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Source: *Political Theory*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Apr., 2000), pp. 197-229

Published by: [Sage Publications, Inc.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/192234>

Accessed: 28/11/2013 08:27

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**“IN AFFIRMING THEM,
HE AFFIRMS HIMSELF”
Max Weber’s Politics of Civil Society**

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But with the member of a Nonconforming or self-made religious community, how different! The sectary’s *eigene grosse Erfindungen*, as Goethe calls them,—the precious discoveries of himself and his friends for expressing the inexpressible and defining the undefinable in peculiar forms of their own,—cannot but, as he has voluntarily chosen them and is personally responsible for them, fill his whole mind. He is zealous to do battle for them and affirm them; for in affirming them, he affirms himself, and that is what we all like.

—Matthew Arnold¹

**INTRODUCTION: STATECRAFT,
SOULCRAFT, AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

In discussing Max Weber’s political thought, two issues tend to prevail—one interrogates Weber’s attitude to modernity and the other liberalism. Closely interweaving these two issues, the conventional narrative proceeds as follows. Weber was mortified by the prospects of the “iron cage” and value fragmentation in which his theory of rationalization culminated and consequently took a turn in a protomythical, irrational direction to counteract the inertia of modern society. In this heroic and pessimistic struggle against teleological inevitability, Weber came to a conclusion that liberal modernity and its normative foundation in natural rights theories had become obsolete,

AUTHOR’S NOTE: For their thoughtful comments on this article, both in its present form and earlier incarnations, I thank David Blaney, Mary Dietz, Harvey Goldman, John A. Hall, Gary Herrigel, Alan Houston, Charles Larmore, Chris Laursen, Mark Lichbach, Bernard Manin, David Mandell, Marion Smiley, and Tracy Strong. The whole project would have been inconceivable without the intellectual mentorship and support of Susanne Hoerber Rudolph. She deserves my special thanks.

POLITICAL THEORY, Vol. 28 No. 2, April 2000 197-229
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which prompted him to seek such illiberal solutions as charismatic-elitist leadership, amoral *realpolitik*, and irrational nationalism. At its worst, Weber's political thought reveals an alarming affinity with the authoritarian political ideas of, especially, Carl Schmitt, "the legitimate pupil of Weber." At best, Weber embodies the "despair" that permeated *fin de siècle* liberalism.

Aside from my disagreement with this line of interpretation, what strikes me most in this familiar narrative is the undiminished relevance of Weber's questions for contemporary political theory, in which the legitimacy of modernity is increasingly challenged and serious questions are raised about the sustainability of liberalism as reconozed by John Rawls. Given this timeliness of Weber's questions, however, I am equally struck by the lack of the discussion between Weber studies and the political theories, especially of liberal persuasion; Weber is more often than not shut out from the various debates concerning liberalism, to which the Weber scholarship also remains largely oblivious. My article aims to redress both problems by topically reconstructing Weber's political thought around the modern self and civil society—an interpretation, I argue, that will facilitate engaging Weber's ideas in the contemporary debates while contributing to a more balanced understanding of his liberal politics.

Instead of attempting a comprehensive survey, the article addresses one specific issue, and it is delimited by what can be roughly called statecraft, soulcraft, and civil society. The question is, How do we understand the role of civil society with regard to the vitality of a liberal democratic polity, on one hand, and the moral characters and civic virtues of its citizens, on the other? To sharpen the contours of this classically Tocquevillean question, let me further focus on one recent brand of arguments that cuts across the vast array of liberal-communitarian positions. According to this neo-Tocquevillean argument, first, a liberal democratic polity cannot be sustained in a robust form without certain kinds of virtues and characters in its citizens.² Second, these types of selves are cultivated, reproduced, and reinforced through an active, voluntary associational life in a pluralistically organized civil society.³ Third, American civil society is in serious decline, which has prompted some adherents of these positions to call for a "softening" of the liberal doctrine of neutrality, if not its complete abandonment, encouraging a stronger form of political and civic education of liberal citizens via an active intervention into the organization and structure of its civil society.⁴ Contra the orthodox liberal reaffirmation of strict separation of statecraft and soulcraft, in short, the neo-Tocquevillean position suggests a politics of civil society in which statecraft and soulcraft are combined to sustain a more robust liberal democratic polity.

Against this background, I will make two claims about Weber's political thought—one pertains to its affinity with the neo-Tocquevillean politics of civil society and the other to its crucial distance. First, Weber agrees that cultivation of certain types of self he called "man of vocation" (*Berufsmensch*) is critical for the continuing vitality of the modern liberal democratic polity, that its dispositions and characters can be fostered only in a peculiar context of civil society he called "sectlike society" (*Sektengesellschaft*), and that the decline of the civil society and the concomitant degeneration of the liberal self must be restored as one of the central agendas for late modern politics. Statecraft and soulcraft are not separated in Weber's politics of civil society, nor can or should they be separated. Second, however, Weber maintains that not any "revivification of civil society" would be conducive to the education and empowerment of the modern self. For he is more sensitive than some contemporary Tocquevilleans to the fact that the simple presence of a vibrant associational life does not offer in and of itself a coherent guarantee against what John Keane calls the problem of "uncivil society."⁵ Not all forms of civil society are conducive to a robust liberal democratic polity—some are in fact detrimental to it. Through a genealogical reconstruction, instead, Weber seeks to resuscitate a peculiar mode of civil society as the site where his liberal politics of voluntary associational life and the unique ontology of modern self intersect and interact. It is this theoretically elaborated ideal type of civil society, cutting across his larger reflections on modernity and modernization, that stabilizes the critical vista from which Weber substantiates the morphology of civil society for a vibrant liberal democratic citizenship.

From this perspective, then, it need not surprise anyone that, privately questioned in November 1918 about the liberal democratic reform of post-war, defeated Germany, Weber replied in the following unambiguous terms:

Foremost among these [reform tasks], too, is the restoration of that prosaic moral "decency" [*Anständigkeit*] which, on the whole, we had and which we lost in the war—our most grievous loss. Massive problems of education, then. The method: only the "club" in the American sense [*amerikanische Klubwesen*] (and associations of every kind based on selective choice of members), starting with childhood and youth, no matter for what purpose.⁶

My article can be summarized as an attempt to understand these somewhat unexpected references by Weber to a robust associational life, moral characterology, and America and to draw their implications for the contemporary political theory of civil society.

GEMEINSCHAFT, GESELLSCHAFT,
AND AMERIKANISMUS

Slowly recovering from the mental illness that had debilitated him since 1897, Weber visited America, where his extensive travel spanned much of the latter half of 1904.⁷ Weber's enthusiasm at the New World is well documented in the *Biography*. Marianne Weber underscored the contrast of her husband's enthusiasm with the critical contempt for America shared by most of the other German academic luminaries who were invited along with the Webers.⁸ Certainly Weber was overwhelmed by the spectacle of the New World: he saw in the skyscrapers dominating Manhattan a superb expression of modern aesthetics that defied any Old World notion of beauty, "the most appropriate symbol . . . of what goes on here [in the New World]," which stands "beyond both [beauty and ugliness by traditional measure]"; he discovered another supreme symbol in Chicago, "the monstrous city which even more than New York was the crystallization of the American spirit," "an endless human desert," which he likened to "a man whose skin has been peeled off and whose intestines are seen at work" and the ultimate "modern reality."⁹ In other words, Weber appears here to isolate the two almost opposite signs of "America" to European intellectuals—one based on a deep attraction to the youth, vibrancy, enterprise, movement, and magnanimity that leads to the description of America as "the New World" and the other on repulsion from the harshness, vulgarity, instability, alienation, and sheer materialism this "ultimate modern reality" called America had come to signify. If the latter attitude found wide sympathy among highbrow intellectuals of Weber's generation such as his companions during the American trip, the former became symptomatic of the next generation of European intellectuals, especially in the postwar youth movement.¹⁰

For Weber, however, neither aspect of the modernity of America intrigued him; it was rather a premodern aspect that aroused his interest most—that is, religion in American society. Thus, he discovered among the new settlers of the frontier—in this case, Oklahoma, as well as in the older parts of the country such as North Carolina and Virginia—a pervasive sense of religiosity that accompanied a rather strict code of social behavior or civility. During an expedition to an Oklahoma settlement, he said,

It is quite wrong to believe that one can behave as one wishes. In the conversations, which are, to be sure, quite brief, the courtesy lies in the tone and the bearing, and the humor is nothing short of delicious.

