interacting with the transcendent realm for himself and—given a con-

figuration of purely sociological factors that facilitated the dispersion of the sorcerer's thought—for his entire society (1968, pp. 399–403 [245–48]). For example, after the idea of the soul arose, burial procedures sought to provide the dead with amenities in their graves (1968, pp. 404–5 [248]).

When mighty gods arose as functionally specialized entities able to protect men against evils, yet failed to do so, logical thought was again engaged to confront this quandary: abstract thinking led to the conclusion that these gods were egoistic beings and that their anger could be calmed only by entreaties and supplications (1968, pp. 432 [264], 424 [258]). These purely “rational” conclusions themselves influenced social action in a number of ways. Perhaps most important, the necessity of appeasing the gods provided the impetus for the crystallization of a new stratum of religious practitioners to conduct worship services: priests. Priests, in turn, further theoretically rationalized conceptions of the metaphysical realm. In the process, the diverse methods of supplication and entreaty became ordered into a variety of regular worship forms, including prayer, tributes, penance, and abstinence. Priests also delineated “good behavior” as conduct agreeable to the gods, and worshipers learned how to attain favor by acting in accord with a divinity's expectations. Given a constellation of facilitating sociological forces, these modes of interacting with the epiphenomenal sphere became dominant throughout a society (1968, p. 423 [258]).

In a later stage of the religious rationalization process, world views arose as a result of the theoretical rationalization of conceptions of the supernatural realm. These comprehensive views of the universe and man's place within it purported to offer exhaustive explanations of man's plight and his repeated experiencing of injustice. In further purely cognitive rationalization processes, religious thinkers continually sought to reorder and systematize the religious values implicit in the world view into increasingly internally consistent doctrines in the hope of deducing patterns of action that would insure a state of grace for believers. According to Weber, religious doctrines themselves—such as the Indian doctrine of *Kharma*, the Calvinist belief in predestination, and the Lutheran justification through faith—could, under certain circumstances, significantly influence practical ways of life. This occurred simply because of the plausibility these doctrines acquired from their consistent explanations for lasting suffering ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 286 [258–59]; [1946] 1958*d*, p. 324 [537]; 1968, p. 424 [259]; Tenbruck 1975, pp. 683–85).

Thus, even though theoretical rationality masters reality through thought, it contains a potential *indirectly* to introduce patterns of action. Indeed, Weber asserts that the abstract rationalization processes carried out by systematic thinkers played a decisive role in the de-magification

processes that characterized the transformation from medieval Catholicism to Calvinism ([1946] 1958*d*, pp. 350–51 [567], 357 [571]; [1930] 1958*a*, p. 102 [92]).

Substantive Rationality

Like practical rationality though unlike theoretical rationality, substantive rationality *directly* orders action into patterns. It does so, however, not on the basis of a purely means-end calculation of solutions to routine problems but in relation to a past, present, or potential “value postulate” (1968, pp. 85–86 [44–45]). Not simply a single value, such as positive evaluation of wealth or of the fulfillment of duty, a value postulate implies entire clusters of values that vary in comprehensiveness, internal consistency, and content. Thus, this type of rationality exists as a manifestation of man’s inherent capacity for value-rational action.

A substantive rationality may be circumscribed, organizing only a delimited area of life and leaving all others untouched. Friendship, for example, whenever it involves adherence to such values as loyalty, compassion, and mutual assistance, constitutes a substantive rationality. Communism, feudalism, hedonism, egalitarianism, Calvinism, socialism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and the Renaissance view of life, no less than all aesthetic notions of “the beautiful,” are also examples of substantive rationalities, however far they may diverge in their capacity to organize action as well as in their value content (1968, pp. 44–45 [85]).

In all cases, the substantive rationality is considered to be a “valid canon”; that is, a unique “standard” against which reality’s flow of unending empirical events may be selected, measured, and judged ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 294 [266]). Since the standpoints represented by value postulates can be, in principle, infinite, action may be ordered into patterns and, indeed, into entire ways of life in an endless number of ways. Small groups, organizations, institutions, political entities, cultures, and civilizations are, in every era, ordered in terms of specifiable value postulates, even though these may be not readily identifiable by their participants and can be so fundamentally foreign to the values of the social researcher that he can scarcely imagine situations in which they acquire validity.

The infinity of possible value postulates points to a critical feature of Weber’s notion of substantive rationality: its radical perspectivism. For him, substantive rationality and rationalization processes based on it always exist in reference to ultimate points of view, or “directions” ([1930] 1958*a*, p. 26 [11–12]): each point of view implies an identifiable configuration of values that determines the direction of a potentially ensuing rationalization process. Thus, no absolute array of “rational” values exists as a set of perennial “standards” for “the rational” and for rationaliza-

tion processes. Instead, a radical perspectivism prevails in which the existence of a rationalization process depends on an individual's implied or stated, unconscious or conscious, preference for certain ultimate values and the systematization of his or her action to conform to these values. These values acquire "rationality" merely from their status as consistent value postulates. Similarly, the "irrational" is not fixed and intrinsically "irrational" but results from the ideal-typical incompatibility of one ultimate constellation of values with another:

Something is not of itself "irrational," but rather becomes so when examined from a specific "rational" *standpoint*. Every religious person is "irrational" for every irreligious person, and every hedonist likewise views every ascetic way of life as "irrational," even if, measured in terms of *its* ultimate values, a "rationalization" has taken place. This essay, if it can make any contribution at all, aims to expose the multifaceted nature of a concept—the "rational"—that only appears to be a simple one. [(1930) 1958a, p. 53, n. 9 (35, n. 1); my translation, emphasis in original]¹²

At least one identifiable point of view rooted in a value postulate exists in every realm of life. The "rationality" and potential rationalization processes within a given arena refer back to these value postulates. Life-spheres, in a sense, defend their own value postulates as "rational" and label those of other life-spheres "irrational." From the point of view of efficiency and productivity in the economic realm, for example, all status monopolies, since they restrict the expansion of the free market, are "irrational," as is capitalism considered from the perspective of the values of feudalism, in which status monopolies were most pronounced ([1946] 1958f, p. 301 [275]). The calculation of the capitalist and the power interests of the politician are likewise "irrational" from the standpoint of all salvation religions of brotherhood, and the converse is also true ([1946] 1958d, pp. 348–49 [561–62], 331–40 [544–54]). Similarly, to the modern intellectual who trusts only science and empirical knowledge, the religious man's reliance on faith remains within the realm of the "irrational" ([1946] 1958d, p. 353 [566]; [1946] 1958f, p. 281 [253]).

