

MAX WEBER'S THEORY OF CHARISMA AND ITS APPLICABILITY TO ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

'Man is at times seized with a panic as in the helplessness of a dream, by a gale of movement, wildly lashing out like an animal that has got into the incomprehensible mechanism of a net.'

Robert Musil, 'The Man Without Qualities'

1. *Charisma and Modern Man*

This essay is devoted to a presentation and critique of one part of Weber's enormous bulk of work, his theory of charisma. By also trying to assess in what respects this theory can be made use of in anthropological research, I implicitly raise the question whether the restraint of most British social anthropologists in consulting and applying the ideas of one of the giants of sociological thought is wholly justified.

The nature of modern, rationalized society and the ambiguous position of man within it form the unifying theme of Weber's sociology; most of his studies, however remote their topics seem to be, are related to it. Weber's theory of charisma, too, can only be understood against the background of his sociological analysis and politico-moral critique of modern, rationalized society and of his concern with the position of the individual within it, topics which will be discussed in this section.¹

¹ Weber's remarks on rationality and the process of rationalization are scattered throughout his works, and he never summarized or systematized his ideas on this point. Hence, as far as my account of rationality is concerned, I am more dependent on commentaries than in other parts of this paper. Discussions of Weber's ideas on the matter can be found in, among others, Löwith (1930), Schluchter (1981) and Brubaker (1984), to whose work I am especially indebted.

Weber's view of rationality and rationalization in modern social orders represents an important break with the ideas of many 'enlightened' writers. Throughout his writings Weber argues that the occidental, modern type of rationality is not the only kind of rationality. He thus refutes the notion of a single, substantive rationality. Religion - and this is a further break with the dominant ideas of his time - is not an expression of the irrational as such, but has its own characteristic rationality. Moreover, in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1971a, first published in German in 1904-06) Weber argues that the Western kind of rationality originates in and develops from religious roots (on these points, see Küenzlen 1980: 32-40).

In *Economy and Society* (1968, first published in German in 1921) Weber identifies two ideal types of rational action, which are set in opposition to non-rational behaviour, i.e. to action which is carried out spontaneously and instinctively on an affectual and/or traditional basis. The two ways in which rational social action may be oriented are described as follows:

- (1) *instrumentally rational (zweckrational)*, that is, determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as 'conditions' or 'means' for the attainment of the actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends;
- (2) *value-rational (wertrational)*, that is, determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects of success... (Weber 1968: 24-5).²

Rationality in Weber's writings is, as Brubaker (1984: 35) points out, a 'relational' concept, because a thing is rational or irrational only from a certain point of view. Applying the distinction between value-rational and instrumentally rational action, it can be said that *Wertrationalität* is rationality from the point of view of a certain belief, or of the value that is given to the end(s). An action is value-rational if it is considered to be consistent with the belief, and if there is a logical relation between action and belief. *Zweckrationalität* is rationality from the point of view of a given means-end relationship. An action is instrumentally rational if it is an efficacious means to a certain end (cf. Brubaker 1984: 35-6).

Weber, as a protagonist of *verstehende* (interpretative) sociology, is primarily interested in the subjective meaning of individual action. Both value-rational and instrumentally rational action are defined from the subjective point of view of the

² The boundary between traditional and affectual behaviour, on the one hand, and the various kinds of rational behaviour on the other is not considered a rigid one, and there are transitions which Weber discusses in the pages following the citation (1968: 24-6).

actor (see Weber 1971a: 194, n.9; also Kalberg 1980: 1155). This purely subjective rationality is distinguished from objectively correct rationality. Only instrumentally rational action can be objectively correct, if the perceived appropriateness of the means to a given end is also actual appropriateness (cf. Brubaker 1984: 54). There are, however, limits to objective rationality which are not set by the limitations of scientific knowledge alone but which are given by the fact that there exist different and conflicting cultural values in the world. As the rationality of science is purely instrumental, it is incapable of defining *Wert-rationalität*, or of yielding the value of an end, or of arbitrating between conflicting values. In this context Weber speaks of a 'clash' of 'ultimate *Weltanschauungen*' (Weber 1970: 117) and, as these cannot be reconciled by scientific means, of 'the ethical irrationality of the world' (ibid.: 122; also p. 148).³

If 'rationality' in Weber's sociology is a multi-vocal, systematically ambiguous and relational concept, the process of rationalization which shaped the rationality of modern Western societies (and still does) is equally not seen as a single, gradual and continuous process. Weber holds that there are several distinct though interrelated processes in the different spheres of social life. Although these processes have different historical sources, proceed in various directions and at different rates, there are nevertheless common characteristic strands.

One such strand is the increase of specialized technical knowledge, or *Fachwissen*, as Weber calls it. This specialized knowledge is concerned with means-ends relations, that is, with the results of certain actions in the physical and social environment; it thus belongs to the field of instrumental rationality. During the process of rationalization in Western societies, this *Fachwissen* gradually achieved growing social importance; step by step, the cultivated man was displaced by the expert, the *Fach-mensch* (cf. Weber 1968: 998-1002). The increase of specialized knowledge and the enhancement of its social importance further led, if we follow Weber, to the 'disenchantment of the world' (*Entzauberung der Welt*), i.e. to a substitution of magico-religious views of the world by scientific ones. This disenchantment resulted in the belief that the world, from the cosmos to the minutest detail of everyday life, can be explained and mastered scientifically by technical means and calculation (cf. Brubaker 1984: 32). Another characteristic and common strand of the various processes of rationalization in the different spheres of social life Weber sees in the depersonalization of social relationships, or, as he calls it alternatively, 'the general tendency to impersonality' (1968: 294). This process led to an 'objectification of the power structure' (ibid.: 601), which Weber sees to have come into being especially in the spheres of economy,

³ Such points of view lead Weber's critics to speak of his 'nihilism' (cf., for example, Aron 1971: 200). Löwith shows the connection of this nihilism with Weber's concern with individual dignity and freedom (1930: 12).

politics and administration (cf. *ibid.*: 600). Weber further holds that the progress of specialized knowledge and technical efficiency, as well as the coming to the fore of impersonal, formal rules, led to greater calculability and control of man and nature (cf. Brubaker 1984: 30-5). Finally, it is perhaps one of Weber's most influential achievements to have shown that as an essential addition to, and as a decisive impetus for, the 'external' rationalization in the spheres of science, law, technology, administration, economy, etc., there took place another, an 'inner' rationalization of individuals: an **inner reorganization** and rationalization of the personality which was pushed forward and created by development in the spheres of religion and ethics. Weber's ideas on this matter, expressed mainly in his *Protestant Ethic*, are well known and need not be reiterated here.

