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*Religion and Revolutionary Beliefs: Sociological and Historical Dimensions in Max Weber's Work—In Memory of Ivan Vallier (1927–1974)**

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ABSTRACT

How adequate is Weber's world-historical Sociology of Religion in relation to ongoing secularization, especially the rise of quasi-religious political movements and ideologies? It is argued that his work retains a considerable degree of conceptual adequacy in the face of new historical developments for both analytical and historical reasons. The essay distinguishes between Weber's developmental theory of modern revolutionary beliefs and his sociology of ideological virtuosi and of social marginality. The model of revolutionary religious virtuosity is applied to the Catholic opposition against church and state in the United States. The essay concludes with some observations on the counterculture in the light of Weber's developmental theory and sociohistorical model.

The sociology of religion is one aspect of that many-faceted historical process called "secularization." Without the decline of traditionalist understandings of the world, segmental analytical approaches such as science and critical scholarship could not have come into their own. But secularization has also meant the rise of beliefs competing with revealed religions and metaphysical rationalism on their own grounds—as comprehensive world views providing meaning for one's life and legitimation for one's actions. Within the sociology of religion there are basically two modes of comprehending these competing beliefs: the functionalist and the historical. From the functionalist viewpoint every organized group requires a belief system. Whether people consider themselves religious or not matters less than the fact that they all need a world view—divergences are mainly a matter of functional equivalents or evolutionary transformation. The logic of functionalism minimizes the historically significant difference between religious and secular world views by playing down the qualitative distinction between salvation religion and "disenchanted" beliefs. But from the historical viewpoint, which I will adopt here, this difference remains important just because it is part of disenchantment and secularization. We must strike a balance between the identification of distinctive differences and the existence of broad similarities among religious and secular world views.

*An early version of this essay was presented at the Eighth World Congress of Sociology, in the section on politics and religion, organized under the auspices of the Committee on Political Sociology of the International Sociological Association. The section was planned, shortly before his death, by Ivan Vallier, an exemplary scholar, colleague and friend. The essay complements my previous statement on "Socio-Historical Model and Developmental Theory: Charismatic Community, Charisma of Reason and the Counterculture." For a critical reading thanks are due to Professor Wolfgang Schluchter (University of Düsseldorf).

The historically oriented sociology of religion—such as Max Weber's—has been concerned with the character and the vicissitudes of the major religions. Strictly speaking, it is more a sociology of the revealed and ethical religions than of religion per se, which was the object of Durkheim's functionalist analysis. The historical sociology of religion aims at a series of historical generalizations about the major religions and through them at contributing to explanations of specific historical constellations in terms of causality or affinity. Sociology in this Weberian sense is part of what is sometimes called, somewhat misleadingly, the "methodology" of historical scholarship—that part dealing with the construction of types or models and the formulation of rules of historical experience. Actually, this "methodology" is a fund of generalized historical knowledge, which helps us answer questions by recourse to generalizations about—in our case—religious leadership, the religious propensities of major social strata, processes of institutionalization and routinization, and what Werner Stark has called the "heterogony of purposes." In *Economy and Society* (c. 19) Weber's distinction between sociology and history in terms of the contrast between historical generalization and causal analysis appears as the juxtaposition of sociohistorical models or typologies and what I have termed (c) developmental or "secular" theory (secular, of course, in the sense of long-range rather than temporal or nonspiritual). In the usual historiographic practice these two analytical dimensions are interwoven irrespective of the degree to which the researcher is aware of their distinctiveness.