Even in Chicago, in comparison with which the Oklahoma settlement appeared "a more 'civilized' place," Weber detected "distinct traces of the

organizational strength of the religious spirit (*organisatorischen Kräfte religiösen Geistes*).” On sighting a street poster proclaiming “Christ in Chicago,” the Webers asked, “Was this a brazen mockery?” which they answered with an empathetic “No.”¹¹ It seems redundant to repeat here Weber’s enthusiastic interest in the religious practices of the Quakers and Baptists in the older parts of America.

Naturally, the essay drafted immediately upon his return was called “Kirchen und Sekten in Nordamerika,” to be published sixteen months later in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (15 April 1906) and later, in an enlarged edition, in the *Christliche Welt* (June 1906). The later and more scholarly version of *The Protestant Sects* in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (1920) is also based on the same text.¹² This series of essays is remarkable, first, in that it attests to the fact that religion was the most impressive social phenomenon in America to Weber, although he also did not fail to notice the newly emerging power of secular modernism there, and, second, in that Weber was particularly interested in the social manifestation of Puritanism in the form of a sectlike constitution of society. That Weber was instantly intrigued more by religious phenomena than secular modernism in America can be readily explained in part by the fact that he had started working on *The Protestant Ethic* the previous year—by the time of his American trip, he must have finished a good portion of it, for the first part of the essay was published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* in 1904, to be followed by the second half in 1905, in which he located the source of modernity in the religious Reformation, consciously, in preference to the secular Renaissance and Enlightenment. Thus, he held that these essays on American sects were meant to “supplement” *The Protestant Ethic*.¹³

What is not at once self-evident is that Weber found “the organizational strength” of religion most interesting in America. Weber’s awe can be attributed to the fact that these sectlike associations could not easily be identified by the theories of associations readily available in contemporary Germany—most notably, by the uniquely German framework of *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft*. This famous dichotomy, given a definitive articulation by Ferdinand Tönnies in 1887, had taken on a life of its own in Germany by the turn of the century and became something of a cliché later in Weimar politics. Regardless of Tönnies’s own intention, the vulgarized form of this dichotomy had been usurped mostly by the more conservative flank of the German literati with their all-too-familiar tone of fervent antimodernism. According to the romantic-antimodernist reading, *Gesellschaft* was synonymous with the modern, thus by implication evil, realm of atomized and materialistic individuals lacking a harmonious whole—the source of all malaise associated with the revolutionary social transformation that was taking place

in Wilhelmine Germany. By contrast, a *gemeinschaftliche* society stood for everything not modern in such a reading: family, home, church, neighborhood, fraternity, community, or anything that invoked an illusory emotion of stability, security, and congeniality.¹⁴

Analytically, these contrasts were reduced to two antinomic modes of associational membership. The natural and spontaneous integration of a *gemeinschaftliche* society was seen to draw its strength from “particularism” (i.e., that associational membership is in principle limited to those sharing a certain set of particularistic features) and “ascriptivism” (i.e., that defining characteristics of associational members are inherited), which in combination provided the most visible locus for the us-them distinction. By contrast, the modern “universalist and voluntarist principle” of association eroded this distinction, thereby ushering in the modern society of atomized individuals and universal sovereignty of the state. Whenever *Gemeinschaft* was cast in terms of its contrast to *Gesellschaft*, its antinomy was drawn between these two sets of principles—particularist and ascriptive versus universalist and voluntarist modes of associational membership.¹⁵

The intellectual relationship between Tönnies and Weber notwithstanding,¹⁶ Weber seems to defy the conceptual dualism of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. That this dualism was unsustainable in light of historical experience was obvious to Weber, for whom the very social forces that most German literati of his time saw as the antidote to the modern *Gesellschaft*—the Protestant religious values as embodied in church, the academic *Bildung* ideal, the Prussian bureaucratic establishment with its moral self-glorification, and even the Junkerdom—were in fact the main contributors to the modernization process that was rapidly undermining the foundations of the alleged *Gemeinschaft* in Germany. Thus, for instance, he isolated the Protestant ethic as the womb of modernity and bureaucracy as its tomb; the Junker, according to his analysis, provided the main driving force behind the rapid transformation of the agricultural East Prussia. Under the circumstances, a reestablishment of the authority of the church and bureaucracy would only deepen the collective anxiety caused by rapid modernization. Even in Germany, the Tönniesean dualism would have appeared too thin a framework to accommodate the modern experience for Weber. One might say that the alleged tension between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* is seen by Weber less as a tension between premodern and modern principles of association than as a tension between two different modes of modern institutions.¹⁷

In a different way, yet with more clarity, America for Weber defies the antinomic structure of a Tönniesean paradigm. In America, he seems to have discovered or confirmed a different mode of modern society that can be

grasped conceptually in terms neither of *Gesellschaft* nor of *Gemeinschaft* models. What he called sectlike associations in America were no *Gemeinschaften*, in that voluntary consent of individual members formed the constitutive foundation, but neither were they *Gesellschaften*, in that entry into these associations was highly restricted in principle. They were voluntary associations that were nevertheless predicated on a particularistic principle of congregation, permeating the intermediary sphere between the state and individuals. They bore little resemblance to what were called *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in contemporary Germany, where society was viewed as cohesive or fragmentary, organic or mechanistic, holistic or atomistic, anti-modern or modern, yet certainly not both. It was both in America.

*SECT CONTRA CHURCH:
PARTICULARISM AND VOLUNTARISM*

To underscore this peculiarity of American associational life, we need to turn to Weber's famous church-sect dichotomy. He maintains that the conventional criteria of differentiation, such as the statutory lack of "recognition" for the congregation by the state, do not provide a sufficient *causa differentia* between the two forms of religious congregation. Instead, he turns to the ideal-typical contrast between institution (*Anstalt*) and community (*Gemeinschaft*).

A "church" sees itself as an "institution" [*Anstalt*] a kind of divinely endowed salvation-dispensing foundation [*Fideikomißstiftung*] for the individual souls who are *born into it* and are the *object* of its efforts, which are bound to the "office" in principle. Conversely, a "sect" . . . is a voluntary community [*freie Gemeinschaft*] of individuals purely on the basis of their religious *qualification*.¹⁸

It is interesting to note that Weber tries to isolate the nature of sectlike association in terms of its opposition to *Anstalt*, an analytical concept developed by Otto von Gierke, who put it as an antithesis to what he called *Genossenschaft*.¹⁹ Gierke's dichotomy was drawn chiefly from the contrasting mode of associational integration by which he attempted to contrast *Anstalt*'s mechanistic solidarity, either contractual or bureaucratic, with the organic and spontaneous solidarity of *Genossenschaft*. The latter draws its strength, Gierke believed, from the particularistic social bond among members of an association—a feature that cannot be made to apply universally in principle. For instance, ethnic, linguistic, or national groups were viewed as more spontaneously cohesive because the members of the group cast their self-identity

in terms of their “natural” difference or contrast to “others.” The *Anstalt* mode of association lacks a spontaneous and cohesive integration precisely because it dispels the particularistic elements or a visible self-other distinction. Gierke traced the origin of the modern *Anstalt* to the universal, cosmopolitan, or “decontextualized” individualism advocated by the political and legal theories of the Enlightenment, in which social imagination was, according to Gierke, predicated on the revival of Roman law concepts that failed to posit an appropriate conceptual realm between private individuals and the public state.²⁰ Gierke maintained, in short, that group formation depends on the particularistic nature of human sociation; that a social imagination with no appropriate place for it, as in natural rights theories, cannot properly account for the irreducibly social nature of man; and that an inappropriate understanding of man’s social nature cannot help but turn to an artificial alternative for social integration such as contract, the market, or bureaucracy—all too “thin” substitutes in Gierke’s view.