The results of rationalization in modern Western society are for Weber highly problematical from the point of view of individual freedom and dignity. Modern capitalist economic action, for instance, is regarded as the paradigm of instrumentally rational action (cf. Weber 1968: 82-5). But the process of rationalization in the economic sphere resulted, according to Weber, in 'the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order' and in 'the iron cage of capitalism' (Weber 1971a: 181; cf. also *ibid.*: 54-5).⁴ Modern administration, another sphere of social life which attracts much of Weber's interest, is essentially bureaucratic administration. Its efficiency and calculability is high compared with other forms of administration, because it is to a great degree based on specialized, technical knowledge (cf. Weber 1968: 973-6). The bureaucrat is guided by abstract and formal rules, and he acts in a spirit of impersonality. His loyalty is not to a person, but to 'the impersonal and functional purposes' of his office (cf. *ibid.*: 959). But again, bureaucratic administration (despite or because of its efficiency and impersonality) presents for Weber an immense threat to the individual in modern social orders. It does not only guarantee technical efficiency but also means 'dehumanization' (cf. *ibid.*: 975); and it leads to the power and control of the bureaucrats over those who are administered (cf. *ibid.*: 225). Finally, Weber's critical and ambiguous attitude towards the ethics of modern *Berufsmenschentum* or professionalism and 'the spirit of capitalism' (both originating, according to Weber, in the Puritan ethos) is neatly expressed in his formula: 'The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so' (1971a: 181).

Weber's great concern with individual dignity and freedom within the modern social order of objectified and petrified rationality reveals a strong moral impetus in his writings, which indicates that the concept of charisma is not the 'value-free' sociological construct which Weber presents it as being. It is loaded with immense moral significance, and it can only be understood against the background of Weber's analysis of modern capit-

⁴ For Weber's statements on capitalism, see 1971a: 17-24, 181-2; see also Eldridge 1971: 63-5.

alist society and of his idea of man within it. One must see clearly that the concepts of charisma and bureaucracy are used dialectically in Weber's thought and stand in constant tension one to another, and that the emergence of a charismatic individual is seen by Weber as a chance to stop (at least temporarily) the bureaucratization of life (see Eldridge 1971: 68).

In this context it is revealing to investigate how Weber envisages the intellectual in modern society, on the one hand, and the prophet (the charismatic individual *par excellence* in Weber's writings) on the other. Another point, which I shall follow up in the final paragraphs of this section, is the elective affinity to be discerned in Weber's thought between his notion of the moral personality and his view of the prophet.

The intellectual, to start with, is characterised as follows:

It is the intellectual who conceives of the 'world' as a problem of meaning. As intellectualism suppresses belief in magic, the world's processes become disenchanted, lose their magical significance, and henceforth simply 'are' and 'happen' but no longer signify anything. As a consequence, there is a growing demand that the world and the total pattern of life be subject to an order that is significant and meaningful (Weber 1968: 506).

The role of the prophet is differently envisaged:

...prophetic revelation involves for both the prophet himself and for his followers...a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated meaningful attitude toward life. To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning, to which man's conduct must be oriented if it is to bring salvation, and after which it must be patterned in an integrally meaningful manner (ibid.: 450).

Hence both the prophet and the intellectual are concerned with the meaning of the world; both charisma and reason, moreover, in Weber's view may be value-creating and revolutionary forces (cf. ibid.: 245). But the modern intellectual, pressed by his scientific view of the world, conceives the world as a *problem* of meaning, whereas the prophet reveals the world as 'a meaningful totality' (ibid.: 450). The charismatic individual, as seen here personified in the prophet, could indeed be the meaning-providing person for whom 'growing demand' arises as a consequence of the process of intellectualization.

The moral personality of modern society, according to Weber, is someone who ought to be constantly guided by reason. However, no matter whether this rational behaviour is of the instrumentally rational kind or of the value-rational kind, a moral personality in Weber's view always has to commit himself to certain central and ultimate values about which he organizes his life. The choice of, and between, these ultimate values or *Weltanschauungen*, as I have mentioned, cannot in the end be guided by objectively ration-

al, scientific means and therefore is fundamentally irrational. Weber now demands that the moral personality, despite acting rationally (and in particular, objectively rationally), does not shirk his responsibility to make these irrational choices concerning the fundamental values and demands also that he thereby creates the meaning of his life. The consciously and deliberately undertaken choice of values, or the will of the individual to choose values, as well as his capacity to turn them into purposes and translate them into teleological-rational action, form the essence of the moral personality (cf. Weber 1975: 191-2). The concept of the prophet (which Weber models predominantly on the ancient Hebrew prophets) bears great similarities with his notion of the moral personality, as the prophet is also presented as one who consciously and systematically guides his action on the basis of deliberately made choices of ultimate values; he forges his *Weltanschauung* into purposes and into action aimed at achieving certain goals or ends (cf. Weber 1968: 450; also Brubaker 1984: 63).