In this essay I propose to examine some conceptual and historical issues resulting from the rise of secular belief systems with which Weber dealt in his *Sociology of Religion* in *Economy and Society*, a chapter written shortly before the First World War. Confronted with such secular beliefs the historically oriented sociology of religion must face the question of the applicability and adaptability of its historically derived conceptual apparatus. In a highly secularized world, in which the traditional religions have lost much of their former scope of influence, such a sociology may find its subject matter recede and its own perspective submerged within a more encompassing political sociology, in general, and a sociology of the intelligentsia in particular, yet without arriving at a purely functionalist scheme devoid of historical categories. In fact, Weber himself linked his sociology of religion to his sociology of law and domination and endeavored to adapt his religious terminology to some major phenomena of secularization. I shall try to show that for these reasons Weber's work retains a considerable degree of conceptual adequacy in the face of new historical developments.

Weber's *Sociology of Religion* is primarily concerned with constructing models of religious leadership and organization and with formulating generalizations about religion and social stratification. A series of generalizations about the creators and perpetuators of religions—prophets, priests and their congregations and churches—is juxtaposed to summary statements about the affinities between certain religious beliefs and positively or negatively privileged status groups, from aristocratic warriors and patrimonial bureaucrats, through manifold intermediate layers of merchants and craftsmen, down to slaves and pariahs. However, the *Sociology of*

Religion is ultimately meant to serve the historical explanation of the course of Western rationalism and therefore contains, in however sketchy a form, developmental (or secular) theories, although their elaboration lies beyond the scope of *Economy and Society* and constitutes a long-range program of research for generations of historians.

The secular belief systems which make part of history "modern" arose as revolutionary challenges to the received and established religions, although some Protestant and even some Catholic lines of religious thought retained a revolutionary potential of their own. Later the secular world views challenged one another in the passage from revolutionary to conservative roles. The rise of new beliefs manufactured by intellectuals is always in some sense revolutionary because it disturbs the status quo. Insofar as Weber's own work on the world religions is concerned with the impact of intellectual creativity and innovation—and this is a very important dimension—it is also a sociology of the rise and spread of innovative beliefs. Indeed, his work contributes to a sociology of the intellectuals in their revolutionary as well as conservative roles. Insofar as it provides a developmental theory of the course of modern revolutionary beliefs, it also supplies a basis for at least attempting an extrapolation to the present time.

I propose to deal first with Weber's developmental theory of modern revolutionary beliefs in the context of secularization (section 1), then with his sociology of ideological virtuosi and of socially marginal groups (section 2). The model of revolutionary religious virtuosity will be applied to the Catholic opposition against church and state in the United States (section 3). I will conclude with some observations on the counterculture in the light of Weber's developmental theory presented in section 1 and of the model sketched in section 2. I should like it to be understood that in dealing with anti-establishmentarian secular and transcendental beliefs and their immediate consequences for the believers, I am not concerned with revolution as the successful usurpation of authority and the establishment of a new ruling apparatus—that is a different issue in Weber's sociology of legitimation and domination.

1. A DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY OF MODERN REVOLUTIONARY BELIEFS

Weber's account of the course of revolutionary beliefs is a developmental or "secular" theory, in the sense understood here, in that it causally relates a series of events over approximately two centuries. A continuous causal regress is conceivable, but it would extend secular theory into a total evolutionary scheme devoid of specifically historical explanatory value. ("Specifically historical" here refers to explanations of the recorded actions of one or several generations without recourse to evolutionary stage theories.) Moreover, Weber's secular theories are intentionally segmental and do not construe a total theory of a given historical society; herein lies a crucial difference from the Marxist method. Other developmental theories of the same subject matter are feasible depending on the researcher's analytical focus.

Finally, such theories are "theoretical" also in the literal sense of being "ways of seeing" a subject matter (and thus of not seeing it in other respects) and in the colloquial sense of not being amenable to unambiguous, scientific proof.