As for Gierke, the important point for Weber when he characterized the sect mode of association in terms of its opposition to *Anstalt* is that it is also based on particularism or exclusivity.²¹ Weber alleges, for instance, that the Catholic Church is not particularly interested in the “ethical” qualities of its lay population because it is vested with a power to redeem their sin periodically. Thus, the church members include periodic sinners as well as religiously sincere personalities. This is why Weber calls it a *Fideikomißstiftung* above, an institution based on leveling universalism. By contrast, a Puritan congregation is not a universal organization that embraces everybody and anybody. For Puritans, “it is a sin not to purge the sacramental communion of nonbelievers.”²² It tends to be an elitist group or aristocracy of those who have passed the strict test of admission, usually decided by a ballot of members.²³ Those belonging to sects are the new elites and aristocrats by virtue of proven quality or, in short, charisma: “The possession of such faculties is a ‘charisma,’ which to be sure, might be awakened in some but not in all.”²⁴ In this clear-cut self-other distinction lies, one might say, the affinity between Gierke’s *Genossenschaften* and Weber’s sects.

While distinguishing the Puritan sects from the church, this particularistic mode of membership also sets them apart from other historical examples of sectlike associations and, especially, from those predicated on mysticism Weber calls “pneumatic sects.”²⁵ Although it was Ernst Troeltsch who first made a formal distinction between sectarian and mystic forms of association, Weber seems fully aware of the difference between the two. In fact, Weber showed great interest in sectarian movements based on mysticism, which include not only ancient gnostic religious groups but also modern varieties. His avid reading in Russian literature, especially of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky,

can be explained in part by the fact that he saw them as fully embodying the spirit of Russian mysticism.²⁶ When Weber asserts that Russian religious sensibility and its attendant form of sect organization are deeply enmeshed in mysticism, he attributes its most distinctive contrast to Puritan sectarianism to the former's different mode of membership, that is, "universal brotherhood" as opposed to the Puritan particularism. Based on what Weber called "acosmism of love," the mystic sect is in principle open to all.²⁷ He believes that the *causa differentia* for mystic sectarianism is this universalist tendency, which characterizes the Christian humanism of Tolstoy's kind. At issue in this contrast is also the particularistic nature of sectlike associations: "As a religion of the virtuoso, Puritanism renounced the universalism of brotherly love."²⁸ This contrast accounts in part for Weber's pessimism about the prospect of liberal democratic reform of Russia in 1905.²⁹ By contrast, liberal democratic polity could flourish in Anglo-American societies because their social constitution relies on the "aristocratic charismatic principle of predetermination and the degradation of office charisma."³⁰

Naturally, Weber does not believe that this aristocratic-particularistic characteristic of sectlike society necessarily antagonizes one of the integral elements of political modernity—democracy. In his only endnote in *America*, Weber takes issue with Troeltsch's characterization of aristocracy and democracy as reflecting heteronomous principles of society.³¹ Especially, Weber opposes Troeltsch's undifferentiated categorization of aristocracy, which is portrayed as based on a social principle of exclusivity and particularism rather than on the democratic principle of universal equality. Instead, Weber introduces a more subtle characterization by holding that the principles of aristocracy are based on principles of exclusivity and ascriptive membership. By doing so, Weber intends to show that the democratic mode of exclusive community formation is in no way self-contradictory, and furthermore, a genuine democratic society resembles an aristocracy in its principle of particularism—a crucial point Tocqueville championed. In other words, Weber agrees that democracy and aristocracy can be in tension with each other, yet not because of the latter's particularism as opposed to the former's alleged universalism but because of the ascriptive principle of membership that democracy cannot accept. Weber insists that the liberal tendency to equate aristocracy with conservative antidemocratic ideas results more from the German peculiarity in which the domination of the Junker establishment still persists.

Weber's understanding of aristocratic particularism or exclusivity and democracy also brings out an interesting point of contrast with Adam Smith and Alexis de Tocqueville. When Smith, like Weber, understood sects in opposition to church, his primary focus was on the benefit of the small size of

the former in maintaining the constant social surveillance of the individual members' ethical behavior. Smith found this sectarian process of moral socialization similar to the way in which aristocratic status honor was upheld by belonging to a closely knit, small-scale society of its own.³² Tocqueville's belief that everyday associational life in America is the functional equivalent of the aristocratic ethical regimentation in Europe is also predicated on a belief in the merits of small scale.³³ In essence, Weber is not in disagreement with Smith's and Tocqueville's postulation when he underscores the affinity between aristocracy and democracy—that is, an everyday social life in which “a man must hold his own under the watchful eyes of his peers.”³⁴ Although Weber seems willing to concede importance to the size of a group, he nevertheless still insists that “but yet it is not that essence itself.”³⁵ Weber's point is rather that small scale itself hinges on the exclusivity of the sectlike associations in which he finds their striking affinity with aristocratic social organizations. Hence, for different reasons from those offered by Tocqueville, Weber makes the Tocquevillean claim that

whoever presents “democracy” as a mass fragmented into atoms, as our Romantics prefer to do, is fundamentally mistaken so far as the American democracy is concerned. “Atomization” is usually a consequence not of democracy but of bureaucratic rationalism and therefore it cannot be eliminated through the favored imposition of “organic structures” from above. The genuine American society . . . was never such a sandpile [*Sandhaufen*]. Nor was it a building where everyone who enters without exception found open doors. It was and is permeated with “exclusivities” [*Exklusivitäten*] of every kind.³⁶

Despite the fact that sects are based on particularism, thus being characterized as *Gemeinschaft* earlier, Weber's characterization of sects in terms of *Gemeinschaft* never has a Tönniesean ring. For Weber's sects conspicuously lack an important component of particularism in Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft*—that is, primordiality. These draw their strength from the ascriptive nature of group formation—what Weber calls being “born into it” or a sheer “chance.”³⁷ That is why Tönnies viewed them as more stable, natural, and authentic than either *Gesellschaft* or *Anstalt*. In this aspect, Tönniesean understanding comes rather closer to what Weber calls here churchlike associations. In contrast, what is remarkable in Weber's characterization of *Gemeinschaft* is its voluntary nature, that is, conscious and free choice and formation by the individual of the purposive social group. In this respect, Weber's *Gemeinschaft* here is closer to Tönnies's *Gesellschaft*; in fact, later in the *America*, Weber concedes that sectlike association is *Gesellschaft* in Tönniesean terms.

The latter [sects] are always “artifacts” of “societies” [*Gesellschaften*] and not communities [*Gemeinschaften*], to use the terminology of Ferdinand Tönnies. In other words, they

neither rest on "emotional needs" nor aspire toward "emotional values." The individual seeks to maintain his own position by becoming a member of the social group. Missing is that undifferentiated peasant, vegetable-like "geniality" [*Gemütlichkeit*] without which Germans can imagine no community. The cool objectivity [*Sachlichkeit*] of the sociation [*Vergesellschaftung*] promotes the precise placement of the individual in the purposive activity [*Zwecktätigkeit*] of the group.³⁸

Cutting across the conventional dichotomies that are employed to account for modern associational life, whether *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft* or aristocracy versus democracy, Weber's church-sect dichotomy effectively highlights the latter's voluntarism and particularism—an eclectic combination of associational attributes designed to produce a most rigorous social mechanism of moral discipline of its members. In a sectlike society, associational membership is in principle voluntary, yet the entry and maintenance cost for the individual members is not inconsiderable. For to join and remain a member of a sect, one can rely on no other sources but "proving oneself in life."³⁹ From an individual member's viewpoint, this emphasis on achievement must usher in a terribly insecure social life, in which "not objectivized contracts and traditions, but rather the religiously qualified individual is seen as the bearer of revelation, which continues *without ever being completed*." The consequence for the social milieu is not mere communal congeniality but purposive activities that promote the highest "ethical rigorism" among the members.⁴⁰ Despite the powerful mechanism of social sanction and discipline, then, Weber's sectlike society represents "the formation of the social structure" predicated "upon an 'egocentric' base" that is designed to create and sustain individual ethical qualities.⁴¹ While maintaining that "this task of 'proving' himself is present more than ever within the group, in the circle of his associates," Weber insists that it is "the individual's need to constantly attend to his self-affirmation [*Selbsbehauptung*]" that binds the group together.⁴² In a sectlike society, thus, Weber concludes that individuality and sociality "were mutually supplementary and operated in the same direction," and furthermore, "the ascetic conventicles and sects formed one of the most important historical foundations of modern individualism."⁴³ Weber's social imaginary is clearly distinguished from his contemporary approaches to modern society precisely on account of this emphasis on the possibility of an individual-centered group life.