What are the interrelations between the prophet/charismatic individual and the process of rationalization, interrelations which also indicate Weber's view of the moral personality's situation and, one might say, dilemma, in modern rationalized society? The prophet is considered to be the bearer of a normative order and in this capacity plays a crucial role in the clash of ultimate values. A charismatic figure who creates new value orientations necessarily deepens and intensifies the value conflict; his new *Weltanschauung* clashes with the old one. The chance of a charismatic figure to become effective and to be the instigator of a process whereby one social and normative order is replaced by a new one is, according to Weber, in a certain dialectical tension with the process of rationalization. By forging his values into purposes and by translating them into teleological-rational action, the charismatic individual is part of the process of rationalization and may instigate it. However, the process of rationalization makes it increasingly difficult for charismatic personalities to arise and to create and establish new values. The prophet, therefore, paradoxically and ironically instigates a process which more and more prevents charisma from becoming effective. Weber holds that the irresistible force of rational discipline eradicates personal charisma (cf. Weber 1968: 1149). 'The waning of charisma', he further claims, 'generally indicates the diminishing importance of individual action' (ibid.: 1148); and here is the link to his concern with the status of the moral personality in modern social orders. The decrease in the chance of a charismatic individual becoming effective indicates for Weber the increasingly problematical position of the moral personality in modern society.

2. *The Pure Types of Domination and the Extraordinary Quality of Charisma*

Weber distinguishes between three 'pure' types of legitimate authority:

The validity of the claims to legitimacy may be based on:

1. Rational grounds - resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands (legal authority).
2. Traditional grounds - resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them (traditional authority); or finally,
3. Charismatic grounds - resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him (charismatic authority) (ibid.: 215).

Weber expressly mentions that ruling organizations (*Herrschaftsverbände*) which belong to one or other of these types are very exceptional and that in concrete reality one normally finds mixtures of these pure types of domination (cf. ibid.: 262-6; also pp. 946-8). The three ideal types of legitimate domination and their concomitant motives of compliance or obedience are to a certain degree congruent with the ideal types of social action. Instrumentally rational action is dominant in the rational type of authority; affectual action is the basis of charismatic authority, and the parallels between traditional action and traditional domination are self-evident. Only value-rational action does not serve as a basis for a type of domination, and it seems to be regarded as underlying all types (cf. also Weber ibid.: 33-6).

What are the most striking similarities and differences between these types of domination? One distinction is that between legal authority and its formal, impersonal character, on the one side, and traditional and charismatic authority, which are both 'personalistic' types of domination, on the other. In the case of legal authority, obedience is owed to the legally established impersonal order and to the commands of its representatives within the scope of the authority of their offices. In the case of traditional authority, obedience is owed to the chief in a traditionally sanctioned position of authority. The charismatically qualified leader, finally, is obeyed 'by virtue of personal trust in his revelation, his heroism or exemplary qualities' (ibid.: 216). The main distinction between charismatic authority and the two other types of domination is that, at least in its genuine form, charismatic authority is extraordinary (*außeralltäglich*), whereas traditional and rational dominations are everyday, routine forms of domination (cf. ibid.: 1111-12).

Weber borrowed the term 'charisma' from early Christian theology. Expressions such as 'the gift of grace', 'spiritual gift', or the Gnostic *pneuma* belong to the semantic field of the term. Weber removed this religiously oriented concept from its histori-

cal and religious context and transformed it into a more generally applicable sociological ideal type which is characterized by its extraordinary quality rather than by its magico-religious quality. Charisma is then defined as

...a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader (ibid.: 241).

What exactly this quality is, and how it can be judged, depends on how it is regarded by those subject to charismatic authority. The specific content of the charismatic quality does not enter Weber's definition and usage of the concept. What is important is the formal structure of the social relationship between charismatic leader and followers, and the nature of the command-obedience structure (cf. ibid.: 242).

The command-obedience structure of charismatic authority has to be investigated further. The legitimacy of charismatic authority, to repeat, is strictly personal and emotional; it is based on the followers' affectual belief in the extraordinary qualities of the charismatic individual. 'It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority', Weber writes, 'which is decisive for the validity of charisma' (ibid.). The only basis of legitimacy for charismatic authority is 'personal charisma as long as it is proved; that is, as long as it receives recognition' (ibid.: 244). Charismatic qualities, then, are not taken for granted. They need to be proved, and the gifts of grace may well desert the charismatic individual. Weber, therefore, stresses that 'if proof and success elude the leader for long, if he appears deserted by his god or his magical or heroic powers, above all, if his leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that charismatic authority will disappear' (ibid.: 242).

Another important characteristic of the command-obedience structure is a certain ambivalence in the nature of the recognition of the charismatic qualities, an ambivalence which is marked by the two poles of freedom and duty. Weber writes:

...recognition is freely given and guaranteed by what is held to be a proof, originally always a miracle, and consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader. But where charisma is genuine, it is not this which is the basis of the claim to legitimacy. This basis lies rather in the conception that it is the duty of those subject to charismatic authority to recognize its genuineness and to act accordingly. Psychologically this recognition is a matter of complete personal devotion to the possessor of the quality, arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope (ibid.).

The charismatic community in its genuine type is a relatively unstable group. It seems, on the one side, that it becomes the more stable the more this freely given recognition is also regarded as a duty. On the other side, the freedom of those subject to charismatic authority to recognise the extraordinary qualities may come to the fore. Charismatic domination is then being transformed in a democratic direction:

The basically authoritarian principle of charismatic legitimation may be subject to an anti-authoritarian interpretation, for the validity of charismatic authority rests entirely on recognition by the ruled, on 'proof' before their eyes. To be sure, this recognition of a charismatically qualified, and hence legitimate, person is treated as a duty. But when the charismatic organization undergoes progressive rationalization, it is readily possible that, instead of recognition being treated as a consequence of legitimacy, it is treated as the basis of legitimacy: *democratic legitimacy* (ibid.: 266-7).

3. *The Routinization and Transformation of Charismatic Domination*

Weber puts great emphasis on the extraordinariness on charisma. The hunger for charismatic leadership arises in times of political, economic, psychic, religious, ethical, or other kinds of distress. Charismatic rulership arises from, as Weber puts it, 'collective excitement produced by extraordinary events' (ibid.: 1121). Charisma, moreover, is regarded by Weber as 'the great revolutionary force' in history, especially in traditionalist, pre-rationalist periods (cf. ibid.: 245, 1115-17); as such it is sharply opposed to the everyday routine of traditional and rational types of domination. Charisma is especially hostile and foreign to economic considerations. 'It disdains and repudiates', as Weber writes, 'economic exploitation of the gifts of grace as a source of income' (ibid.: 244; cf. pp. 1113-14, 1119-20).