Substantively rational points of view may also differ within a single sphere. Within the realm of religion, for example, a plenitude of ultimate value-standpoints and world views confront one another, each proclaiming its "rationality." The Hindu organic social ethics remains incomprehensible as a way of life to the mystic Buddhist who has chosen to pursue Nirvana through a life of contemplation, as does the ascetic's action in the world ([1946] 1958d, p. 338 [551–52]). To the ascetic, on the other hand, the paths to salvation in these Oriental religions remain wholly senseless ([1946] 1958d, pp. 352–56 [565–70]), as does the Confucian

¹² This footnote was added in Weber's 1920 rewriting of the *PE*.

gentleman's study of classical literature (1951, pp. 226–49 [512–36]). Similarly, within the arena of ethics, the proponent of the ethic of conviction (*Gesinnungsethik*) always claims that the adherent of the ethic of responsibility ultimately advocates an “irrational” position. The advocate of universal values makes the same claim about the supporter of particularistic values. The converse also holds in each of these cases.

Largely as a consequence of the secondary literature's general orientation to the *PE* rather than to the later “Religious Rejections of the World,” where Weber's radical value perspectivism is most apparent,¹³ interpreters of the types of rationality have nearly totally neglected this significant aspect. This neglect has resulted also, on the one hand, from the common tendency to reduce the multidimensionality of rationalization processes to a single dimension (e.g., bureaucratization) and, on the other hand, from the failure to distinguish, as Weber does, between a researcher's personal values and his attempt to define scientifically the historical foundations, sociological preconditions, and significant consequences of a social phenomenon. For example, Herbert Marcuse (1972, pp. 133–51), in particular, argues that Weber identified capitalism's formal rationality with rationality as such and supported this economic system in his scientific writings as one in conformity with the absolute value of Reason in the Hegelian sense. On the contrary, Weber's investigation of “rationality” and rationalization processes implies nothing about a desire on his part to advocate either their expansion or constriction.

Weber's radical perspectivism, his notion of substantive rationality, and his *verstehende* sociology as a whole all pivot on the conviction that values are not demonstrable by the methods of science ([1946] 1958*e*, pp. 150–51 [607]; 1949, pp. 52–55 [149–52], 58 [154–55], 60 [157]) but remain in the contemporary era the only domain in which the autonomous individual confronts his “own demons.” That even the most precise “technically correct” rationalization within, for example, the economic sphere, cannot be said to be legitimate and “valid” as “progress” at the level of values remains a constant assumption throughout Weber's sociological analyses. Nor can science, on the other hand, prove the values of the Buddhist monk or those of the Sermon on the Mount to be “superior” to any other value configuration (1949, p. 38 [530]; [1946] 1958*e*, p. 148 [604]).

Formal rationalities have stood in the most direct antagonism to many substantive rationalities. The recurrent conflict of these types of rationality has played a particularly fateful role in the unfolding of rationalization processes in the West.

¹³ This essay confronts the reader with an overwhelming cascade of examples in which Weber puts himself in the position of an ideal-typically constructed “subject” and examines the cosmos from the perspective of that subject.

Formal Rationality

Unlike the intercivilizational and epoch-transcending character of the practical, theoretical, and substantive types of rationality, formal rationality generally¹⁴ relates to spheres of life and a structure of domination that acquired specific and delineated boundaries only with industrialization: most significantly, the economic, legal, and scientific spheres, and the bureaucratic form of domination. Whereas practical rationality always indicates a diffuse tendency to calculate and to solve routine problems by means-end rational patterns of action in reference to pragmatic self-interests, formal rationality ultimately legitimates a similar means-end rational calculation by reference back to universally applied rules, laws, or regulations.

To the degree that sheer calculation in terms of abstract rules reigns, decisions are arrived at "without regard to persons." An orientation of action to formal rules and laws is tantamount to a rejection of all arbitrariness: universalism and calculation in reference to enacted regulations stand here strictly opposed to decision making in reference to the personal qualities of individuals concerned. Distinct personalities—even charismatic ones—no less than differences in regard to status are subjected to the dictates of formally rational procedures. The personal grace or favor given by the lord of a manor, for example, is totally alien to the "spirit" of bureaucracy (1968, pp. 979 [565], 244 [141], 225 [129]).

Weber refers to bureaucratic domination as formally rational because action oriented to intellectually analyzable general rules and statutes predominates here, as well as the selection of the most adequate means for continued adherence to them. From a technical point of view, the most "rational" type of domination is found in the bureaucracy simply because it aims to do nothing more than calculate the most precise and efficient means for the resolution of problems by ordering them under universal and abstract regulations (1968, pp. 975 [562], 226 [130]; [1946] 1958f, p. 295 [267]).¹⁵

Legal formal rationality exists when formally trained jurists carry out laws that apply to all citizens of the state in a manner such that ". . . only

¹⁴ The major exception is noted below in the discussion of formal rationality in the religious realm. Roman law is also an exception.

¹⁵ Weber naturally does not deny the fact that "red tape" can significantly diminish the efficiency of a bureaucracy. His discussion of this form of domination's ideal-typical features is nearly exclusively oriented toward a comparison with patriarchal, feudal, and patrimonial forms of domination, none of which can even approach the bureaucracy's efficiency, dependability, etc. Moreover, in spite of its uneven functioning, Weber believes that industrial societies cannot dispense with this form of administration or substitute a different form. Any high hopes that this can occur are, to him, sheer illusion (1968, pp. 223 [128], 988 [570]).

unambiguous general characteristics of the case are taken into account in terms of purely processual and legal factors" (1968, pp. 656–57 [396]; translation altered). This mode of juridical procedure opposes legal substantive rationality, where decisions are arrived at in strict reference to a postulate of ultimate justice. Similarly, in the economic sphere, formal rationality increases to the extent that all technically possible calculations within the "laws of the market" are universally carried out, regardless of either their effect on individual persons or the degree to which they may violate ethical substantive rationalities (1968, p. 85 [44–45]).

As opposed to the formulation of hypotheses, which belongs to the domain of theoretical rationality, experimental scientific procedures are also judged, by Weber, to be fully formally rational. Calculation proceeds in this case in relation to the common rules of experimentation. These are very likely to be carried out in a more sophisticated manner than rules in the bureaucratic form of domination or in the economic and legal spheres: strict empirical observation, quantification, and systematic measurement attain here a peak of methodical control, especially in the laboratory. Just as in the other life-spheres, the execution of all technically possible means-end rational calculations takes place "without regard to persons." Rule-oriented, pure calculation that reacts directly back on action occurs also in the realm of religion, though only in a few special cases. Formal rationality in religion is described by Weber as action "ordered according to plan" (*Planmässigkeit*): methodical techniques, such as contemplation or yoga, are executed here in accord with fixed procedures ([1946] 1958f, pp. 293–94 [266]).

III. COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THE TYPES OF RATIONALITY

A comparison and contrast of formal, substantive, theoretical, and practical types of rationality must be turned to now. This can take place most feasibly within the context of an examination of the aspects common to the four types of rationality, the relation between the four types of social action and the types of rationality, and the manner in which the different types of rationality introduce regularities and patterns of action as well as, in some cases, ways of life. Once these themes have been discussed, all the preliminary steps will have been taken for an analytic discussion of the multiple rationalization processes charted by Weber.

Aspects Common to the Four Types of Rationality

However much they may vary in content, mental processes that consciously strive to master reality are common to all the types of rationality. Regardless of whether they are characterized by sheer means-end cal-

cultation, the subordination of diffuse realities to values, or abstract thought processes; regardless also of whether they take place in reference to interests, formal rules and laws, values, or purely theoretical problems—all of these processes systematically confront, for Weber, social reality's endless stream of concrete occurrences, unconnected events, and punctuated happenings. In mastering reality, their common aim is to banish particularized perceptions by ordering them into comprehensible and "meaningful" regularities.¹⁶

Mental processes are of interest to Weber primarily in regard to the extent to which they can be translated into patterns of social action. In some cases, such as practical rationality, regularities of action follow so closely on the calculation in relation to self-interests that the mental process itself is scarcely visible. Theoretical rationality, on the other hand, illustrates the opposite extreme: here cognitive processes often do not introduce patterns of action, though they may do so indirectly. In general, a quite direct linkage exists between the mental process and action oriented to formal and substantive rationalities (see table 1).

Constellations of historical and sociological factors determine, for Weber, whether a particular type of rationality in fact found clear expression as a mental process alone or also as regularities of action that became established as sociocultural processes, whether at the level of groups, organizations, societies, or civilizations as a whole. This common potential of the types of rationality to master reality consciously exists as a cornerstone in Weber's analysis of the unfolding of diverse rationalization processes in various civilizations.

The Types of Action, the Types of Rationality, and Legitimate Orders

As conscious regularities of action that aim to master reality, practical and formal types of rationality are based typically on man's capacity for means-end rational action; substantive rationality derives typically from value-rational action. Even though theoretical rationality, on the other hand, is rooted in abstract cognitive processes instead of action, rational action—and even patterns of rational action—may follow indirectly from theoretical rational thinking (see table 2).

Substantive, formal, and theoretical types of rationality do not, in Weber's scheme, remain simply amorphous sociocultural regularities of action. Instead, given configurations of facilitating sociological and historical factors, they are institutionalized as normative regularities of action with-

¹⁶ Though a conscious, systematic mastery of reality is not, of course, the only means by which, according to Weber, regularities arise (see 1968, pp. 33–38 [17–20]).

Weber's Types of Rationality

in “legitimate orders”:¹⁷ organizations,¹⁸ traditional (patriarchal, patrimonial, feudal) and rational-legal (bureaucratic) forms of domination, types of economic structures, ethical doctrines, classes, and strata. The diffuse, problem-solving character of practical rationality generally confines it to the domain of routine, everyday, pragmatic difficulties.

TABLE 1
CONSCIOUS MASTERY OF FRAGMENTED REALITIES THROUGH
REGULARITIES OF ACTION

Type of Rationality	Mental Processes	Relation to Action	Reference for Mental Processes
Theoretical	Various abstract processes	Indirect	Values or purely theoretical problems
Practical	Means-end calculation	Direct	Interests
Formal	Means-end calculation	Direct	Rules, laws, regulations
Substantive	Subordination of realities to values	Direct	Values

TABLE 2
ANTHROPOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUALS AND
CONSCIOUS PATTERNS OF RATIONAL ACTION

ANTHROPOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUALS		TYPES OF RATIONALITY	CONSCIOUS PATTERNS OF RATIONAL ACTION
Types of Social Action	Mental Processes		
Nonrational:			
Traditional	Nonrational	...	No
Affectual	Nonrational	...	No
Rational:			
Value rational	Subordination of realities to values	Substantive	Yes
Means-end rational . . .	Means-end calculation	Formal, practical	Yes Yes
*	Various abstract processes	Theoretical	Yes

* Rational action can be produced indirectly.

¹⁷ Weber's interest here is not, of course, to argue that certain orders possess absolute legitimacy while others do not but, rather, to note the various possible reasons individuals may have for *ascribing* legitimacy to an order or for *guaranteeing* its legitimacy (1968, p. 33, n. 20). His use of “order” (*Ordnung*) and “legitimate order” (*legitime Ordnung*) are particularly difficult to trace in *Economy and Society* because these terms are variously translated as “order” and “norm.”

¹⁸ “Organization” (*Verband*) is Weber's general term for, e.g., the enterprise (*Betrieb*) and the voluntary association (*Verein*) as well as for the compulsory political and religious institution (*Anstalt*) (1968, pp. 48–56 [26–30]). It must be kept in mind that for Weber these organizations as well as all legitimate orders result from nothing more than the common action orientations to them of individuals in delineated groups.

Clear “elective affinities” (Howe 1978) exist between certain legitimate orders and particular types of action. When substantive rationalities are formed by prophets, priests, and theologians into ethical salvation doctrines and institutionalized in an organization, whether a church, sect, or hierarchy, the devout *typically* feel obligated to uphold this “ethical substantive rationality” for value-rational reasons. However, this need not occur. Many persons, for example, do not possess, according to Weber, the “religious qualifications” to pattern their actions consistently in behalf of a value constellation. Thus, they believe in these values not as absolute ethical principles but as mere guidelines for action that can be upheld or discarded according to momentary demands. In this case, the ethical substantive rationality is often upheld simply in a means-end rational manner. Other persons—though these are definitely not representative of sect or church members—may view an institutionalized ethical substantive rationality in terms of their own interests and nothing more. This possibility is illustrated by the means-end rational motives of the businessmen who joined Calvinist sects simply in order to acquire reputations for impeccable honesty and thereby secure the trade of sect and other community members ([1946] 1958c, pp. 305–8 [210–13]). In this case, substantive rational patterns of action are not believed in value rationally. Instead they exist as mere means-end rational means toward running a successful business (1968, pp. 26 [13], 85–86 [45]).

In other cases, elective affinities between legitimate orders that institutionalize a type of rationality and types of social action clearly exist only when these orders are examined in reference to an epoch's peculiar value constellation. The bureaucracy as a legitimate order characterized by formal abstract regulations may be maintained for a number of different reasons. Prussian civil servants of the 19th century performed their tasks efficiently and began their workdays punctually at eight because of their belief in a value constellation: according to the “bureaucratic ethic,” duty required dependability, precision, efficiency, punctuality, discipline, stability, and reliability. In this extraordinary case, an impersonal¹⁹ substantive rationality itself became a means appropriate for the fulfillment of formal rational patterns of action (1968, pp. 26 [13], 85–86 [45]). In other societies and other eras, the same systematic execution of tasks in reference to universal rules takes place because the official simply adheres to custom (traditional action) or because he is aware that failure to do

¹⁹ Here I am distinguishing between “personal” and “impersonal” values. Both types may occur as constellations, thus forming substantive rationalities. This distinction, which, to my knowledge, Weber never explicitly discusses, is one that I have extracted from his oeuvre. Impersonal values, such as those specific to the “bureaucratic ethic,” fail to take persons into account as do, e.g., the values of compassion, brotherly love, or forgiveness.

so would mean loss of his job (means-end rational action) (1968, p. 31 [16]).

