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The Fate of Cultural Values

Introduction
In public and private cultures, distinctive cultural values, whether ethical or aesthetic, are irrelevant when viewed from the perspective of formal rationality. So, what is the fate of such values with formal rationality in the ascendancy? They disappear from sight, they are repressed, they go into exile, they return in an abhorrent form, whether in the distorted forms of religious fundamentalism or in re-enchanted forms of cultural consumption, in types of commodity fetishism which would even surprise Marx. The most sublime values retreat, as Weber (1946a[1918], p. 155) suggested, ‘either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations’. Or, as this chapter argues, such values are served by professional culture creators or by other types such as the intransigent, the ignored and the amateur. These are culture creators whose activities, from the point of view of formal rationality, are not readily comprehensible because they are in the service of different value-systems and so cannot be entirely contained by the impersonal forces which govern our lives. Going to the heart of Weber’s ambivalence towards rationalization, this chapter examines the fate of a modern culture dominated by the expedient and yet impersonal rules of formal rationality. However, the chapter also draws attention to a productive strain in Weber’s work on the rationalization of culture. In his Science as a Vocation lecture, Weber (1946a) argued that if we face up to the demands of modern culture, with its competing value systems, we do not have to be led by the hand of impersonal forces and serve systems that should, in a more rational world, serve us. If we choose to serve particular cultural values, or pursue a ‘calling’, we can
purposefully gain clarity regarding how best to serve the specific 'demon' or 'godhead' or value-system that we wish to serve. Furthermore, we can gain clarity regarding the consequences that attend the pursuit of the ends we have set in our sights. This pursuit of clarity, which is particularly instructive in our uncertain times, typifies Weber's doggedness, his desire to face up to the demands of the day.

**Formal rationality and legal authority**

Formal rationality is expressed in the dominant form of authority in modern society, which is legal authority. As we will see below, this type of authority finds its apotheosis in bureaucracies, the ideal type of which operates entirely according to calculable rules and is indispensable to the running of a capitalist economy and a modern state. This type of authority as expressed in law or in bureaucratic rules is formally rational because it operates with a 'cool “matter-of-factness”', with equality before the law (Weber, 1946c[1915], pp. 220–221). Where legal authority is dominant, people obey rationally established norms, rules and laws, and in a working context, adhere to the impersonal duties that go with their office. It is, therefore, a disembodied, intellectualized kind of authority. This contrasts with more substantive forms of authority which, for example, allow for arbitrariness in decision making as a consequence of ‘the personally free discretion flowing from the “grace” of the old patrimonial domination’ (Weber, 1946c, p. 220). Whereas a patrimonial prince might bestow ‘utilitarian and social ethical blessings upon his subjects, in the manner of the master of a large house upon the members of his household’, modern, trained jurists apply a generally applicable, abstract rule of law to all citizens belonging to a given state (Weber, 1946c, pp. 298–299).

Before discussing legal authority in detail, let us first consider Weber's ideas regarding domination and the basis of legitimacy. Weber (1968, p. 212) argued that domination is the probability that a given group of persons will obey certain commands, and ‘implies a minimum of voluntary compliance’; only in the case of slavery is submission to authority absolutely involuntary. The degree of compliance is based on a certain interest that may be motivated by, for example, rational calculation, emotional or ideal interests. However, for domination to be effective, it requires more than the cultivation of personal interest or affection on the part of its subjects. According to Weber (1968, p. 212), domination normally necessitates an executive staff to enforce the commands and rules of a given authority; it also,