Weber holds that charismatic domination in this extraordinary and genuine type can only exist in *natu nascendi*. It cannot remain stable and last for long unless it is rationalized and/or traditionalized (cf. ibid.: 246). 'When the tide that lifted a charismatically led group out of everyday life flows back into the channels of workaday routines', Weber says, 'at least the "pure" form of charismatic domination will wane and turn into an "institution"' (ibid.: 1121). In Weber's view, therefore, genuine charismatic authority vanishes soon after it appears, or it is transformed into routinized forms of charismatic domination and, finally, into everyday forms of domination. Charismatic domination, then, can only exist as an institution or organization if it is routinized, and if it is lastly transformed into its very opposite, namely into an everyday form of domination. On one side of the process of the routinization or *Veralltäglichung* (literally,

'every-day-ification') of genuine charisma, at its starting point when charismatic leadership arises, charismatic domination does not really exist as a political organization or institution. 'The purer charismatic authority in our sense is', as Weber puts it, 'the less can it be understood as an organization in the usual sense' (ibid.: 1119). On the other side, at the end of process, routinized forms of charismatic domination could hardly be called 'charismatic' any longer, as traditional and rational elements have come to prevail.

The principal motives underlying the routinization of charisma are, according to Weber, 'the ideal and also material interests of the followers in the continuation and the continual reactivation of the community' (ibid.: 246), interests which are even stronger where the administrative staff of a charismatic community are concerned (cf. ibid.). Elsewhere, Weber writes:

One of the decisive motives underlying all cases of the routinization of charisma is naturally the striving for security. This means legitimization, on the one hand, of positions of authority and social prestige, on the other hand, of the economic advantages enjoyed by the followers and sympathizers of the leader (ibid.: 252).

Two aspects are of fundamental importance for the transformation of charismatic domination into an everyday and perennial phenomenon: the alteration of its anti-economic character and the adaptation of the administrative staff to everyday conditions. Both processes are linked. It is only in the beginning, Weber claims, that followers and disciples of a charismatic leader have purely idealistic motives. The great majority of them 'will in the long run "make their living" out of their "calling" in a material sense as well' (ibid.: 249). The routinization of charisma is therefore accompanied by the appropriation of economic advantages by the charismatic followers (cf. ibid.: 249-51). As it is not possible to live on booty for long, nor on contributions, gifts or any other kind of extraordinary sources of income alone, some form of fiscal organisation which guarantees regular income has to be established (cf. ibid.: 251). For this reason, Weber asserts, 'it is necessary for the administrative staff and all its administrative practices to be adapted to everyday economic conditions' (ibid.: 252).

A crucial point at which the followers' interest in transforming charismatic authority into a perennial institution becomes most acute and obvious is the death (or disappearance) of the charismatic leader. Weber pays great attention to the ways in which the problem of succession can be met and solved, as these ways in his view indicate how the personal charisma is traditionalized or routinized, and as they therefore are of great importance for the subsequent social relationships of the charismatic community (cf. ibid.: 246, 1123).

Weber distinguishes between three main different ways: designation, hereditary charisma, and charisma of office. In the case of designation, it is believed that either the charismatic leader

himself is qualified to designate his successor, which is often done in the form of adoption (cf. *ibid.*: 247, 1124-5); or else the charismatically qualified staff designates the successor. The approval of the designated successor by the ruled is indispensable, to be sure. We find, then, 'the right of prior election' (*Vorwahlrecht*) for the administrative staff, and the subsequent popular acclamation by the ruled. Originally, a majority principle is not possible. Voters have to aim at unanimity, as only one person can be the right successor. The majority principle may, however, come to prevail, and charismatic domination may then be transformed into a democratic electoral system (cf. *ibid.*: 266-71, 1125-31). In the case of hereditary charisma (*Erbcharisma*), charisma is regarded as a quality of the blood and may be transferred through blood ties. Charisma then belongs to a house or a lineage within which it is hereditary. Hereditary charisma does not always ensure unambiguously the identification of the right successor, as many heirs may exist. One possible implementation is 'the belief in the charisma of primogeniture' (*ibid.*: 1137). If this is not the case, hereditary charisma has to be implemented by other forms of finding a successor (cf. *ibid.*: 248, 1136-8). In the case of charisma of office (*Amtscharisma*), charisma is regarded as an objective, transferable entity, dissociated from persons, which can be transmitted by artificial, magical or ritual means, such as coronation, anointing, laying-on of hands, etc. Charisma, then, does not belong to an individual but is charisma of office. This conception may result in the strict separation between the charisma of office and the worthiness of the incumbent (cf. *ibid.*: 248-9).

The various ways in which the problem of succession is met indicate different kinds of routinization of genuine charisma. Whereas designation does not necessarily affect the strictly personal charisma of the individual, hereditary charisma and charisma of office lead to the 'depersonalization of charisma' (*ibid.*: 1135), and in both cases personal charisma may be totally absent. Charisma of office especially may transform genuine charisma into 'a qualification that is inherent in everybody who has become a member of the office hierarchy through a magic act...' (*ibid.*: 1141).

4. *Charismatic Kingship*

In pre-monarchical times the possessors of charismatic qualities were, according to Weber, responsible for the relief of extraordinary (external and internal) distress in a community. The medicine man, the leader of war or hunting parties, the rain-maker and the magician are some such charismatic figures. There may be as many bearers of charisma as there are kinds of distress. Side by side with these extraordinary persons who become important in extraordinary times, Weber sees the chieftain of peacetime. He may be a dual figure who has functions both in extraordinary times

and in peacetime. But more often the chieftain of the hunt and war stands beside that of peace, who has essentially economic, hence everyday, functions (cf. *ibid.*: 1142).