In Weber's dialectical postulation of individual and group life, it is important to note that civil society is not a site for the open market for associational life, institutionally guaranteed by a set of formal rights, in which individuals can freely enter a group and remain members, although they are entitled to establish their own at any time. Nor is it a communitarian paradise in which emotive desire of bonding and identity drawn from shared ascriptive qualities

are paramount. It is rather a disciplinary and (trans)formative site in which certain moral traits and civic virtues are cultivated via collective emphasis on individual achievement and ethical qualities. Weber's repeated emphasis on particularistic elements in the Puritan sects reflects the belief that the highest possible sense of duty and methodical conduct of life can be achieved only within an organizational environment that constantly probes and reinforces the ethical standard that individual members should apply to their everyday life. While administered according to the voluntary consent of the members, thus a sectlike association must establish a clear boundary of its identity, a high threshold for entry, and a constant threat of expulsion. In Weber's sectlike associations, voluntarism needs to be complemented by what Nancy Rosenblum calls "gatekeeping," for otherwise it loses its power of sanction for the ethical disciplining of individual members.⁴⁴ It might be said that for Weber, this gatekeeping function is a precondition for a democratic organization of civil society.

Weber's repeated emphasis on associational sanction and individual discipline, then, ushers in a new question that has not been fully explored so far. That is, what kinds of moral personality and civic virtues are to be cultivated in this disciplinary civil society? To this topic we now turn.

MODERNITY, MODERNIZATION, AND THE "SECT MAN"

Weber's interest in the modes of formative associations and moral characters persisted long after the American trip. In 1910, for example, Weber delivered a lengthy address at the first meeting of the German Sociological Association, calling for a two-part collective research into journalism and associational life or, simply put, the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) in Germany. In describing his research agenda for associational life, Weber began with his observation on the contemporary dynamism in the German public sphere and called the modern self "associational man" (*Vereinsmensch*). He then quickly proceeded to draw an analogy with American associational life by which to underscore the decisive influence different modes of association exerted on the formation of various personalities. And he concluded the opening remarks with the familiar statement that contra "institution" (*Anstalt*), "the archetype [*Urtypus*] of all associational modes [in America] . . . is the sect in the specific sense of the word." This ideal type of Anglo-American associational life seems to pose for Weber a fine counterexample to Germany, as he formulated the two main questions for the research in the

following ways. First, “the democracy in America is no sand-pile”; then “how does it stand to us? . . . Where? With which consequences? Where not? Why not?” The second question is, “How does the affiliation to a certain type of association relate to the inner working of personality as such?” a question he once again linked to the Anglo-American counterexamples, such as “Greek letter societies” in American colleges. After expounding at length on the various aspects of the relationship between associational mode and personality formation, Weber related this question of formative association and personality to the “making of the individuals and then the making of objective, public cultural values [*Kulturgüter*]” in contemporary Germany.⁴⁵

Even in this seemingly value-neutral research proposal, Weber's attitude to its subject matter—which “range from bowling clubs (*Kugelklubs*) to political parties”—is far from positive. His problem is that German association life bred mostly passive and conformist personalities. Thus, for example, the popular culture of localized singing clubs (*Gesangvereinskunst*) needed to be examined, since its member

will become a person who, to put it succinctly, will easily become a “good citizen” in the passive sense of the word. No wonder that monarchs have such a great predilection for entertainments of that kind. “Where people sing, you may safely settle.” Great, strong passions and great actions are lacking there.⁴⁶

In other words, Weber had problems with the organizational culture of these associations. As he elaborated in his postwar political writings, the German associations tended to emphasize “schoolboy subordination” in the governing of internal matters. In contrast to “English clubs . . . [in which] all gentlemen are equal,” they emphasized a “training for the discipline of office” and “ritualized conventions.” Weber was also critical of these internal cultures because this nonsense was disguised as personality training, which in fact was strictly followed by the members “in order to ingratiate themselves in higher places.” Lacking in Weber's view was the genuine cultivation of free and autonomous personalities who can take principled moral action—a crucial defect that eventually led to vain “boasting about the wealth of one's parents” and zeal to be incorporated into the “society” (*Gesellschaft*). Weber's interest in German associational life was, in short, motivated by his suspicion that it produced men of passive conformism and that, most alarmingly, it tended to reinforce authoritarian politics prevalent in Weber's Wilhelmine Germany.⁴⁷

To more fully account for Weber's implication of happily singing burghers, passive citizenship, and authoritarian politics, however, we need to take a step back and begin with his larger reflections on modernity. As is well

known, Weber captured the problem of modernity with two potent images of the imminent “iron cage” of bureaucratic petrification and the Hellenistic “polytheism” of warring deities. This seemingly contradictory imagery of modernity in fact reflects different faces of the same coin. Whether the problem of modernity is accounted for in terms of a permeation of objective, instrumental reason or of a purposeless agitation of subjective values, Weber viewed these two images as constituting a single problem insofar as they contributed to the inertia of modern man, who fails to take principled moral action. According to Weber, a modern man tends to act only according to his aesthetic impulse to express arbitrary convictions; the majority of those who do not even act on their beliefs lead the life of a “cog in a machine.” Some have suggested that this problem of modern man was the central theme of Weber’s vast unorganized opus.⁴⁸

Once things were different, Weber claimed. An unflinching conviction that relied on nothing but one’s innermost personality once issued in a highly methodical and disciplined conduct of everyday life—or, simply, life as a duty. This type of self drew its strength solely from within in the sense that one’s principled action was determined by one’s own psychological need to gain self-affirmation—thus its difference from Enlightenment utilitarianism (Weber frequently identified two). Also, the way in which this deeply introspective subjectivity was materialized, that is, in self-mastery, involved a radically objective stance toward oneself and nature—thus its contrast with the romantic self-indulgence. Subjective value and objective rationality once formed an “unbroken unity,” according to Wilhelm Hennis, in which Weber saw the genuine possibility for modern individual freedom.⁴⁹ Consider the following statement, for instance:

The “freer” the actor’s “decision”—the more it results from his/her “own considerations,” undistorted by outer compulsion or irresistible “affects”—the more motivation itself, *ceteris paribus*, falls remorselessly within the categories of “means” and “end.” . . . Moreover, the “freer” the “action” is in the sense described here, i.e., the less it has the character of a “natural event,” the more the concept of “personality” comes into play. This concept of personality finds its “essence” in the constancy of its inner relation to certain ultimate “values” and life-meanings” (*Lebens-“Bedeutungen”*) . . . [in] consistency of its inner relationship to certain ultimate values and meanings of life, which are turned into purposes and thus into teleologically rational action.⁵⁰

In Weber’s postulation of moral personality and individual freedom, then, two claims of integrity prevail—one between intention and action and the other between action and consequence. Weber maintains that a free action is compatible with the subjection to formal constraints derived from means-end calculations. A free action voluntarily subjected to causality Weber

characterizes as pursuing an "ethic of responsibility" (*Verantwortungsethik*). According to the ethic of responsibility, an action is given meaning only as a cause of an effect, that is, only in terms of causal relationship to the empirical world. Weber maintains that causality is an inverse expression of means-end narrative, that an action is validated in terms of causality; this means in effect that it falls under the choice predicated on a means-end scheme.⁵¹ Given that an action becomes signified as an ascertainable means to an end, then, an ethical question is reduced to a question of technically correct procedure. The virtue becomes a rational understanding of the possible causal effect of an action and willful reorientation of the elements of an action in such a way as to achieve a desired consequence. By emphasizing causality that a free agent subscribes to, in short, Weber prescribes an ethical integrity between action and consequences, instead of a Kantian emphasis on that between action and intention. A free action consists of choosing the correct means.