Modern revolutionary beliefs originated in certain sectors of ascetic Protestantism and in philosophical rationalism. They postulated inherent rights of the individual against traditionalist authority. Ascetic Protestantism and Deist Enlightenment propagated religious and metaphysical notions of natural law that amounted to what Weber calls a "charismatic glorification of Reason" (c, 1209), that means, Reason became charismatic by providing a revolutionary legitimation for "natural," self-evident rights against the status quo. Here, in the most succinct form, is Weber's account of the origins and revolutionary consequences of this natural law:

The elaboration of natural law in modern times was in part based on the religious motivation provided by the rationalistic sects. . . . the transition to the conception that every human being as such has certain rights was mainly completed through the rationalistic Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the aid, at certain periods, of powerful religious, particularly Anabaptist, influences. . . . the consistent sect gives rise to an inalienable personal right of the governed as against any power, whether political, hierocratic or patriarchal. Such freedom of conscience may be the oldest Right of Man—as Jellinek has argued convincingly; at any rate, it is the most basic Right of Man because it comprises all ethically conditioned action and guarantees freedom from compulsion, especially from the power of the state. In this sense the concept was as unknown to Antiquity and the Middle Ages as it was to Rousseau's social contract with its power of religious compulsion. The other Rights of Man or civil rights were joined to this basic right, especially the right to pursue one's own economic interests, which includes the inviolability of individual property, the freedom of contract, and vocational choice. This economic right exists within the limits of a system of guaranteed abstract rules that apply to everybody alike. . . . It is clear that these postulates of formal legal equality and economic mobility paved the way for the destruction of all patrimonial and feudal law in favor of abstract norms and hence indirectly of bureaucratization. It is also clear that they facilitated the expansion of capitalism (c, 1209).

The tremendous charismatic eruption which we call the French Revolution succeeded to the extent that it institutionalized part of the formal natural law of the Enlightenment. However, since formal natural law facilitated bureaucratization and industrialization and augmented their perceived evils, it provoked a critique from inside and outside its basic presuppositions—at any given point there did not appear to be enough formal equality nor enough substantive equity. In the era of the restorative Holy Alliance ethical socialism based on natural law arose in opposition to formal natural law as well as legal positivism: "The decisive turn toward substantive natural law is connected primarily with socialist theories of the exclusive legitimacy of the acquisition of wealth by one's own labor" (c, 871). This was the second historical stage of modern revolutionary beliefs, since it challenged liberal individualism with schemes of radical social transformation that continued to postulate individual rights but did so in the context of collectivist solutions. However, ethical socialism was in turn attacked and defeated by Marxist anti-metaphysical radicalism, which became the third stage:

The rise of Socialism at first meant the growing dominance of substantive natural law doctrines in the minds of the masses and even more in the minds of their theorists from among the intelligentsia. These substantive natural law doctrines could not, however, achieve practical influence over the administration of justice, simply because, before they had achieved a position to do so, they were already being disintegrated by the rapidly growing positivistic and relativistic–evolutionistic skepticism of the very same intellectual strata. Under the influence of this anti-metaphysical radicalism, the eschatological expectations of the masses sought support in prophecies rather than in postulates. Hence in the domain of the revolutionary theories of law, natural law doctrine was destroyed by the evolutionary dogmatism of Marxism (c, 873).

Here too, as on many other occasions, Weber contrasts the intellectuals and the masses. The underlying generalization is that mass suffering leads to eschatological expectations and that intellectuals proffer various solutions. In our period of secularization they came up first with notions of formal, then of substantive natural law, but soon went on to positivism and scientism, offering prophecies instead of postulates. This involved “an almost superstitious veneration of science as the possible creator or at least prophet of social revolution” (c, 515). However, by its very faith in the predictive powers of science, deterministic Marxism undermined revolutionary voluntarism and became a comforting and comfortable ideology for the socialist labor movement, which was struggling against a powerful and seemingly invincible establishment. This third stage was characterized by the belief that capitalism’s demise was inevitable, although revolutionary voluntarism, which was driven by natural law postulates, seemed destined to failure. In a sense, Marx himself became an empirical sociologist through his recognition of the importance of social structural (“objective”) conditions, but in his eager polemicism and trusting scientism he developed a blind spot when it came to acknowledging the power of sheer conviction and personal determination on the part of revolutionary virtuosos.