The predecessors of kings were, according to Weber, the holders of extraordinary powers rather than the holders of peacetime functions. 'Everywhere', Weber writes, 'the king is primarily a warlord. Kingship originates in charismatic heroism' (*ibid.*: 1141). Where war and hunt are absent, a charismatic sorcerer may achieve similar powers, especially when natural calamities are frequent. Thus, what is important in Weber's conception of the emergence of kingship is that it arises out of extraordinary, originally magical or religious sources, and most frequently, out of war. The charisma of the warlord depends upon success or failure in raids, feuds, or wars. However, for the warlord to become a permanent figure and king, there must be a 'chronic state of war and a comprehensive military organization' (*ibid.*: 1142; cf. also p. 1134).

Charismatic kingship in Weber's sociology is presented as a routinized and institutionalized form of charismatic domination. The royal power, and the strata which are privileged by its rule, have already stabilized and secured their economic and social positions by transforming the purely charismatic grounds of authority in rational and/or traditional directions. Nevertheless, genuine charisma, or better the *idea* of genuine charisma, may still be of great importance in routinized forms of charismatic domination, since it may be used to legitimate the existing social and property order. Weber holds that 'the very quality of genuine charisma as an extraordinary, supernatural and divine force makes it a suitable source of legitimate authority for the successors of the charismatic hero' (*ibid.*: 1147). Thus, after its routinization, the ideology of genuine charisma remains important and advantageous for the ruler and for those whose power and property depend on the continuation of his rule.

In such a situation, in which genuine and personal charisma is ascribed to a ruler for legitimating purposes, it may be that the ruler's legitimacy is not clearly identifiable and that it requires an additional charismatic power. There may then develop a charismatic staff organization which controls the ruler and restricts his activities. It is in this context that Weber discusses the killing of the God-King.

Insofar as he [the ruler who is a divine incarnation] does not prove himself through his own deeds, his very claim must be confirmed by the experts in matters divine. Hence divine rulers are peculiarly subject to confinement by the groups which have the greatest material and ideal stakes in their legitimacy, the court officials and the priests; this confinement may result in permanent palace arrest and even in the killing of the God-King when he comes of age, so that he cannot compromise his divinity or emancipate himself from tutelage. In general, the very fact that the charismatic ruler carries such a heavy burden of responsibility in relation to the ruled tends to

create an urgent need for some form of control over him (ibid.: 1147).

Weber further points out that because of his exalted charismatic qualities, the ruler is often forced to abstain from administrative or governmental functions, that is, from spheres of social action where things can easily go wrong and are likely to dissatisfy the ruled (cf. ibid.: 1147-8); he thus gives a reason why the divine king should reign but not govern.

With the notion of 'charismatic kingship' Weber's discussion of the routinization of charisma concludes. Charismatic kingship is presented as a permanent political institution, but it is still seen as a charismatically legitimated institution. In order to bring out the methodological importance of the notion of charismatic kingship, I must outline the problematical position which the notion occupies in Weber's theory of charisma as a whole.

It is by the very definition of charisma as an extraordinary, anti-institutional force that charismatic domination cannot exist in its pure form as a political institution. If an anti-institutional charismatic outburst becomes institutionalized, it also transforms into a routinized, somehow corrupt form of charismatic domination, and finally into its opposite, namely into an everyday form of domination. This (deliberate) ambiguity of the concept of 'charismatic domination' is especially evident in Weber's combination of the terms 'charisma' and 'kingship', and it may lead to two misguided assumptions. First, it might be held that the concept of charismatic domination denotes a psychological rather than a sociological or historical phenomenon. This assertion could be supported by the fact that Weber frequently uses the vocabulary of psychology or social psychology in connection with his discussion of charisma. The second assumption might be that Weber's theory of charisma and its routinization has evolutionary implications and that it could be headlined by a phrase such as 'From Charisma to Bureaucracy'; and that this is a historical development which is congruent with the more general process of rationalization. This assertion could be supported by the fact that in the case of charismatic kingship especially, Weber tends to speak in terms of origin and evolution.

However, Weber's concept of 'charismatic domination' is neither meant as a psychological concept nor as the starting point of evolution. In order to show that for Weber 'charismatic kingship' (the methodologically important case to prove that charismatic authority may exist as a political institution) is a matter of (social-and-historical) fact, one has to show what he regards as distinctive of routinized charismatic political institutions as opposed to traditional and rational ones. I must clarify further how the concept of charisma in Weber's sociology is connected with the notion of historical development.

The distinctive criteria of charismatically legitimated political institutions have to be found at the borderline where charismatic domination turns into traditional or rational domination. Weber (in connection with the depersonalization and routinization of charisma as hereditary and office charisma) maintains that 'we

are justified in still speaking of charisma in this impersonal sense only because there always remains an extraordinary quality which is not accessible to everyone and which typically overshadows the charismatic subjects' (ibid.: 1135). The peculiar nature of the command-obedience structure of charismatic authority, let us recall, is characterised by the fact that charisma has to be recognised as an extraordinary quality by the followers. At this point Weber's remarks on 'the divine right of kings' are crucially important. In his opinion, the genuine meaning of the divine right of kings implies that they may be rejected with scorn if their rule fails to bring well-being to their subjects. His prime historical example for these *Verschmäherkönige* (as he calls them) are the early Chinese emperors. They were forced to accuse themselves publicly of sins and insufficiencies in cases of floods, droughts, or other kinds of distress suffered by their subjects. They even faced death as a kind of expiatory sacrifice (cf. ibid.: 242-3, 114-15). Hence, no matter to what degree and in which direction a certain kind of genuine charismatic domination has been routinized and depersonalized, as long as the holder of political power is regarded by his subjects as the bearer of extraordinary qualities which they could not possess, and as long as the loss of these qualities would threaten and even end his rule (and possibly his life), one is justified in speaking of charismatic domination in connection with political institutions.

With regard to the relationship between charisma and historical development, one finds that Weber's philosophy of history is not free of the evolutionistic ideas of his time. Gerth and Mills (1970: 51) point out that the notion of rationalization especially bears the strong imprint of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, with its view of a steady and unilinear progress of moral man and of technique, a progress instigated by reason.