In terms of consequentialism alone, then, Weber's ethic of responsibility by itself becomes utterly indistinguishable from utilitarianism. It is obvious, however, that Weber completely rejects utilitarian ethics; Weber's model of moral action, that is, Puritan asceticism, is after all precisely what Jeremy Bentham sought to replace with his utilitarian ethics.⁵² Weber cannot accept utilitarian ethics on two grounds: it presupposes a foundationalist system of human psychology to which the meaning of human action is reduced in the last instance, and it is based on a hedonist account of human psychology or what he calls, rather disdainfully, "the balance of pleasure [*Lustbilanz*]."⁵³ In other words, Weber's opposition to utilitarianism focuses on its tendency to resolve moral dilemmas without remainder (a feature utilitarianism shares with Kantianism) and also on its treatment of the moral self as the agent of utility rather than as the bearer of integrity (a feature that sharply distinguishes utilitarianism from its Kantian alternative).⁵⁴ From Weber's perspective, the former reflects another metaphysical foundationalism that is no longer plausible especially in light of the fragmented value spheres of the modern world; the latter reflects simply a distasteful as well as unrealistic view of man.

Given this unambiguous rejection of utilitarianism, it is not surprising that Weber introduces another element of willful subjection in his understanding of free action—that is, a willful subjection to an autonomously chosen purpose. A free agent should be able to choose autonomously not only the means but also the end. In this respect, Weber's problem arises because the kind of rationality applied in choosing a means cannot be used in choosing an end. These two types of human reason represent categorically distinct modes of rationality—a boundary further reinforced by modern value fragmentation. With no objectively ascertainable ground of choice provided, a free agent has

to create a purpose ex nihilo: “ultimately life as a whole, if it is not to be permitted to run on as an event in nature but is instead to be consciously guided, is a series of ultimate decisions through which the soul—as in Plato—chooses its own fate.”⁵⁵ This ultimate decision and the Kantian integrity between intention and action constitute the essence of what Weber calls an ethic of conviction (*Gesinnungsethik*).

In the end, thus, individual freedom for Weber consists of these two ethics, which prescribe two heteronomous logics of voluntary subjection, willfully brought together in one unified self. Weber thus formulates the most fundamental question that drives his ethical reflections as, “How are hot passion and cool judgment to be forced together in a single soul?”⁵⁶ Some contrary comments notwithstanding, his answer is that “the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility are not absolute opposites. They are complementary to one another, and only in combination do they produce the true human being.”⁵⁷ Weber called the carrier (*Träger*) of this unity the “man of vocation” (*Berufsmensch*) in the comparative sociology of religion, “personality” (*Persönlichkeit*) in the epistemological writings, and “charismatic individual” in *Economy and Society*. He finds its historical archetype in Puritan man, whose moral psychology is predicated on the existential meaninglessness of this world and the attendant psychological anxiety that ironically generates the most active sort of worldly activism he calls “inner-worldly asceticism.” It is a paradoxical attitude that seeks with fanatical zeal to renounce and, moreover, to transform this world for the sake of the other world. To do so, a Puritan man strives to achieve and maintain an “ethical total personality (*ethischen Gesamtpersönlichkeit*),” in which subjective formulation of purpose and objective application of means-end causality constitute a coherent, systematic whole.⁵⁸ For a systematic unity of life to be constituted, says Weber, the most decisive quality is self-control and self-discipline under “the supremacy of a purposive will.”⁵⁹

For Weber, it is this kind of moral personality that is constituted, reinforced, and reproduced in a unique kind of disciplinary associational life he called “sectlike society,” as outlined earlier. In fact, these modes of formative associations and modern self cannot be sustained without each other—thus his otherwise enigmatic neologism “sect man” (*Sektenmensch*), which he regarded as the anthropological foundation for the birth of capitalist and liberal modernity.⁶⁰ It is important to recognize this genealogical ontology of the modern self since Weber’s politics of civil society is motivated by his recognition of the troubling irony that this coherent vision of the modern project generates a tension with his historicist understanding of modernity. Mod-

ern-ity is predicated on a historically specific constellation of cultural values and ideational contexts, yet modern-ization has effectively undermined the normative foundations for the modern individual identity and disciplinary civil society. According to Weber's finely tuned tragic sense of history, in short, the modern project has fallen victim to its own success.⁶¹

This problem of "late" modernization as a *Verfallsgeschichte* is clear to Weber in what was going on in American civil society. Calling them all a "Europeanization" of America,⁶² Weber pointed to two phenomena—(re)feudalization and bureaucratization. In rapidly Europeanizing America, secularization has turned sectlike associations into mere exclusive castes and ethical standards into status honor and prestige. An associational membership tends to be determined by inheritance, both cultural and material—mere chance from Weber's perspective. In terms of their organizational principle, these new groups are "leading toward aristocratic status group"—due not to its particularism, I must add, but to its lack of voluntarism.⁶³ Weber was convinced that American society was on the road to Europeanization, in which society would become refeudalized and unable to maintain the ethical standards that once sustained the social integration of American civil society. Paralleling refeudalization is the overall bureaucratization of civil society. The peculiar lack of bureaucracy in American civil society, Weber appeared convinced, would not last and indeed was undergoing a fundamental transformation in the direction of more bureaucratization, in which the voluntary and autonomous civil society is increasingly displaced by professionalized state and market apparatuses. Thus, Weber loathed the convergence between American and German societies in which religious concerns reflect mere hypocrisy and ethical probing is displaced by mere opportunism: "Only the direction in which conventional 'hypocrisy' moved differed: official careers in Germany, business opportunities in the United States."⁶⁴ The congruence signaled for Weber an increasing displacement of a vibrant civil society in America and the consequent erosion of the unified moral personality, in which "the subjective dissolution of this unity (*die innere Lösung jener Einheit*)—the denigration (*Verfehmung*) of the *Berufsmenschen*—is obvious."⁶⁵

Against this dissolution of moral personality, refeudalization of civil society, and overall bureaucratization, the question that motivates Weber's political project is, "How is it at all possible to *salvage* any *remnants* of individual freedom of movement (*Bewegungsfreiheit*) in any sense? . . . How is democracy even in this restricted sense to be at all possible?"⁶⁶ Standing on this tension between modernity and modernization is, in short, Weber's politics of civil society, which aims to recover "sect man" under late modern circumstances.⁶⁷

PURPOSE, CONTESTATION, AND THE POLITICAL

To further sharpen the contours of Weber's politics of civil society, I will compare it with a contemporary theory of civil society, especially that of Michael Oakeshott. For Oakeshott effectively highlights two main subtexts that have informed my interrogation so far—one problem pertaining to “liberal neutrality” and the other to “uncivil or bad civil society.” Oakeshott's ideal type of “civil association” contains an unflinching belief in the liberal principle of procedural neutrality and formal rule of law. But his own formulation also discloses his recognition that the liberal neutrality cannot be sustained without a substantive sociocultural context and certain individual characters and virtues that can uphold and appreciate it. In its concern with the substantive foundation of a formal rule of law, it might be said that Oakeshott's project amounts to a communitarian defense of the liberal principle of neutrality.⁶⁸ This strategy, nevertheless, obviously involves a tension since Oakeshott's belief in liberal neutrality prohibits him from explicitly endorsing the formative influence of civil society. This tension ushers in, as I will argue, a suppressed account of the formative aspects of civil associations that recommends an education of liberal virtues without overtly saying so. Once understood this way, Oakeshott's ideal types of civil association and “cives” reveal an interesting point of contrast, which illuminates Weber's politics of civil society that transcends both liberal and communitarian projects.