After positivism and relativistic skepticism had become an integral part of bourgeois rationalism, Marxism provided a transition to proletarian rationalism. Both processes were accompanied by the decline of ethical and emotional religiosity, and especially of the kind of revolutionary fervor that in earlier eras had usually appeared in a religious guise. For this reason Weber thought it unlikely that the modern proletariat was going to produce a new congregational religion.

Insofar as the modern proletariat has a distinctive religious position, it is characterized by indifference to or rejection of religion, as is true of broad strata of the modern bourgeoisie. For the modern proletariat the sense of dependence on one’s own achievements is supplanted by a consciousness of dependence on purely social factors, market conditions, and power relationships guaranteed by law. . . . the rationalism of the proletariat, like that of the bourgeoisie of developed capitalism . . . cannot in the nature of the case easily possess a religious character and certainly cannot easily generate a religion (c, 486).

Thus, secularization seemed to run its inexorable course, weakening the received religions and making the rise of new religions unlikely. However, not all sections of the proletariat were “modern” (nor all lower-class groups proletarian), and proletarian rationalism displaced older beliefs only partially. Masses of German workers, for instance, were indeed largely alienated from established religion, but

for many their estrangement from the benevolent god of Christianity seems to have been founded on their perception of the obvious injustice of the world—hence on a moral feeling rather than on mere positivist belief. Weber referred to one of the earliest working-class surveys undertaken by Adolf Levenstein, a self-taught worker: “A recent questionnaire submitted to thousands of German workers disclosed the fact that their rejection of the idea of god was motivated, not by scientific arguments, but by their difficulty in reconciling the idea of providence with the injustice and imperfection of the social order” (c, 519). Many workers, then, were converted to socialism primarily by their more or less articulate conviction of the injustice of the social order rather than by any faith in a science of society. On the grass-roots level ethical socialism remained strong, while “scientific” socialism became the official creed of the Social Democratic labor movement.

Although Weber thought it unlikely that the modern proletariat was going to produce a new religion, the labor movement was an ambiguous phenomenon from the viewpoint of his *Sociology of Religion*. After all, there were striking ideational and organizational analogies, especially when form and content were viewed separately. By religion Weber meant primarily congregational religion, in which an ethical prophecy imposed a unified meaning on the world and demanded from the believer self-discipline in all realms of life. Christianity had begun as such a congregational religion, and in reaction to its transformation into a universal church congregationalism emerged time and again, reaching a high point with the rationalist Protestant sects and their inner-worldly asceticism. In its early phase the labor movement resembled Christian sects in the high degree of personal commitment and discipline which its members accepted voluntarily. It is true that socialism was not a revealed religion—this is the most obvious difference, if we leave aside variants of Christian socialism—but secular socialism was anchored in convictions about natural law, whether in the ethical sense of the “utopian” socialists or in the “scientific” sense of historical materialism. In both cases it was a matter of belief, since the workers tended to accept “scientific” socialism too as an act of faith.

Weber tried to deal with these similarities by resorting to qualifying phrases, such as “quasi-religious,” “equivalent to religious faith” or “approximating” a religion (c, 515), or by using adjectival modifiers which, so to speak, secularized a religious term, such as “this-worldly salvation” or “economic eschatology.” Thus, socialism appeared as an “economically eschatological faith” promising “salvation from class rule” (c, 515). Proletarian rationalism tended to supplant the contents of congregational religion with “ideological surrogates” (c, 486). Organizationally socialism arose in the form of “anti-religious sects,” which had a “stratum of declassed intellectuals who were able to sustain a quasi-religious faith in the socialist eschatology at least for a while” (c, 515). Potentially the intellectuals were the religious or ethical core of the movement, but their increasingly positivistic ideology militated against whatever charismatic force they might have constituted. Finally, as the socialist labor movement established itself, organizational concerns and the material interests of the workers gained ascendancy over the ideological

predilections of its intellectuals; the socialist leaders used the intellectuals' revolutionary rhetoric, but they were basically pragmatists (cf. Roth, a).