The concept of charisma is linked with historical development and thus with the process of rationalization in various ways. To start with, genuine charisma is presented as a typical irrational force. The charismatic type of domination is linked with emotional and affectual types of social action. Moreover, there is, according to Weber, a negative correlation between charisma and rational discipline: the more rational discipline prevails, the less charismatic and individual action is possible. Is charismatic domination, then, the irrational starting point of the process of rationalization? Hardly. Weber himself points out that 'charismatic domination is by no means limited to primitive stages of development' (1968: 1133) and that 'the three basic types of domination cannot be placed in a single evolutionary line' (ibid.). He is thus far from propagating a unilinear evolution from charisma to bureaucracy which would be congruent with the process of routinization of genuine charismatic domination. Charismatic breakthroughs are for Weber recurrent historical phenomena possible under all historical conditions. They disturb, and temporarily bring to a halt, the steady and unilinear process of rationalization. Once the initial phase of charismatic domination is over, genuine charisma tends to recede before the powers of tradition and rational association, and the process of routinization is set

in motion. Charismatic breakthroughs and the development outlined then constitute a recurrent diachronic episode within history.

5. *Charismatic Domination and Kaiser Wilhelm II*

Weber repeatedly argues that political and scientific statements (including sociological ones) have to be strictly separated. In this section I attempt to illustrate that this claim is not always an easy one to fulfil by discussing how Weber's political views, especially his critique concerning Imperial Germany, find their expression and reflection in his theory of charisma. In order to do so, a brief outline of Weber's political standpoint has to be given first.

Weber throughout his life was passionately interested in politics. The basis of his political judgements was the National Liberalism of his father. But he never committed himself to the National Liberal Party, and in the 1880s, as the result of the political events in Germany under the Bismarck regime and of the party putting up with them, he moved away from National Liberalism and from his father's political position. Due to influences from his mother's family and friends, Weber became aware of 'the social question' and turned towards a more progressive 'social liberalism' which acknowledged the obligation and responsibility of the powerful state to take care of the weaker and poorer strata of society.

Characteristic of Weber's political standpoint are, in many respects, his evaluations of first Bismarck's and then Kaiser Wilhelm II's policies. An account of Weber's position as regards Bismarck is given by his wife Marianne:

Weber's judgement of him was in the same vein in those early years as it was thirty years later: admiring recognition of his incomparable political genius and his policy that aimed at Germany's power and unity, but also a rejection of uncritical devotion and deification (Marianne Weber 1975: 118).

Weber criticised Bismarck's anti-socialist law, the so-called *Sozialistengesetz*, the establishment and extension of which were supported by the National Liberal Party. Weber disapproved of the *Sozialistengesetz*, because for him it was an expression of the fading of old individualistic libertarian ideas in the National Liberal Party. Marianne Weber writes:

Weber always judged political events on the basis of one thing to which he clung all his life: *Intellectual freedom* was to him the greatest good, and under no circumstances was he prepared to consider even interests of political power as more important and attainable for the individual. Not for reasons of political expediency, but only in the name of *conscience* does a man have the right to oppose the conscientiously held different beliefs of others (ibid.: 120).

More than anything else, Weber disapproved of Bismarck's intolerance towards independently minded political leaders, and of the fact that he surrounded himself with docile bureaucrats and minions instead. Weber, however, did not blame Bismarck alone for this but also the nation which willingly submitted to his rule.

In 1888, Emperor Wilhelm I died, and his successor Friedrich III, in whom the liberals had some hope, died after only three months on the throne. When Wilhelm II mounted the throne, Weber was immediately sceptical. He especially abhorred the feudal and ecclesiastical inclinations of the Kaiser and he came to regard the preservation of Bismarck's power as the only effective counterbalance to Wilhelm II's reactionary tendencies. When in 1891 Bismarck fell, Weber thought that the only merit of the Kaiser was that 'he does not please any faction' (*ibid.*: 121). One year later Wilhelm II's policies led Weber to the following judgement:

The most unfavorable opinions of him keep gaining ground. He evidently treats politics only from the point of view of an ingenious lieutenant. No one will deny that he vigorously does his duty in the sense of service. But the wrongheadedness that prevails in between times and the uncanny consciousness of power which animates him have brought such an unprecedented disorganization to the highest places that it is bound to have an effect upon the administration as a whole. [...] We are currently escaping diplomatically truly serious situations as if by miracle. But there can be no doubt that European politics are no longer directed from Berlin (Marianne Weber 1975: 123).

This negative judgement of the Kaiser 'remained', as Marianne Weber points out, 'definitive and was only strengthened by subsequent events' (*ibid.*: 123). The political blunders and diplomatic failures of the Kaiser in the pre-World War One decade especially were considered with great concern by Weber and confirmed him in his view. Weber held that it was mainly due to the policies of the Kaiser that Germany became diplomatically isolated during this period. Again, he did not blame only Wilhelm II, but also the leading parliamentary parties and the German nation as a whole for allowing him to continue (*cf. ibid.*: 399-400). He writes in a letter to Naumann - a member of parliament and a friend of his - that 'we are being "isolated" because that man rules us in that fashion and we tolerate it and put a good face on it' (*ibid.*). In 1908, Wilhelm II's diplomacy and policy in connection with the Balkan crisis resulted in strong demands by politicians for safeguards against the Kaiser's 'personal regime'. Delegates of the parliament proposed constitutional changes in the direction of a parliamentary regime, and Weber joined in (*cf. ibid.*: 404).

Bismarck, then, was regarded by Weber as an eminent politician whose greatest mistake was that he did not tolerate other independently minded politicians, and who therefore paved the way for the 'personal regime' of Wilhelm II, a 'political dilettante' surrounded by the same willing tools and docile bureaucrats. Besides his National Liberalism, his ultimate value of a nationally powerful

state, and his high esteem for individual liberty and social responsibility, Weber thus came to see changes in the political structure in a parliamentary and democratic direction as absolutely necessary. This was not so much the case for the sake of democracy as a value in itself, but rather because Weber thought that such a political system would bring forth strong, independent, and one may say, charismatic political figures. These were essential, in his opinion, to check the exalted powers of the politically docile bureaucrats and to restrict the actions of an incompetent head of state (on these points see also Gerth and Mills 1970: 37-8; Marianne Weber 1975: 653).