In opposition to an “enterprise association” (*universitas*), according to Oakeshott, a “civil association” (*societas*) is a universal organization in that it is capable of embracing heterogeneous types of self and smaller associations. Its universal character is predicated on Oakeshott's assertion that “civil” law does not interfere with the substantive purposes of individual actions. It is not only formal and procedural but also neutral. Oakeshott likens civil law to a road map, which only supplies a “how-to” knowledge, yet does not provide any “where-to.” A road map or a system of roads is neutral to the individual traveler's direction or destination. In this sense, the state à la civil mode can tolerate within its domain heterogeneous types of selves and associations. The only precondition is met when they assent to the procedural and formal prescriptions of civil law and moral practices (Oakeshott tends to identify the two). Once the characteristics of a civil association are transposed onto the state, the state becomes seen as a *societas cum universitas* that governs *sine irae et studio*—or, simply put, purposelessly.⁶⁹ Herein lies, according to Oakeshott, the critical difference of a civil association from a bureaucratic enterprise association.

Utterly devoid of any substantive purpose, however, an ideal typical bureaucracy also rules *sine irae et studio*, Weber says, which “is the specific

nature of bureaucracy, and it is appraised as its special virtue."⁷⁰ For Weber, bureaucracy is incapable of articulating a substantive purpose, instead relying on a formal rule of procedure only. Charles Larmore is right in his "praise of bureaucracy" when he criticizes Oakeshott for failing to understand bureaucracy as the institutional expression of liberal neutrality.⁷¹ The irony is that Oakeshott's ideal type of civil association, which is conceived to criticize the petrifying effect of the modern welfare bureaucracy, is defined by features that Larmore—and Weber would certainly agree—sees as the essence of a bureaucratic rule: purposelessness and neutrality.

Weber shows a characteristic ambivalence toward bureaucratic rule especially with regard to its relationship to democracy. On one hand, he understands that a precise formulation of formal rule that can be applied universally and neutrally improves the predictability of governing, curtails the arbitrary exercise of political power, and thereby contributes to the empowerment of individual rights. On the other hand, he recognizes that formal neutrality is a highly elusive ideal, and that even if achieved, its purposelessness has a detrimental effect on genuine democracy. Weber can be no less critical of bureaucratic associations than Oakeshott, in short, yet for altogether opposite reasons.

In part a subtle criticism of Hegel's glorification of bureaucracy as the sole representative of universal interest, Weber's point is that bureaucracy has a tendency to form a status group of its own, in fact striving to establish itself as the only ruling caste over other classes, and its seemingly neutral rule is motivated by a partial class interest thinly disguised as a universal interest.⁷² Besides the empirical criticism, however, Weber also maintains that the universal, formal, purposeless neutrality of bureaucracy, even if achieved, will contribute directly to the leveling of the whole political society, ushering in the merely "passive democratization."⁷³ The critical problem Weber sees is that "in contrast to the democratic self-government of small homogeneous units,"⁷⁴ passive democratization will turn the governed into, at best, passive beneficiaries and subjects of the governing activities of the bureaucratic officials. This has a critical impact on the substantive contents of the individual characters and identities; thus, he says, "the bureaucratization of all domination very strongly furthers the development of . . . the personality type of the professional expert (*Fachmenschentum*)."⁷⁵ Analyzing the relationship between bureaucracy and democracy, for example, Weber holds that insofar as responsiveness and accountability to the public opinion are concerned, bureaucracy can be made democratic, thus satisfying the procedural requirements for democracy. The problem is, as a result of bureaucratic rule, public opinion itself has degenerated into merely "communal action (*Gemeinschaftshandeln*) born of irrational sentiments."⁷⁶ Contrary self-claims notwith-

standing, the purposelessness of passive democracy and bureaucratic rule has been transformed into a purpose itself that justifies the imposition of a specific kind of identity for its citizens at the expense of other identities. A genuine democracy, as opposed to a procedural and passive democracy, becomes a question of the nature of citizenship and individual characters for Weber.

Oakeshott's formulation of liberal neutrality can be a good example of Weber's second critique, for it tends to conflict with the new identity of "cives" imposed on the allegedly heterogeneous selves who constitute a civil association. On one hand, Oakeshott describes this new identity as a "persona"—a sort of public mask one wears as an associate.⁷⁷ By implication, it can be adopted by different types of selves regardless of their substantive dispositions and faculties. On the other hand, *cives* is only a different name for those whom Oakeshott called in various contexts simply an "individual" or "religious man"—that is, a "free agent"⁷⁸ who realizes that, by virtue of submitting to the procedural prescriptions of moral traditions, customs, and practices only, one can gain the freedom of choosing a substantive purpose.⁷⁹ This type of self presupposes a particular set of substantive values that sharply distinguishes it from other types, most notably what he variously called "individual manqué," "anti-individual," or "mass man" that are in need of transformative education. It takes some sort of homogeneity with "a man like me,"⁸⁰ according to Oakeshott, for a civil association to be able to sustain itself. Oakeshott's ideal type of civil association is, then, inclusive and exclusive, heterogeneous and homogeneous, or, in his own words, universal and compulsory, all at once.⁸¹

One way to make sense of Oakeshott's assertion that a civil association is inclusive and exclusive at once seems to be that it provides an educational ground for free agents. Although freedom is intrinsic to human conduct, according to Oakeshott, its exercise is an art, not nature, something to be educated and learned.⁸² However, he does not identify this kind of moral education simply as an indoctrination of moral rules, duties, and obedience. Learning "technical knowledge" does not exhaust the contents of moral education; it is rather an elusive remainder of the technical learning that prompts individuals to reflect, choose, and act in moral terms and autonomously. It is only in the context of associational life, through "continuous corrective analyses and criticisms" in everyday life,⁸³ that individuals receive moral education that cannot be exhausted by learning of rules. One cannot learn to be a free agent unless he or she is part of an appropriate moral and customary fabric of an intimate associational life. Civil association is inclusive in that it can embrace heterogeneity; yet it is exclusive in that it purports to generate homogeneity as *cives*. The universal identity of *cives* is predicated on the compulsory moral education of heterogeneous selves. Despite the claim of neutrality, as

Weber would have insisted, it is not true that Oakeshott's civil association is not concerned with what can be called a Platonic politics of the soul—it simply aims at, one might say, a *laissez-faire* politics of the soul.

In Oakeshott's formulation of liberal neutrality and its internal tension, in fact, what he chose not to give explicit consideration is more instructive—that is, what happens to those who refuse to subscribe to this homogeneous identity *qua* *cives*? The type of self who fails to live by this “unsought freedom” Oakeshott called “the poor,” who are blamed for the emergence of the collectivist “enterprise association” in modern political society.⁸⁴ In more urgent need of education and self-transformation into *cives* are, however, those whom Oakeshott calls the “moral eclectic.” The moral eclectic is a moral perfectionist who refuses to accept the customary ethics of his or her world and claims a knowledge of noncontingent truth; moreover, he or she is a political activist who attempts to change this world according to his or her truth. The moral eclectic is a Platonic seer who has gone out of the cave and seen the light only to come back to enlighten the *cavemen*.⁸⁵ In making a claim for an unmitigated contact with a transcendental or otherworldly source of meaning, the moral eclectic exhibits a “charisma,” a personal quality that poses the most potent threat to what Weber calls “routine” or what Oakeshott calls “moral practice.” This is why in Oakeshott's cave, the charismatic figure is respected, revered, yet in the end ostracized. The moral eclectic's charisma needs to be confined to a purely private sphere; a Freudian sublimation is welcome, yet once spread out into a public sphere, charisma would be treated like an epidemic to be quelled.⁸⁶ Charisma has to be subdued, confined into private sphere, converted into customs, and in short “routinized.”⁸⁷ In sum, for Oakeshott, the danger to civil association and, by extension, to individual freedom lies in the liberation of charisma from its routine confines.