At the time of his writing—about 1910—Weber quite correctly perceived an anti-charismatic, anti-revolutionary and religiously uncreative situation in central Europe, although less than a decade later the Russian and German upheavals of 1917–19 occurred. Over a period of decades religious and revolutionary impulses had greatly diminished in most of Europe. In retrospect, the French Revolution appeared as the last great charismatic event in Western history, and the ebbing of the revolutionary tide in good measure accounted for Weber's fears of impending universal bureaucratization and what he called, in analogy to ancient history, "Egyptianization"—cultural immobility through religious and political traditionalism. When the "guns of August" opened up in 1914, this immobility was disrupted by a mass enthusiasm reminiscent of a great religious revival. An orgy of self-sacrifice engulfed Europe at war, but not many months thereafter a profound disillusionment set in. Mass despair spread, undermining legitimacy, and pacifist as well as revolutionary currents resurfaced. Yet when the three great monarchies came tumbling down, this appeared to Weber more a self-inflicted collapse than the accomplishment of determined revolutionary minorities or of a revolt of the masses—of either charismatic virtuosi or charismatically excited majorities. External military pressures and the authorities' failure of nerve led to a domestic power vacuum, opening up unanticipated opportunities for the surprised and unprepared representatives of "scientific socialism." Therefore Weber refused, with considerable conceptual consistency, to recognize the German and even the Russian upheavals as great charismatic eruptions and denounced the German goings-on as revolutionary sham and bloody carnival, while suspecting the Russian events of being a military dictatorship in socialist guise.

Up to now I have proceeded primarily on the historical plain, the level of secular theory. I have sketched the manner in which the socialist labor movement was inimical to received religion at the same time that it exhibited some typical religious features. Crucial to Weber's assessment of the decades before World War I was his conclusion that the revolutionary potential inherent in the charisma of Reason with its appeal to natural rights had been dissipated by the advance of positivist Marxism and the workers' own economic rationalism. Revolutionary voluntarism alone was indeed not strong enough to overthrow established governments, but the deterministic rhetoric and strategic opportunism of the self-professed Marxist labor movement weakened the revolutionary temper that is a precondition of sustained radical action.

Such a historical explanation on the level of secular theory presupposes historical rules of experience about the innovative role of intellectuals, the religious propensities of groups with and without direct economic interests, as well as the religious affinities of large social strata. I shall very briefly state some of these generalizations.

2. *A SOCIOLOGY OF IDEOLOGICAL VIRTUOSI AND SOCIAL MARGINALITY*

An ethically disciplined way of life has always been the accomplishment of small numbers of men and women—virtuosi with their special gifts for single-mindedness in thought and action. Moreover, the religious person par excellence has always been an intellectual, irrespective of whether in a given case he himself was anti-rationalist or even anti-intellectual. The ethical religions were created by such virtuosi, although their historical success depended on affinities with the interests of larger strata. In the past the intellectuals were mostly religious in the transcendental sense; in modern times the secular intellectuals have outnumbered the religious ones, but this has not basically changed the dual political role of intellectuals as legitimators or challengers of the powers-that-be, as mouthpieces of conservation or harbingers of revolution.