In order show that, and how, Weber's political critique of Wilhelmine Germany is reflected in his theory of charisma, two aspects of this theory have to be recalled: first, Weber's view that kingship arises out of charismatic sources, especially from the position of a warlord; and secondly, the elective affinity which Weber saw between charisma and democracy.

Weber's notion of the origin of kingship in charismatic extraordinary warlords, developed at a time of great concern with Kaiser Wilhelm II's political and military blunders before and during World War One, is the mythical revival of the charismatic origin and basis of kingship for present-day purposes. It represents the critique of a king who did not, in Weber's opinion, come up to what one would expect from the incumbent of such an extraordinary office and who, Weber wished, would go, or whom he wanted at least to be strictly controlled. One may say that Wilhelm II's rule was of the traditional type and that hints at his invalid charismatic basis are misplaced. However, the Kaiser himself repeatedly covered his political and military failures behind the ideology of 'the divine right of kings', and he demanded loyalty by virtue of this right. Weber, in parts of his political sociology, seems to be showing those who claim charismatic legitimacy, or who use 'the divine right of kings' for legitimizing purposes, what charismatic domination implies: strict control of the charismatic leader in order to safeguard his charismatic legitimacy, and deposition or death if the gifts of grace have deserted him. Take the following statement, where Weber is eager to show the genuine meaning of charisma and of the divine right of kings:

It is clear that this very serious meaning of genuine charisma is radically different from the convenient pretensions of the present 'divine right of kings' which harks back to the 'inscrutable' will of the Lord, 'to whom alone the monarch is responsible'. The very opposite is true of the genuinely charismatic ruler, who is responsible to the ruled - responsible, that is, to prove that he himself is indeed the master willed by God (Weber 1968: 1114).

Elsewhere, in the context of a discussion of the genuine meaning of *Gottesgnadentum*, Weber points out that 'even the old Germanic kings were sometimes rejected with scorn' (ibid.: 242); and Wilhelm II in his eyes ought to be rejected with scorn by the people. When Weber writes that 'a people that never decided to

show a monarch the door or at least to impose major curbs upon him sentences itself to political tutelage' (Marianne Weber 1975: 404), this indicates that he also blamed the German nation for allowing itself to be ruled by a dilettante.

It ought to be made clear that Weber was not against monarchism, but against bad monarchs operating under a sham constitutionalism. Weber's ideas about parliamentary monarchism are expressed in his section on 'the charismatic legitimation of the existing order' (1968: 1146-48), in which he discusses the 'exalted' position of the God-King, his sacrificial death and, at length, his being controlled and kept apart from politics and administration. The historical paradigm for the restriction of a king's activities is the Oriental caliph, whose legitimate authority urgently required the traditional position of Grand Vizier; for without the Vizier the caliph could be made responsible for troubles and his charismatic authority endangered. This oriental example leads Weber to contemplate the position of the parliamentary monarch, whose political functions are envisaged as follows:

He formally limits the power struggle of the politicians by definitely occupying the highest position in the state. From a purely political viewpoint, this essentially negative function, which depends on the mere existence of a legitimate king, is perhaps in practice the most important one. In more positive terms, this function indicates in the most typical case that the king can take an active part in government only by virtue of his personal capacities or his social influence (*Kingdom of Influence*), not simply by virtue of rights (*Kingdom of Prerogative*)... (ibid.: 1148).

These seemingly value-free comments on the political position of a parliamentary monarch are, in fact, a spiteful comparison between Wilhelm II and his British royal contemporaries, Edward VII and George V (cf. also Marianne Weber 1975: 405).

If in the above passage Weber puts the monarch in his proper place, I now have to consider Weber's ideas concerning parliamentarism. Thus I have reached the second point at which Weber's political critique of Wilhelmine Germany can be found to be strongly expressed in his theory of charismatic domination: the links between charisma and democracy, with its principle of election.

It has been mentioned above that according to Weber, one way of meeting the problem of the succession of a charismatic leader is to choose the successor by designation. This designation can be undertaken by the charismatic leader himself or by the charismatic followers. Only the latter option interests us here. It can be of two distinct, though interrelated kinds. It is either designation of the successor by the most powerful retainers, who may then gain the constant right of prior election; or it is based on public acclamation by all the followers. If the right of prior election is emphasised, this may lead to the traditional and oligarchic privileges of the voter. The coming to the fore of the principle of public acclamation by all the followers may lead to

the legalized and regular election of the ruler by the whole community of the ruled, in which case charismatic rule is transformed in a democratic direction and may finally evolve into a fully developed democratic representative system. The personally legitimated charismatic leader is no longer a leader by the grace of God, but by the grace of those who are formally free to elect him (cf. Weber 1968: 267).

Weber's view of democracy is a *zweckrational* one. He considers democracy as a political system which could further the coming into power of strong political leaders under legal domination, leaders whom he regards as alone being capable of checking the exalted powers of the bureaucrats. The great importance which Weber gives to the role of charismatic political leadership in a representative government under legal domination finds its expression in his charisma theory in a peculiar way: Weber is concerned with one aspect of the process of routinization more than with any other. This what he calls '*die herrschaftsfremde Umdeutung des Charisma*' (Weber 1976a: 155), which Roth and Wittich translate as 'the transformation of charisma in a democratic direction' (Weber 1968: 266). This cognitive preference in his sociological analysis for one aspect could well be said to be rooted in a political claim of Weber's which can be epitomized by the reverse of the phrase cited above: Weber demanded a transformation of Germany's 'democracy' in a charismatic direction. I place inverted commas around 'democracy' because I take the term to mean the kind of democracy which Weber experienced and criticised in the Germany of his time. It may be recalled that Weber also demanded the transformation of Germany's sham parliamentarism in a democratic direction. But he did so only - bearing in mind his instrumentally rational view of democracy - because he thought that democratic election may bring forth charismatic politicians and hence push parliamentarism in a charismatic direction.