To Oakeshott, hence, Luther's famous declaration at Worms—“Here I stand; I can do no other”—foreshadows the subsequent tragedies of modern history. For the episode marks the advent of the assertive subjective will that is held responsible for the erosion of the moral fabric of society in which individual freedom is embedded. The moral attitude represented by Luther, according to Oakeshott, led only to “fanaticism” and “follies.”⁸⁸ For Weber as well, Luther's declaration signals a historical watershed, yet for a categorically opposite reason—it movingly illustrates the essence of modern individual freedom.⁸⁹

The contrast could not be clearer. Both projects are predicated on a principled criticism of modern bureaucratic rule, seeking an alternative foundation of modern liberal politics in a pluralistically organized civil society. Contra Oakeshott's civil associations, however, the goal of Weber's politics of civil

society is precisely to cultivate a moral eclectic who can take a defiant moral action. This kind of self is constantly empowered and disciplined in an associational life in which the sense of collective purpose is sharply enumerated and voluntarily shared among the members. Thus, Weber characterizes sectlike society as culminating in the social mechanism Oakeshott denounced as “*domestica disciplina*.”⁹⁰ In terms of its emphasis on purpose and discipline, in short, Weber’s sectlike society is an “enterprise association” in Oakeshott’s terms.⁹¹

In contrast with Oakeshott’s postulation of civil society as a site in which tacit customs and moral practices are preserved and educated, furthermore, Weber posits a mutually reinforcing relationship between the purposeful and disciplinary nature of sectlike civil society and open contestation, competition, struggle, and even conflict or, in short, the political. In opposition to bureaucratic formal neutrality, “the essence of politics . . . is conflict, the recruitment of allies and a voluntary following.”⁹² What makes this statement interesting is Weber’s implication of the political, conflict, and voluntary associations. Political contestation depends on the mobilization of voluntary associations; thus, Weber defines political parties as “voluntarily created organizations directed at free recruitment.”⁹³ In turn, voluntary associational activities become more robust when the associates take part in political contestations, for that strengthens the locus of identity, sense of common purpose, and individual discipline. Herein lies Weber’s affinity with Carl Schmitt’s theory of the political, yet the difference is equally apparent. For Weber’s emphasis on the exclusive nature of associational life and the consequent discipline, purpose, and contestation ushers in a robust pluralism and heterogeneity within a civil society, whereas Schmitt’s preoccupation with the friend-enemy distinction is meant to generate a social homogeneity in the name of democracy.⁹⁴ At this juncture of moral personality, activist citizenship, the political contestation, and voluntary associational life stands Weber’s unique politics of civil society. And it is in this light that the following lament, which concludes Weber’s famous “Science as a Vocation” speech, makes much sense.

The fate of our age, with its characteristic rationalization, intellectualization, and above all disenchantment of the world, is that the ultimate, most sublime values have withdrawn from the public sphere [*Öffentlichkeit*], either into the transcendental realm of mythical life or into the brotherhood of immediate personal relationships between individuals. It is no accident that our greatest art is intimate rather than monumental, nor is it fortuitous that today only in the smallest group [*Gemeinschaftskreise*], between individuals, does something pulsate in pianissimo which corresponds to the prophetic pneuma which formerly swept through great communities [*Gemeinden*] like fire and welded them together.⁹⁵

In sum, Weber's project is to preserve and amplify the element of the political, a goal that enables him to negatively substantiate what he regards as a "bad civil society." From this perspective, both the liberal principle of formal and procedural neutrality and associational life conceived one-sidedly in terms of customs, traditions, and practices can be active accomplices in the expansion and penetration of bureaucracy into everyday life, contributing to the formation of passive, complacent, conformist, and even docile citizenry. What is necessary in Weber's view is instead an active and highly alert citizenry that is ready to take autonomous, principled, and defiant action, and such character traits can be bred only in a small-scale associational life that emphasizes purpose and discipline through various means of membership selection and sanctions. In contrast with the liberal-judicial and communitarian-social models of civil society, one might say, Weber proposed a political model by which he strove to imbue the late modern "iron cage" once again with vibrancy, enterprise, movement, and dynamism.⁹⁶

CONCLUSION: "BOWLING ALONE"

It is an irony of history that precisely at the moment when the triumph of civil society is loudly proclaimed in many parts of the world, civil society in America, one of its traditional seedbeds, is allegedly in decline. Implicit in this kind of allegation is a more profound and troubling question of whether a liberal democratic polity can sustain itself on its own terms. Identifying the orthodox liberal demarcation of statecraft and soulcraft as the source of the problem, an increasing number of theorists are turning to civil society as a site in which a certain kind of moral personality and civic virtues conducive to liberal democracy is cultivated. Weber's larger reflections on modernity can also be understood as driven by the similarly agonizing question of its sustainability, especially after it has successfully undermined its own normative foundation in the course of rationalization and secularization. Prominent in this troubling tension between modernity and modernization for Weber was the problem of the disempowerment of the modern liberal self.

In this light, both the neo-Tocquevillean and Weberian projects can be said to share the recognition that liberal democracy cannot be sustained in a robust form without a unique sociocultural environment that can cultivate a unique kind of individual characters. Seen this way, both projects criticize the classic doctrine of liberal neutrality that requires citizens to leave behind their private identities before entering the public sphere of rational debate and collective deliberation and in turn strictly prohibits politics from intervening in the

moral and civic education of its citizens. It is on this broadly communitarian and/or civic republican criticism of liberal neutrality that the Weberian and neo-Tocquevillean politics of civil society converge. This similarity, however, cannot last long, and it is in the different degrees of sensitivity to the contents of civil society and individual characters that they diverge. Especially compared to those whom Peter Berkowitz calls the right-Tocquevilleans, Weber appears more sensitive to the possibility of bad civil society.⁹⁷ To this naive emphasis on spontaneous voluntarism, Amy Gutman responds with a question, and Weber would certainly follow,

Should we be horrified about the decrease in associational activity in America, if it has in fact taken place? We cannot assume that the more secondary associations that exist, the better off liberal democracy will be. More of civic importance probably depends on the nature of associations in America than on their numbers.⁹⁸

Not all forms of civil society are conducive to the vitality of liberal democratic polity—some might in fact be detrimental to it.

Even when the “nature of associations” is enumerated, those characteristics appear radically different from Weber’s project. For Weber, on one hand, the most critical issue in revitalizing our civil society is to preserve and magnify the elements of contestation in our iron cage society. Modern individuals need to be engaged in various associational activities so that they can challenge and compete with each other in a concrete, everyday context, in which they will be constantly required to define, redefine, and choose their ultimate values and to take disciplined moral actions based on their choices. For Weber’s politics of civil society, in short, the critical issue is to “deepen” the innermost core of the modern self. To “broaden” the self, on the other hand, or to develop “the I into the We” seems to define some projects especially of right-Tocquevillean persuasion.⁹⁹ In this view, a desirable form of associational life is frequently imagined in terms of communal congeniality and group solidarity—the civic virtues, in terms of sociability, civility, cooperation, and trust.¹⁰⁰ In the face of the alleged anomie and disorderliness, then, the issue becomes the recovery of this kind of solidarity through a pluralistic associational life, which as an unintended consequence is expected to engender a more engaged public citizenry and a robust liberal democracy. The difference, in short, lies in the primary function that is assigned to the modern civil society, that is, between the cultivation of defiant individual autonomy in Weber’s civil society and the recovery of individual sociability and the enhancement of social solidarity in the right-Tocquevillean civil society. Weber’s politics of civil society in the end cannot accept a simple celebration of associational life for its own sake.

Sheldon Wolin recently warned that “in the age of vast concentrations of corporate and governmental power, the desperate problem of democracy is not to develop better ways of cooperation, but to develop a fairer system of contestation over time, especially hard times.”¹⁰¹ Weber would wholeheartedly agree and add that the question is not only about the “system” but is more critically about the proliferation of autonomous and disciplined selves who readily rise up to join “contestations.” It is a pluralistically organized civil society Weber called sectlike society that is expected to cultivate these moral dispositions and civic virtues. If our “revivified” civil society, however, can breed only communal congeniality and fuzzy neighborliness, Weber might even say—let people “bowl alone.” For in the absence of better alternatives, ironically, defiantly resisting purposeless group pressure can sometimes be a more visible hallmark of “sect man.”