One historical rule of experience, which has become a sociological generalization, is this very difference between the ideological virtuosi and common men as it relates to economic organization. Throughout the ages most individuals have been preoccupied with the exigencies of living; material interests have strongly counteracted ethical and religious sentiments. The great majority of men have always been forced to pursue material interests in order to make a living. The capitalist market economy, which has been an overwhelmingly powerful force of secularization, has militated against religious preoccupations among businessmen, workers, and farmers by enforcing impersonal rules that have nothing to do with ethical considerations. Instead, religious and ethical creativity has typically been found among what Weber calls groups without direct economic interests—rentiers of various kinds and marginal groups of intellectuals outside the dominant status groups, whether they were declassed, petty-bourgeois, proletaroid or pariah. To the extent that men without direct economic interests have adhered to strict status conventions—think of Confucian scholar-administrators, Prussian or English civil servants, or professors at established universities—they have been unlikely to be innovative in ethical and religious matters, although declining political fortunes at times made a difference; high-status intellectuals have in the past turned to speculation on salvation when the stratum to which they belonged went into decline. By contrast, the lowest and least rational strata have tended to be ethically unproductive because of their hankering for magical salvation. Typically, they are “susceptible to being influenced by religious missionary enterprise,” desirous of “substitutes for magical-orgiastic supervention of grace,” and therefore amenable, for instance, to the “soteriological orgies of the Methodist type, such as engaged in by the Salvation Army” (Weber, c, 486). However, analogous to the way in which ancient Israel and Greece, which were peripheral to the centers of civilization in the Near East, became the world-historical locus of religious and philosophical innovations that made the West possible, so socially and economically marginal groups can have a creative potential if they move outside the status hierarchy:

Groups which are at the lower end of, or altogether outside of, the social hierarchy stand to a certain extent on the point of Archimedes in relation to social conventions, both in respect to the external order and in respect to common opinions. Since these groups are not bound by the social conventions, they are capable of an original attitude toward the meaning of the cosmos; and since they are not impeded by any material considerations, they are capable of intense ethical and religious sentiment (Weber, c, 507).

On the contemporary scene Weber recognized the innovative revolutionary role of marginal intellectuals in Syndicalism and the Russian intelligentsia. In Latin countries no uniform socialist movement arose controlled by a disciplined working-class apparatus, and intellectuals retained greater influence on the various competing groups. Therefore, Syndicalism appeared to Weber as "the only remaining variant of socialism in western Europe equivalent to a religious faith," but he also noticed its tendency to "turn easily into a romantic game played by circles without direct economic interests" (c, 515). The Russian intelligentsia, in spite of its social and ideological diversity, came closest to creating a religious movement by virtue of its commitment to natural law, admixture of traditionalist and emotionalist religiosity and readiness to self-sacrifice:

The last great movement of intellectuals which, though not sustained by the uniform faith, shared enough basic elements to *approximate a religion* was the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia, in which patrician, academic and aristocratic intellectuals stood next to plebeian ones. Plebeian intellectualism was represented by the proletaroid minor officialdom, which was highly sophisticated in its sociological thinking and broad cultural interests; it was composed especially of the *zemstvo* officials (the so-called "third element"). Moreover, this kind of intellectualism was advanced by journalists, elementary school teachers, revolutionary apostles, and a peasant intelligentsia that arose out of the Russian social conditions. In the 1870s, this movement culminated in an appeal to a theory of natural rights oriented primarily toward agricultural communism, the so-called *narodnichestvo* (populism). In the nineties, this movement clashed sharply with Marxist dogmatics, but in part also aligned itself with it. Moreover, attempts were made to relate it, usually in an obscure manner, first to Slavophile romantic, then mystical, religiosity or, at least, religious emotionalism. Under the influence of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, an ascetic and acosmistic patterning of personal life was created among some relatively large groups of these Russian intellectuals. We shall leave untouched here the question as to what extent this movement, so strongly infused with the influence of Jewish proletarian intellectuals who were ready for any sacrifice, can continue after the catastrophe of the Russian Revolution [in 1906] (c, 516, emphasis added).