Similarly, capitalism as a legitimate economic order can be maintained for a variety of reasons. Weber argues that the origin of modern capitalism cannot be fully understood without reference to the value-rational orientations of the Puritans to an ethical substantive rationality: the believer religiously inspired to value disciplined, methodical work and the accumulation and reinvestment of money brought a systematic component to economic activity that proved far more effective than the utilitarian orientations of the "adventure capitalist" in bursting the bonds of economic traditionalism ([1930] 1958*a*, pp. 47–78 [30–62]). In this unusual and significant case, the Puritan's selection of the means-end rational *means* (a constellation of impersonal values) to fulfill his goal of resting secure in the certainty of salvation (a goal that could be realized only by the acquisition of wealth) eventually provided *one* impetus for the formal rational organization of economic enterprises (1968, pp. 26 [13], 85–86 [45]).

The modern capitalist, on the other hand, may adhere to the abstract laws of the market for traditional or means-end rational reasons, or even as a result of a value-rational belief in them as "correct." Indeed, he may even, as did the Calvinist, value-rationally believe in an impersonal substantive rationality—methodical work, efficiency in the performance of tasks, dependability, etc.—as the most adequate means to fulfill his goal of succeeding in business.²⁰ He can, as well, constantly change his motivation for acting, though according to Weber this does not typically occur. All this does not alter the fact that formal rational patterns of action are necessary in order to insure the success of a business enterprise (1975, p. 193 [133]; 1930, pp. 70–73 [54–59], 55–56 [37]; 1968, pp. 585 [353], 1186 [709]). It does, however, explicitly call into question those views of history that see modern societies as the product of a unilinear advance of either means-end or value-rational action (1930, pp. 74–78 [60–62]).

Thus, for Weber, a legitimate order that institutionalized a particular formal or substantive type of rationality can call forth various types of social action and even further types of rationality. Dozens of examples such as those above can be extracted from Weber's sociological writings. Theoretical rationality, as well, regardless of whether it is institutionalized

²⁰ Precisely such a belief in the "spirit" of capitalism has died out in our time, Weber believes. Its demise has not, however, led to a weakening of capitalism's "economic rationalism": its present existence as an all-encompassing "cosmos" effectively coerces individuals to conform to its demands. In Weber's words: "The Puritan *wanted* to work in a calling; we are *forced* to do so" (1930, p. 181 [203]; emphasis in original). Or, "... the idea of 'duty in one's calling' prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs" (1930, p. 182 [204]).

in organizations that pursue scientific, religious, or secular-ethical endeavors, can lead indirectly to a variety of action orientations.

The Capacities of Different Types of Rationality to Introduce Methodical Ways of Life

Despite their common capacity to master reality consciously, the types of rationality confront heterogeneous realities in distinctly different ways and introduce regularities of action with varying degrees of effectiveness. Ways of life are called into being only by practical and substantive rationalities. These ways of life diverge widely from one another in methodicalness and continuity: only values, for Weber, and particularly a unified configuration of values, are analytically capable of introducing methodical rational ways of life.²¹

The practical rational way of life, according to Weber, lacks a methodical character. Based on subjective interests, this way of life continually reacts to changing situations instead of ordering them, for example, under an ethical postulate or an abstract rule. Nonetheless, however much the individual merely deals with the disparate difficulties presented by external factors in the most feasible means-end rational way, an element of consistency remains: self-interests regularly guide action here and introduce a way of life grounded in them.

The various cognitive processes characteristic of theoretical rationality actively confront given realities and seek to manipulate them abstractly. They do so by searching for interrelationships among discrete, seemingly unconnected arenas. Yet their power to introduce a way of life or to suppress practical rationality remains definitely constricted. The modern scientist's formulation of hypotheses only rarely directs his practical action orientations either inside or outside the laboratory, and the ratiocinations by sorcerers, priests, monks, or theologians regarding the sources for evil and suffering react back on their daily action only when the "empty" quality of theoretical processes is banished by an association of them with values.

Formal rationality is only slightly more successful in subduing the practical rational way of life than is theoretical rationality. As long as the civil servant, the lawyer, the businessman, and the scientist execute the tasks typical of their professions, their orientations to given abstract rules and laws insulate them from the random flow of fragmented events as well as from practical rational confrontations with daily problems. These formally rational patterns generally fail, however, to characterize the action of these persons in their personal relationships, in their capacities

²¹ Following Weber, I am employing the expressions "methodical ways of life" and "methodical rational ways of life" synonymously.

as parents, in their leisure hours, or in their choice of hobbies. Thus, the imprint of formal rationality remains circumscribed, and the bureaucrat, for example, may well act in a practical rational or any other manner as soon as he leaves his office. No consistent attitude that comprehensively characterizes action and introduces a way of life can be found here.

Only action oriented to substantive rationality has the potential to introduce methodical ways of life that subjugate the practical rational way of life based on interests, the formal rational orientation to rules, and reality's stream of disjointed occurrences. This development occurs most effectively after the values of a given substantive rationality of delimited magnitude have been rationalized, through *theoretical* rationalization processes, into internally unified value constellations that *comprehensively* address and order all aspects of life. The *value content* of these substantive rationalities, which determine the *direction* of such *value-rationalization processes*,²² varies across a wide secular and religious spectrum. Most important for Weber in the introduction of methodical rational ways of life is the fact that only substantive rationalities place "psychological premiums" on *ethical* action in the world.

Weber defines an "ethical" standard as ". . . a specific type of value-rational *belief* among individuals which, as a consequence of this belief, imposes a normative element upon human action that claims the quality of the 'morally good' in the same way that action which claims the status of the 'beautiful' is measured against aesthetic standards" (1968, p. 36 [19]; translation altered, emphasis in original).

This purely formal definition can be given a concrete reference by an infinite number of value-rational beliefs, some of which—those which involve an orientation to value postulates—elevate ethical standards to the status of an *ethical substantive rationality*. When believed in value rationally, the ethics of solely this-worldly and secular value postulates, such as Communism, are designated by Weber as ethically rational²³ no less than the ethics of all but the most primitive religions, regardless of whether a monotheistic God or pantheistic gods punish and reward (1968, pp. 429 [262], 518 [314], 325 [191]).