NOTES

1. Arnold (1993), 195-96.
2. Berkowitz (1999), Galston (1991), Macedo (1990), Rosenblum (1989).
3. Gutman (1998), Rosenblum (1998), Shils (1997), Macedo (1997).
4. Barber (1999), Sandel (1996), Elshtain (1995).
5. Keane (1998), 114 ff.
6. Letter to Friedrich Crusius, as quoted in Mommsen (1984), 323. A complete letter is in *Biography* 647/636, Baumgarten (1964), 536 ff., and *Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (GPS) (first edition), 482 ff., all of which Mommsen claims to be mistranscribed. Material enclosed in parentheses in the quote is based on Mommsen's claims. English rendering is altered to provide a more literal translation.
7. For the importance of America for Weber's political thought in general, see Mommsen (1974). For the historical details surrounding Weber's American trip, see Rollman (1995). Diggins (1996) makes broad and at times intriguing observations on Weber's attitude toward America.
8. *Biography* 294/281. The German academic luminaries who were invited to the 1904 St. Louis World Exposition included such liberal thinkers as E. Troeltsch, A. von Harnack, W. Sombart, F. Tönnies, and W. Windelband. See Honigsheim (1968), 11.
9. *Biography* 295/282-83, 298-300/285-87; Baumgarten (1964), 450-521.
10. Mommsen (1974), 72; Peukert (1989), 267-71; Wohl (1979), 42-84.
11. *Biography* 300-02/287-89, 305/293.
12. Mommsen (1974), 80.
13. *Sects* 207/450.
14. Tönnies (1993); Ringer (1969), 265-66, 164-71; Herff (1984), 36, 84, 136.
15. For more on the *Begriffsgeschichte* of the categories of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, see Riedel (1972).
16. For more on Weber and Tönnies, see Cahnman (1995).
17. In agreement is Alexander and Loader (1989), 106.
18. *America* 578/9.

19. See his monumental *Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*, vols. 1-3 (1868-1881). There are several editions of this seminal work in partial English translation, the most famous of which is by F. W. Maitland in Gierke (1901). More recent selections are edited by A. Black and translated by M. Fischer in Gierke (1990).

20. Gierke (1901), 94, 98.

21. For other examples of Weber's use of Gierke's categories, see Riesebrodt (1989), 136-38.

22. Sects 222 n.1/453 n.9.

23. *Ibid.*, 214-15/309.

24. Economic Ethics 259/287; cf. Sects 227-31/316-18, 458 n.27.

25. Russia 152-64/63-65, 126-30.

26. Sozialpolitik 467.

27. Rejections 491-92/333; Sozialpolitik 470.

28. Rejections 489-91/332.

29. Russia 164-65/65-66.

30. ES II 722/1205.

31. America 580-81/12-13. For what Weber calls "the elective affinity between the sect and democracy," see ES II 724-26/1208-09. Cf. Troeltsch (1931), 617-25. Troeltsch certainly knew this criticism of Weber's, as he cites "America" in Troeltsch (1958), 149. In the same book, he responded, without naming Weber and probably also criticizing Georg Jellineck, by reemphasizing the tension between the aristocratic nature of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and modern egalitarian democracy: for example, "This is still, however, an essentially religious and aristocratic idea, sharply distinguished from the pure rationalism of the conception of the Natural Law in the period of Enlightenment, and from the democratic sympathies of Rousseau's teaching. . . . Democracy in the strict sense is everywhere foreign to the Calvinistic spirit" (*ibid.*, 115-16).

32. Smith (1976), 309-38; cf. Macedo (1996), 242-52.

33. Tocqueville (1988), 604. For more on Weber and Tocqueville, see Kalberg (1997).

34. ES II 723/1206.

35. America 578/9.

36. *Ibid.*, 580/10; Sects 215/310; ES II 723-24/1207; Sozialpolitik 443.

37. America 578/9.

38. *Ibid.*, 581/10-11.

39. *Ibid.*, 561/8.

40. *Ibid.*, 579/10; emphasis added.

41. Sozialpolitik 470.

42. America 581/11; Sects 234-35/320-21.

43. Sects 235/321.

44. Rosenblum (1998), 64.

45. Sozialpolitik 442-43, 447; cf. Biography 425-30/420-25.

46. Sozialpolitik 445. Also see Weber's letter to Karl Bücher of February 1909, in which he compares the "singing talent" of the black population in the southern United States to the German choral societies, highlighting "concurrent" political pessimism (MWG II/6, 49).

47. Democracy 381-386/116-17.

48. For the most programmatic statement, see Hennis (1988) and (1996). In agreement with Hennis is Harvey Goldman in his path-breaking book (Goldman 1988) and the sister volume (1992), which are particularly good in portraying the ideal type of the Puritan man of vocation in Weber's comparative sociology of religion. Sharing a similar exegetic agenda is Tracy Strong (1992). The question of self has until recently been curiously neglected in Weber scholarship.

Hennis's conscious revival of the earlier tradition of Weber scholarship that centered on philosophical anthropology was critical in generating the present interest in Weber's concept of the modern self—an interest prompted in part by the challenge of postmodernism and its focus on the modern self. For the earlier Weber scholarship, see Jaspers (1926), Löwith ([1931] 1960), Henrich (1952), and Landschudt (1969).

49. Hennis (1988), 93.

50. Roscher & Knies 132/191-92.

51. Neutrality 526/35.

52. Bentham (1982), 11 ff.

53. Freiburg 558/14.

54. For this formulation of the critique of utilitarianism in general, see Honig (1994), 574.

55. Neutrality 507-8/18.

56. Politics 227-28/353.

57. *Ibid.*, 250-51/368.

58. ES I 324/533.

59. Protestant Ethic 116/118-19. The story is of course far from over. For one, how can this cohabitation of heteronomous ethics be maintained without causing conflict? How can the potential conflict be managed? It is no wonder that Weber described the psychological state of a Puritan *Berufsmensch* as hysteria (China 456-58/232). In this respect, Charles Larmore's subtle indication—and I am inclined to agree—that Weber's goal was to preserve and amplify this potential conflict to create a constantly agonizing moral agent may provide one answer (Larmore 1987, xiii-xiv, 144-46). The *Berufsmensch* may be a unified personality, in other words, yet it does not have to be a harmonious soul. My point has simply been to take issue with various readings that highlight the absolute incompatibility of two ethics in which either rational responsibility (Schluchter 1979) or value conviction (Strauss 1950) dominates the other.

60. Letter to Adolf von Harnack (5 February 1906). See MWG II/5, 32-33.

61. Curiously neglected among Weber scholars, Frederic Jameson (1971) clearly brings out these conceptual schemata in Weber's *Protestant Ethic* thesis through a Levi-Straussian textual analysis.

62. Sects 208/302.

63. *Ibid.*, 215/310; ES I 933/188.

64. Sects 214/309.

65. Schlußwort 319.

66. Parliament 465-67/159; emphasis added.

67. In agreement is Wolin (1981).

68. For Oakeshott, in the light of liberal-communitarian debate, see Franco (1990), 230-36.

69. Oakeshott (1976), 201, 144.

70. ES II 563/215-16.

71. Larmore (1987), 40-41.

72. Biography 420-23/415-18; Parliament 500-502/190.

73. ES II 569/985-86.

74. *Ibid.*, 567/983.

75. *Ibid.*, 576/998.

76. *Ibid.*, 566/980.

77. Oakeshott (1976), 196-97.

78. *Ibid.*, 112.

79. Oakeshott (1993), 28-30, 33.

80. Oakeshott (1976), 129.

81. *Ibid.*, 148-51.

82. Oakeshott (1991), 466.
83. *Ibid.*, 474.
84. Oakeshott (1976), 236, 303.
85. *Ibid.*, 27-31.
86. Oakeshott (1991), 472.
87. *Ibid.*, 485.
88. Oakeshott (1976), 238.
89. *Politics* 248-250/367.
90. Oakeshott (1976), 284.
91. In agreement is Turner (1992), 151-53.
92. *Parliament* 481-83/173.
93. *Ibid.*, 454-55/149.
94. Schmitt ([1928] 1983), 234.
95. *Science* 107-11/30.
96. For a contemporary articulation of the political model of civil society, as opposed to the liberal-juridical and communitarian-social models, see Mouffe (1993), 60-73, although I disagree with her interpretations of Oakeshott and Schmitt in this association.
97. Berkowitz (1999), 187.
98. Gutman (1998), 31.
99. Putnam (1995), 67.
100. Shils (1997), Fukuyama (1996), Elshtain (1995).
101. Wolin (1996), 115.

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