If the Syndicalist and Russian intellectuals fitted the historical generalizations about religious virtuosi at least to some extent, the same was no longer true of many western and central European intellectuals, who had secularized themselves by abandoning religious and metaphysical value absolutism. By promoting positivism, evolutionism, and relativism they made themselves, so to speak, atypical in the historical balance of things. They were no longer religious virtuosi but merely the creators and followers of intellectual fashions without ultimate ethical commitment, irrespective of the degree of intolerance or fanaticism that might accompany them. With the rise of neo-romanticism, which Weber greatly disliked, some of these fashions appeared in religious guise, often revolving around "the wisdom of the East." But Weber did not expect any genuine religious contribution from the "literary, academic or café-society intellectuals" of his time. In a scathing passage he observed that their

need . . . to include 'religious' feelings in the inventory of their sources of impressions and sensations, and among their topics for discussions, has never yet given rise to a new religion. Nor can a religious renaissance be generated by the need of authors to compose books on such interesting topics or by the far more effective need of clever publishers to sell such books. No matter how much the appearance of a widespread religious interest may be simulated, no new religion has ever resulted from such needs of intellectuals or their chatter (c, 517).

Such intellectuals were neither capable of adhering to an ethic of sheer commitment to ultimate values (*Gesinnungsethik*) nor to an ethic of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*). For Weber this typological dichotomy seems to hold throughout history—the ideological virtuosi embrace the former, the pragmatic virtuosi (or whatever term would be suitable for their opposite) the latter.¹ However, secularization brought about a significant change, undermining the naive faith in revelation and natural law and ushering in an "age of subjectivist culture" in which most intellectuals must choose and defend their values on self-consciously rational or frankly irrational grounds. Personally, Weber accepted this outcome of secularization and tried to turn it into a humanist virtue. In 1909 he remarked:

We know of no scientifically ascertainable ideals. To be sure, that makes our efforts more arduous than those of the past, since we are expected to create our ideals from within our breast in the very age of subjectivist culture; but we must not and cannot promise a fool's paradise and an easy road to it, neither in thought nor in action. It is the stigma of our human dignity that the peace of our souls cannot be as great as the peace of one who dreams of such a paradise. (d, 420)

That was Weber's own ethic of responsibility, but he did not deny a basic empathy to those whose ethical and religious intensity led them to an ethic of sheer commitment that necessitated ascetic self-control.

As Weber (b, 120, 127) made clear in his political testament "Politics as a Vocation," the ethic of responsibility is not lacking in commitment or conviction (both shades of the meaning of *Gesinnung*), but it is pragmatic insofar as it endeavors to balance the ethical costs of a course of action against the intended results. The ethic of sheer commitment or single-mindedness, which in English is usually rendered the ethic of ultimate ends, insists on spiritual purity irrespective of practical consequences. From the perspective of its opposite it is an "ethic of good intentions," but the association with the proverbial "road to hell" may make such a rendering appear biased.

In the complex entanglements of social action there is no hard and fast line between the two ethics. However, we do observe time and again that people profoundly differ on one particular issue—whether or not the world is ethically irrational. For Weber the difference between the two ethics is related to acceptance or rejection of a pantheon of conflicting values. Both the ethical religions and political absolutism in the ideological sense originated in a need for denying this irrationality, which to Weber was an ineluctable fact of life. The ethic of responsibility accepts this irrationality and therefore advocates action in the spirit of an "in spite of"—"of doing one's best." By contrast, the ethic of sheer commitment takes an "all or nothing" position. Most human beings are not capable of strenuous

ethical conduct, and in this sense the two ethics are the guideposts of minorities, but the ethic of sheer commitment is distinctively a matter of spiritual virtuosity, of making maximum demands on the true believer, whereas its opposite accepts the fallibility of man.

There are two logical extremes within the ethic of sheer commitment, a consistently militant and a consistently pacifist position. Weber again uses religious terminology to describe adherents to the militant version as "revolutionary apostles" (c, 516), "revolutionary crusaders," and "prophets of revolution" (b, 125), who protest against the injustice of the social order. In a basically nonrevolutionary situation, as it prevails most of the time (and today also in the United States), only an acute sense of elitist superiority and moral righteousness can sustain these "warriors of the faith." Just as they are unswervingly committed to their ethic of ultimate ends, so their opponents fight them according to the maxim that "it is impossible to make peace with warriors of the faith" (b, 515, cf. a, 45).