With regard to the command-obedience relationship which Weber hoped for in Wilhelmine Germany, the following can be said. Weber wanted a shift in Imperial Germany away from obedience owed to the person of the Kaiser by virtue of his sanctified traditional position; he also wanted a shift away from obedience owed to the bureaucrats by virtue of an impersonal formal legality. He demanded a shift away from these kinds of obedience towards a kind of obedience owed to the person of the charismatic politician by virtue of personal trust in him expressed by his followers in elections. In this point, again, resemblances between Weber's political standpoint and his sociological analysis of the command-obedience relationship under charismatic domination can be found. And again, the political change which Weber hoped for is a reversal of the change in the command-obedience relationship during the process of routinization of charismatic domination. Recognition of charismatic qualities, as we have seen, is ambivalent. It is both freely given and a matter of duty, with the latter being dominant in genuine forms of charismatic domination. With the transformation of charisma in a legal and democratic direction, the free will of the ruled to recognize the leader's qualities and to choose him becomes dominant. The reversal of this sociological analysis in Weber's political claims is to be found as follows:

Weber's idea of democracy first acknowledges the right and freedom of the community to choose its political leader. But after this first step, once the political leader has been recognized and confirmed in an election, he may treat this freely given trust in him as a duty on behalf of the ruled to follow him.

6. Conclusions

The rather restrained use British social anthropologists have made of Weber's ideas is, I suppose, partly due to the fact that much of his discussion takes place on a high level of abstraction. This may have resulted in the impression that Weber's investigations are not rooted in ethnographical and historical data as the works of anthropologists are, an impression which is not justified. If one looks, for example, at Weber's studies of the world's major religions (see, for instance, Weber 1951 and 1976b, both first published in 1920), one cannot but admire (considering the enormous scope of the intellectual enterprise) Weber's great knowledge and careful handling of the then available relevant data. It is through the thorough investigation of data of manifold cultural and historical origins that Weber arrives at his more theoretically minded and abstractly formulated conclusions, as, for example, in his so-called 'small sociology of religion' (see 1968: Ch. V). The fact that Weber is ultimately interested in the formulation of rather abstract and universally valid conclusions, rather than in the understanding and interpretation of particular societies as such should not, I think, put anthropologists off from consulting his works. However, the main task anthropologists face, in my opinion, is less one of developing and updating Weber's theories than one of critically assessing them and of considering their heuristic value and applicability in anthropological research. My final remarks will attempt to do so with regard to the discussed theory of charisma.

Weber took the term 'charisma' out of its historical setting of the early Christian Church (as seen by Rudolph Sohm in 1892).⁵ He thereby detached the concept from its original, predominantly magico-religious context and, by putting the emphasis on the extraordinariness of charisma instead, created (or intended to create) a generally applicable sociological ideal type. This stress on the vague notion of extraordinariness is, in the end, not really convincing, as it leads to an over-generalization which diminishes the accuracy and heuristic value of the concept when used in political sociology or anthropology. It is useful, I think (in accordance with Speer 1978: 49-50), to restrict the use of the concept of charismatic domination to historical situations in which there arise political leaders to whom magico-religious

⁵ The many similarities between Sohm's notion of charisma and Weber's are discussed by Speer 1978: 43-6.

powers are ascribed, if these powers are regarded and presented as the basis of their claims to legitimate domination. Charismatic domination, then, is to be seen as a historical ideal type which applies, not to all kinds of extraordinary leadership qualities, but only to leadership which is religiously or magically legitimated.

I propose further to regard Weber's types of domination, not so much as types of political institutions, but rather as typical orientations or tendencies of actions which sustain social aggregates. Weber is less interested in the analysis of the structural characteristics of collectivities than in the analysis of 'meaningful' individual and social actions which are distinctive of certain collectivities. Hence it is not surprising to find that Weber, for example, speaks of *Vergemeinschaftung* and *Vergesellschaftung* instead of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Bendix points to this fact:

One corollary of this starting point was Weber's tendency to treat all concepts of collectivities or larger social aggregates as convenient labels for tendencies of action. Wherever possible, he avoided nouns, and hence the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (Whitehead), by using verbs or 'active nouns', though there is no English equivalent for the latter. This approach even applied to the two terms used in the title, *Wirtschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Instead of using the term 'economy', Weber entitled a major part of his book *Basic Sociological Categories of Economizing Activities (Soziologische Grundkategorien des Wirtschaftens)*. And instead of 'society', the text speaks of 'societal tendencies of action' (*Vergesellschaftung*) (Bendix 1977: 476; cf. *ibid.*: 470-8).

The concept of charismatic domination, in particular, refers to social actions and to their change in orientation during the process of routinization rather than to the fixed structural characteristics of political institutions.

Moreover, the greatest part of Weber's interests lies, not in an analysis of the nature of the bond between charismatic leader and followers and of the typical orientation of action under such a domination, but in an analysis of the routinization and transformation of charismatic authority. This emphasis, as well as the very ambiguity of the concept of charismatic domination (i.e. that a charismatic community in its beginning could hardly be called a political organization, and that at the end of its routinization it could hardly be called charismatic) makes charismatic domination a flexible and useful conceptual tool in historical studies.

These specifications, to make a final point, allow the application of Weber's ideas, not only to revolutionary charismatic uprisings and movements, but also to action in stable situations, a point which was emphasised especially by Shils (1965) and Eisenstadt (1977). The latter writes:

Perhaps the most important missing link in this whole area was the lack of systematic exploration of the nature of the charismatic orientation and bond as a distinct type of social action. It is only when it is fully recognized that this bond is not something abnormal that the differences between the more extreme and the more routine expressions of charisma can be more fully recognized and systematically studied (1977: xxiv-xxv).

It is with these specifications and restrictions that I consider Weber's theory of charisma to be thought-provoking and of some heuristic value in anthropological research, no matter whether it is more theoretically or more ethnographically oriented.

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