Ethical rationality does not involve simply the memorization of rules for proper conduct that putatively contain the cumulative wisdom of past generations. Instead, ethical action implies, first, an imperative for conformity to a moral good that is felt to be internally binding or obligatory

²² In this case, since values exist as the reference points for theoretical rationalization processes, "value-rationalization process" can be used synonymously with "theoretical rationalization process."

²³ Since ethical rationality is itself a type—and only one type—of substantive rationality, it is properly referred to as "ethical substantive rationality." To avoid this awkward phraseology, however, I will often use the briefer expression "ethical rationality."

and, second, a disjunction between a normatively valid canon that claims ethical status and the empirically given flow of fragmented realities. According to Weber, daily action can be decidedly influenced by ethical rationalities even if "external" guarantees for them are lacking and even, at times, in spite of opposing social forces. When an ethical rationality penetrates practical rational action, Weber refers to the resulting action as "practical-ethical" (1968, pp. 36 [19], 528 [321]; [1946] 1958*f*, pp. 286 [258–59], 293–94 [266], 280 [252]; [1946] 1958*d*, p. 324 [537–38]). Of greatest significance for all practical-ethical regularities of action are the values constituting the corresponding ethical rationality. Yet these values vary not only in relation to content but also in their comprehensiveness and degree of inner unity.

Value rationalization refers, for Weber, to the theoretical rationalization of substantive rationalities, whether ethical or not: their comprehensiveness (the extent to which they claim to order all action) and their inner unity are enhanced. Inner unity is rationalized according to the degree to which the values within a given substantive rationality, however comprehensive or limited it may be, are ordered and systematized. As rationalization proceeds, these values come to stand in a relation of consistency not only to one another but also hierarchically under an ultimate value. In the religious sphere, for example, value rationalization implies the breaking down of the discrete values of isolated ritual practices, unconnected magical ceremonies, and a pantheon of gods, each of which demands sacrifices and loyalty, and the molding of these amorphous values into increasingly comprehensive and unified world views.²⁴ Whenever they appear as substantively rational religious doctrines, fully unified world views offer coherent explanations of all injustice and suffering in terms of principles of right and wrong that are accepted on faith as "truth."

To the extent that value-rationalization processes expand a substantive rationality's comprehensiveness and inner consistency into a secular or religious world view that exists as an ethical standard, and to the degree that social action is value rationally oriented toward this value constellation, the dispersed happenings of daily life, the practical rational way of life oriented to interests, and formal rational patterns of action are all replaced by ethical claims. Thus, for Weber, the chance that action will become substantively rationalized to conform to a given salvation ethic or other ethical substantive rationality depends not only on the strength of antagonistic *interests* but also on the motivations of believers and the

²⁴ This is only one axis of the extremely intriguing course of religious rationalization (see, e.g., 1951, p. 226 [512]; 1952, pp. 425–26, n. 1 [1–2]). This rationalization process, which has been only partly dealt with by Schluchter (Roth and Schluchter 1979, pp. 11–64) and Tenbruck (1975), cannot be discussed here. I have recently commented extensively on these articles in a review essay (1979).

relative value rationalization of the ethic: the more an ethic approaches the point of absolute comprehensiveness and inner unity and the more value-rational action prevails, the more powerful become the psychological premiums placed on action systematically directed toward ethical goals. To Weber, the individual who value rationally orients his action to an internally unified and comprehensive ethical substantive rationality acts methodically in reference to an *ethic of conviction* (*Gesinnungsethik*) and rationalizes action "from within" in *all* spheres of life to conform to its internally binding values (1968, pp. 424 [259], 450–51 [275], 578–79 [349–50]; 1951, p. 244 [530]; [1946] 1958*b*, pp. 120–27 [551–59]).

As the determinant of the direction for a potential value-rationalization process, the content of the substantive rationality's values has, according to Weber, the effect of guiding action into specific channels and directing it away from others. This occurs when the value-rationalization process fails to reach its end point of development, though also when an ethic of conviction arises ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 287 [259]).

In the religious arena, for example, this content was particularly important in regard to the potential influence of a belief system on the pragmatic action of its followers ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 289 [261]). When believers oriented their religious action to a world view, such as that implied by the classical Buddhist doctrine of the eightfold path to salvation, practical rational as well as all other action orientations "in the world" were radically denigrated as "senseless" and generally suppressed. Many types of "practical ethics" ([1946], 1958*f*, p. 294 [266]), on the other hand, such as Catholicism's lay ethic, ancient Judaism, Lutheranism, and Hinduism, placed ethical premiums on practical rational regularities of action, though they failed to do so in a consistent and comprehensive manner. Practical rational action patterns were *consistently*, and for *all* believers, awarded psychological premiums by Calvinism and Catholicism's virtuoso dogma for monks. In placing enormous premiums on disciplined work and methodical ways of life, these doctrines *comprehensively sublimated* practical rational action, whether in the monastery or "in the world," into practical-ethical action. Instead of being suppressed, practical rationality now became consistently penetrated by an ethical dimension, acquiring in the process a heightened intensity (1968, p. 551 [334]; 1951, p. 247 [553–54]). These types of practical rational ways of life, which Weber emphasized as containing the most fateful consequences for modern man (1930, p. 26 [11–12]), were not to be rediscovered in the value content of any other ethical salvation religion of historical significance (1968, p. 556 [337]; [1946] 1958*f*, p. 290 [263]).

Substantive rationalities in the secular arena also vary infinitely in value content, degree of comprehensiveness, and internal unity. For Weber, fragmented occurrences are theoretically rationalized to conform to a

secular value postulate when, for example, persons elevate an ideal of friendship to the level of an ethical standard and consider themselves internally bound to uphold all the standards of brotherhood. When they are value-rationalized, secular ethical rationalities may exhibit a more general applicability that influences social action more comprehensively. The Renaissance rejection of traditional bonds and its faith in the power of the *naturalis ratio* ([1946] 1958f, p. 293 [266]) permeated diverse spheres of life, as did the Enlightenment's faith in Reason and classical liberalism's credo of the Rights of Man and freedom of conscience (1968, p. 1209 [725–26]). Similarly, the upholding of egalitarianism may affect not only its adherents' purely political and legal activities but also their social and even their economic endeavors.²⁵

Such ethical rationalities, whenever their values are further theoretically rationalized, become components within more comprehensive and internally unified ethical rationalities. This occurs if, for example, the orientation of action toward social justice as an ethical ideal is value-rationalized to such an extent that a closed world view implying an explanation of all past, present, and future human misery arises. Secular political, social, and philosophical movements of this total degree of comprehensiveness and inner consistency prototypically blossomed in 19th-century Europe. In Marxian socialism, for example, the ideals of brotherhood, egalitarianism, and social justice no longer remained isolated ethical principles or vague hopes but fused into a systematically unified world view that explained man's past and present plight. It also promised, if the tenets laid down were correctly implemented, the future abolition of all earthly hardship. As a unified belief system that claimed absolute truth, Marxism, when believed in value-rationally, ethically ordered *all* spheres of life "from within." For Weber, the power of such a secular ethic of conviction to centrally rationalize all social action in behalf of its values is no less strong than that of a religious ethic of conviction. Of critical importance in both cases is an acceptance of the ethic on faith and a *belief* in it as an absolute beyond all compromise.²⁶

²⁵ In certain periods and in certain cultures, as a result mainly of economic and political factors, the belief in egalitarianism may extend into spheres of social action from which it has been traditionally barred, such as minority rights and sexual preferences. That the claims for equality of nearly all minority movements in the United States, from abolitionism to the civil rights, women's, and gay movements in the 1960s and 1970s, have been rooted in ethical rationalities from the Enlightenment and classical liberalism, such as the "natural rights of man" and "equality of all" as embodied in the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, constitutes support for Weber's emphasis on the potential influence of ethical rationalities.

²⁶ That Weber considered Marxism a belief system based on faith rather than a science is clear (1968, pp. 515–16 [313–14]). He is, however, reluctant to refer to Marxism directly as a religion. He prefers to stress that this closed world view exhibits a number of characteristics generally associated with religions, such as its nature as an "economy-

In sum, substantive rationality is the only type of rationality that possesses the analytical potential to introduce methodical rational ways of life. Although theoretical and formal types of rationality are also capable of indirect and direct conscious mastery of reality, neither introduces consistent attitudes toward life. Even though endowed with the capacity to do so, practical rational patterns of action remain simply reactions to heterogeneous realities. Thus, the practical rational way of life, characterized by a means-end rational calculation of interests, lacks the methodical element called forth when values, particularly those believed in as ethical standards, regulate action "from within." Only substantive rationality possesses the analytical potential to master—or rationalize—reality comprehensively. It does so by consciously and methodically organizing action into patterns that are consistent with explicit value constellations (see table 3).

IV. RATIONALIZATION PROCESSES IN GENERAL AND
RATIONALIZATION IN MODERN SOCIETIES

For Weber, a purely analytic discussion such as the one immediately above regarding the potential of the different types of rationality to introduce methodical rational ways of life has little relationship to the question whether this potential was actually realized in societies. In history's battleground, interests have struggled against interests, and values and "ideas," regardless of the clarity of their formulation or their intrinsic plausibility, have died a sudden death unless anchored securely within social and economic matrices. By the same token, irrespective of whether they were based on practical, theoretical, formal, or substantive types of rationality, rationalization processes have been set in motion as significant sociocultural developments only when firmly rooted social strata have appeared as their "carriers."

TABLE 3
TYPES OF RATIONALITY IN RELATION TO WAYS OF LIFE

CONSCIOUS MASTERY OF REALITY		REGULARITIES OF ACTION
Lack of a Way of Life	Way of Life	
Theoretical rationality	Practical rationality	Nonmethodical
Formal rationality	...	Nonmethodical
...	Substantive rationality	Methodical

cally eschatological faith." The beliefs of its followers are referred to as "quasi-religious" or "equivalent to a religious faith" (see further, 1968, pp. 486 [296], 873–74 [501]); Guenther Roth (1976, p. 262) makes the same point.

Rationalization Processes: Interests and Values

Substantive rationality is most responsible for both the diffuseness and the perspectival nature of Weber's rationalization theme. This type of rationality combines with the notion of ethical substantive rationality to constitute the pivotal concepts in his analysis. Only ethical rationalities are capable of permanently suppressing practical rational regularities of action or, just as important, intensifying them by transforming them into practical ethical action. In addition, only ethical rationalities possess the analytical vigor to subdue formal rationalization processes fully. Finally, only ethical rationalities provide a value content for theoretical rationalization processes, set them in motion in specific directions as value-rationalization processes, and give rise to comprehensive, internally unified value configurations. These value constellations, even though for Weber they are themselves largely manifestations of "*irrational*" historical, economic, political, domination, and even geographical forces ([1946] 1958f, p. 281 [253]), constitute rationally consistent world views to which individuals may orient their action in all spheres of life. Whenever these world views acquire the social and economic anchorage necessary for their diffusion throughout a civilization, they lay down the "tracks" (*Gleise*)—or boundaries—within which the everyday altercations among economic, political, and other *interests* take place.²⁷

All of these achievements of ethical rationality derive from a single postulate that underlies Weber's historical sociology and methodological writings no less than his fundamental anthropological view of man: action cannot be understood as simply an adjustment to "given" realities, whether daily routine or bureaucratic statutes, as manifest in practical, theoretical, and formal rationalities. Nor can a residual status be assigned to the component of human action that falls outside routine and adaptive behavior. Instead, according to Weber, *action motivated by values* and resistant to and counterpoised against environmental molding by interests has been of the greatest historical consequence.²⁸

For Weber, the worldly wisdom and utilitarian common sense of an Alberti could not have given birth to modern capitalism, nor could the initial impulse for social, philosophical, or religious movements that professed to alter given realities crystallize from practical rationality ([1930] 1958a, pp. 76–78 [61–62]; 56, n. 12 [38, n. 1]; 158, n. 16 [168, n. 3]). Even less could formal rationality have planted the seeds for its own germination. Nor have these regularities of rational action alone ever been

²⁷ Weber's memorable statement on the relation of ideas and interests must be understood in this context (see [1946] 1958f, p. 280 [252]).

²⁸ As well as of pivotal interest to a *verstehende* sociology. An overriding aim of Weber's sociology is to make individuals sensitive to values.

capable, Weber asserts, of giving birth to ethical substantive rationalities, value-rationalization processes, world views, or a unified way of life: no ethical action monitored by an internalized standard, regardless of whether it involves a circumscribed ethical rationality such as friendship or an ethic of conviction, can result solely from means-end rational action.

Neither the means-end rational action that provided the foundation for practical and formal rationality nor value postulates devoid of an ethical aspect could transcend and order daily routine to a degree sufficient to set a *comprehensive and continuous rationalization* of given realities into motion. Such a development could emerge only after value-rationalization processes rooted in an ethical rationality had led to the formation of at least an incipient world view in reference to which, irrespective of its particular value content, everyday routines could be qualitatively assessed, found wanting, and rejected. Weber's notion of ethical substantive rationality and his emphasis on the *divergent* directions followed by rationalization processes rooted in values accounts for his opposition to all explanations of the advance of rationalization as a manifestation of either adaptation to given realities or the conflict of sheer interests.²⁹

Precisely this Weberian assertion explains his unwillingness to side with Marx in endowing economic interests with a generalized significance, even though he refused to underestimate their strength. Only ethical rational action, not simply the thrust of interests, possessed, for example, the potential effectively to rupture traditional ways of life and attitudes. For Weber, specific types of ways of life have often demonstrated a greater affinity with certain types of economic action because of ethical rational influences rather than because of intensive economic pressures ([1930] 1958a, pp. 26–27 [12]), in spite of the fact that the very origins of ethical rationalities themselves must be in turn understood as largely the result of economic factors. Such distinctions at the levels of “meaning” and motivation for action have been of enormous significance for an understanding of the meandering routes rationalization followed in different civilizations.

Interests as the Basis for Rationalization Processes: Affinities, Antagonisms, and Sociological Anchorings

The centrality of ethical substantive rationality and rationalization processes based on this type of rationality in Weber's scheme must be viewed as an *analytical* centrality. Its conceptual significance, which derives from

²⁹ This interpretation of Weber's fundamental view of history and social change is fully supported by Tenbruck: “His entire oeuvre testifies to his conviction that a comprehensive and continuous rationalization of reality cannot arise out of interests” (1975, p. 689).

its unique capacity to call forth methodical rational ways of life, tells us nothing whatsoever about the role it has played in history. Far from ends in themselves, the types of rationality were, for Weber, merely the basic heuristic tools he employed to scrutinize the historical fates of rationalization as sociocultural processes. In doing so, he wished to ascertain which rationalization process or processes typically penetrated into the different spheres of life and to assess the strength of these processes by examining the stability of their sociological roots.

Having utilized his ideal-typical concepts—the types of rationality—as means of orientation that guided him to critical historical watersheds, Weber as historical sociologist, whether investigating the multidimensionality of rationalization or any other theme, directly confronted history's raw "irrationality." Instead of being subject to a transcendental meaning, the inexorable dialectical advance of "Reason," evolutionary laws, or even the centrality of the economic sphere as a general rule, history was understood by Weber as a realm characterized by the immutable clash of "irrational" interests regulated only at their extremes by established world views. Even these world views were originally determined by the victory of certain interests, power, historical chance, and other random factors. For Weber, all questions of historical development and change, of the circumscription of some movements and the struggle to positions of hegemony by others, inevitably run up against the purely "irrational" drift and flow of interests and interest constellations. Far from simply an internally consistent concept, "rationalism" is a historical concept that contains a world of contradictions within itself" ([1930] 1958a, p. 78 [62]; [1946] 1958f, p. 281 [253]).

At times, owing to a sheer accidental juxtaposition of factors, interests crystallized to form a cohesive stratum. This stratum could, if another random configuration of historical forces congealed, "carry" a specific rationalization process. Civil servants, for example, carried formal rationalization processes as a consequence of their typical daily activities in organizations. Other strata, as often as not, carried rationalization processes antagonistic to those upheld by bureaucrats, as, for example, when religious intellectuals propounded substantive rationalization processes. As further carriers of still other rationalization processes became institutionalized in legitimate orders within a society, a labyrinth of such processes evolved. Some of them fused in elective affinity relationships, while others clashed. Still others split apart and then later converged, merging into, struggling with, and overlapping myriad other rationalization processes all along their expanding and contracting paths.

Rather than capable of being arranged along a line of linear development, such as the "disenchantment of the world," multifaceted rationalization processes recurrently surfaced and then faded away amidst a

tapestry of shifting balances and kaleidoscopic interweavings. Paradox and irony abound in Weber's charting of this polychromatic net. The best-known instance occurred when the "irrationality"—when viewed from a purely eudaemonistic perspective ([1930] 1958*a*, pp. 78 [62], 70 [54])—of the Calvinist work ethic contributed to patterns of action and entire ways of life thought to exemplify the highest peaks of civilization, yet ones that came to enslave individuals in the 20th century within an impersonal "iron cage" saturated by formal, theoretical, and practical rationalization processes ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 281 [253]; [1930] 1958*a*, pp. 181–82 [203–4]; Loewith 1970, pp. 114–15). Time and again, Weber notes the manner in which groups of individuals create realms of freedom by responding, through rational regularities of action, to fragmented realities. In carrying these regularities to extremes, however, the same groups may construct veritable networks of bondage.

Nearly all rationalization processes are of short duration for Weber as a historical sociologist casting his glance down through the ages. Only a very few—those based on the ethical substantive rationalities that form the tracks for the unfolding of civilizations—reach across millennia. Even though, once entrenched as accepted world views, these substantive rationalities and the "ideas" that legitimate them acquire an autonomous (*eigengesetzliche*)³⁰ power to focus the belief and action orientations of entire populations (Tenbruck 1975), their perpetuation is guaranteed, according to Weber, only when they become institutionalized within legitimate orders and carried by established social strata. The vast majority of rationalization processes are rooted in interests and fail to legitimate themselves adequately at the level of values. Thus, they are suppressed whenever a more powerful constellation of antagonistic interests appears on the horizon.

Modern Rationalization Processes in the West: The "Type of Person"

Practical, theoretical, and formal rationalization processes strongly dominate substantive rationalization processes in modern Western societies. The Judeo-Christian world view, which provided the point of reference for major groupings of substantive and ethical rationalities as well as for the theoretical rationalization of their values, has been largely replaced by the scientific world view. With this axial shift and with the definition of science—mainly by Weber himself—as a mode of knowledge analytically distinct from values, values could be no longer defined as the legitimate subject matter of the 20th century's major theoretical rationalization pro-

³⁰ Unfortunately, Weber's notion of *Eigengesetzlichkeit*, which has been dealt with by Tenbruck (1975) in only one of its multiple incarnations, cannot be explored here.

cesses. This holds true even though the scientific world view as a whole is itself a substantive rationality. Simultaneously, formal rationalization processes in the scientific arena as well as in the economic and the legal spheres and in the bureaucratic form of domination coalesced to give birth to a network of patterns of action, all of which pointed in the same direction: suppression of value-oriented action. Thus, ethical rationalities lost the constellation of interests that enabled them to stand effectively in direct opposition to the impersonal character of all formal rationalities and to circumscribe the influence of the latter by subsuming them under an ethical postulate ([1946] 1958*d*, p. 331 [544]; 1968, pp. 1186 [709], 585 [353], 600 [361]; 1927, p. 357 [305]).

With the eclipse of substantive rationality's power to order comprehensively all aspects of life in behalf of values, a resurgence of the practical rational way of life could take place ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 281 [253]). This way of life, in turn, which formal rationality subdued only to the degree that action took place within enterprises (*Betriebe*) and bureaucracies, began to compete freely with formal rational patterns of action. Concomitantly, wherever value-rational actions within bureaucracies, such as those typical of the Prussian civil servant, were weakened as a consequence of the general uprooting of substantive rationalities, purely means-end rational action penetrated these organizations more easily. However much some individuals and groups may desire a reinstatement of the "bureaucratic ethic," attempts to reinstate it confront firmly entrenched interests now institutionalized within legitimate orders. In such cases, Weber repeatedly emphasizes that the plausibility or "reasonableness" of a desire for change can provide only a stimulant. This prerequisite acquires significance only if a constellation of facilitating factors anchored in interests crystallizes.

For Weber, the rise of science as a mode of knowing and experiencing foreboded particularly fateful consequences, if only because it threatened to pull even values out of the arena of "belief" and place them in the realm of calculation: with the advent of the scientific world view, even values could become subject to empirical observation, mathematical measurement, and testing ([1946] 1958*e*, p. 139 [594]; 1922, pp. 473-74). This development, he emphasized, stood in the most principled opposition to all religious world views which, as ethical postulates, asserted the "meaningfulness" of worldly life and certain actions simply as a result of their valuation for particular salvation paths. In all religions, values existed as eternally "valid" absolutes, and the world existed as a cosmos ordered in a final manner by gods and doctrines ([1946] 1958*d*, pp. 350-53 [564-66]). Precisely the theoretical rationalization processes that had, in ages past, molded the fragmentary values of "primitive" religions into internally unified configurations of values that comprehensively explained the per-

petuation of this-worldly suffering now became emancipated from their subjugation to values. Once clearly focused within the domain of science in the 20th century, these processes came to exist as "empty" abstract thought processes that labeled religion as a realm characterized by a "sacrifice of the intellect" and the "irrational" ([1946] 1958*d*, pp. 351–52 [564–66]; [1946] 1958*f*, p. 281 [253]) (see fig. 1).

When it combined with formal, practical, and other theoretical rationalization processes unbridled by values, this shift of theoretical rationalization from religion to science became of paramount significance for the destiny of methodical rational ways of life. In the past, both the direction of such ways of life and their methodical aspect had originated from a rationalization in reference to values. Wherever ethical rationalization processes had been set in motion, their values were—as a rule and often decisively—*religious* values ([1946] 1958*f*, p. 287 [259]). The banishment of these values led Weber to ask a specific question: "What *type of person* [*Menschentyp*] will—or could—survive in the modern cosmos?" (1949, p. 27 [517]; [1930] 1958*a*, pp. 180–82 [203–5]).

He wanted to know, above all, what type of person would be the carrier of Western civilization in an age when the life-sphere that had previously united the personality into a force capable of standing in opposition to the "stream of material constellations" had lost its sociological anchorage. Would this type of person be little more than a pale reflection of the formal rationality characterizing his merely adaptive action in the legal, economic, and scientific spheres as well as the bureaucratic form of domination, and of the practical rational orientations required to handle life's daily tasks and difficulties? The type of person capable of systematically rationalizing action "from within"—in relation to a unified value constellation—and of thereby lending his or her entire existence an unambiguous "direction" and "meaning" was viewed by Weber as a *historical* subject bound to historically and sociologically unique traditions, cultural values, and social-

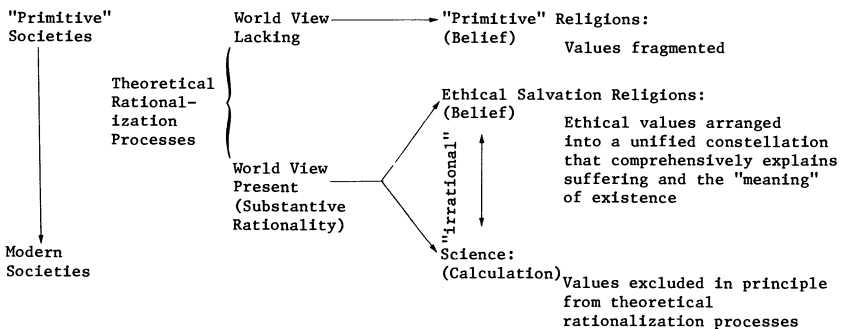


FIG. 1

economic structures. Casting his glance down through the ages from the perspective of the dawning of the 20th century, he saw the fading away of the distinct configuration of sociological factors that carried the historical subject which, to him, embodied Western civilization's highest ideals: the autonomous and free individual whose actions were given continuity by their reference to ultimate values.

Weber saw no social stratum firmly anchored in Western industrial societies capable of replacing ethical salvation religions as an institutionalized carrier of ethical rationality and value-rationalization processes. The crystallization of such a stratum was rendered all the more unlikely by the unfolding of the major life-spheres along their particular and "autonomous" routes of rationalization: devoid of the personal dimension, the realms of the economy, law, and knowledge, as well as all bureaucratic structures of domination, now developed solely in relation to abstract rules, laws, regulations, and external necessities. These arenas thus remained outside of and unrestrained by all ethical claims (1968, p. 585 [353]; [1946] 1958*d*, p. 331 [544]; 1927, pp. 357–58 [305]). Without the cultivation of a conscience in the normal socialization of children, all ethical demands of them as adults were destined to fall on deaf ears. The type of person to whom ethical claims are alien could scarcely master his reality consciously and direct action consistently. Instead, such persons remained subject to the random—or, in Weber's terms, "irrational"—flow of interests in their environment. The overwhelming strength of sociologically entrenched spheres unable in principle to generate value-rationalization processes condemned the *unified personality* to exist "at the edges" of modern society in small and intimate groupings ([1946] 1958*e*, p. 155 [612]). Moreover, to the extent that the values of the political sphere—such as those incorporated in the Bill of Rights—are swept away by the onslaught of formal, practical, and theoretical rationalization processes, politically oriented action will become increasingly characterized by a mere means-end rational calculation of self-interests. If this trend is not reversed, the rule of authoritarian force will, according to Weber, inevitably spread and suppress all political freedoms.

Far from treating Weber's overall view of historical rationalization processes in any comprehensive manner, this article has only taken a first step toward doing so by discussing the types of rationality as concepts and their manifestation in rationalization processes. The comparative-historical sociology that is laid out in *E&S*—so often between the lines—and "applied" in the separate studies on the religions of China, India, and the ancient Near East took Weber far beyond the level of analysis limited to analytic concepts into a realm vastly more congenial to him personally. In his comparative-historical sociology, he searched for typical patterns

that might provide clues to the general circumstances under which strata that carried specific rationalization processes were constricted or allowed to spread and establish durable traditions. Such investigations utilized the conceptual level simply as a means of orientation to locate significant historical junctures.

Instead of being an end in itself, as many commentators on Weber's methodological writings seem to believe, the formation of clear concepts was simply the unavoidable first step in undertaking a sociological analysis. For Weber, it was not the concept, however clearly and even aesthetically shaped, that was of primary interest but, rather, the question how historical processes advanced *sociologically* within given civilizations. If one wishes to follow Weber's methodological procedures, the purely conceptual inventory of the multiple Weberian types of rationality and their manifestation in a multiplicity of rationalization processes undertaken here can serve as the logical prerequisite for an exploration of the vicissitudes of rationalization processes in history at all levels of sociocultural process.

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