The pacifist position is the acosmistic love ethic typified by the Sermon on the Mount, which implies

a natural law of absolute imperatives based on religion. These absolute imperatives retained their revolutionizing force during almost all periods of social upheavals. They produced especially the radical pacifist sects, one of which in Pennsylvania experimented in establishing a polity that renounced violence toward the outside (Weber, b, 124).

Christian pacifism can be illustrated by its recent revolutionary revival on the part of the Catholic opposition against church and state in the United States. This phenomenon demonstrates the possibility of a genuine religious revival carried on by religious virtuosi. To many contemporaries its appearance came as unexpectedly as the new youth movement of the 1960s, and was propelled by events that could hardly have been foreseen in the 1950s, such as the historical accident of Roncalli's papacy, although the general reform movement in the wake of Vatican II must be distinguished from the charismatic revolt of priests and nuns against church and state.

3. RELIGIOUS VIRTUOSI AGAINST CHURCH AND STATE²

Historically, priests have been the most important legitimizers of political authority. Today they are rivalled and frequently eclipsed by secular legitimizers, whether they be free-lancing intellectuals or employed party ideologists. This competition has destroyed the clergy's one-time monopoly. In recent years many clergymen have tried to regain their once dominant position as exclusive guardians of faith and morality by involving themselves in social and political issues. Hundreds of young clergymen prefer the campus ministry over suburban assignments, and many of them joined "the Movement" in the sixties. To some extent this development can be understood as a mundane phenomenon, in Weberian terms, as the struggle of monopolist guild interests against competitors. But there has also been a nucleus of genuine charismatics, who incur great personal risks by taking an extreme stand

calculated to invite "repression" from the church and the state. "Divine Disobedience" has become the slogan of these virtuosi.

Typologically, priests are the preservers of a sacred tradition within an institutionalized setting, such as the bureaucratic Catholic church. Catholic priests are bearers of institutional charisma. Their sacramental acts are valid irrespective of the priest's individual state of grace. But the rebel priests have turned themselves into *prophets*, that means, individual bearers of charisma. They do not proclaim a new religious message—prophecy need not be concerned with offering a new religion, but may simply preach the renewal of religion in the spirit of its original revelation. The rebel priests are often willing to experiment with new forms of liturgy and modes of living, but more important is their harking back to the personal example of Christ and the days of early Christianity with its communal organization. Theirs is a deliberate "raw fundamentalism," as Daniel Berrigan has said of his brother Phil and of himself. The Berrigan brothers have become the most famous of the small group of clerical virtuosi, and their beliefs and actions can be viewed here as prototypical.

Men and women like the Berrigans challenge the church as a worldly institution that has completely failed its spiritual mission. The orders, too, are failing. The Jesuits, for instance, appear as not much more than academic climbers. The Berrigans profess themselves disinterested in many of the internal issues agitating the church and the Catholic community—celibacy, divorce, birth control, and parochial education. Instead, they are preoccupied with the great moral issues of the world—poverty, exploitation, and war. In this supreme perspective the church and most Christians appear self-centered and oblivious, in Daniel Berrigan's words, to the true meaning of "Christ's invitation that all men come join Him, and be with him—in all their variety" (13). Before Christ's message the church and, *a fortiori*, the state are found wanting. For this kind of religious virtuosity, as Weber has observed, the fact that:

the use of force within the political community has increasingly assumed the form of the constitutional state (*Rechtsstaat*) . . . is merely the most effective mimicry of brutality. All politics is oriented to *raison d'état* and to the autonomous end of maintaining the external and internal distribution of power. These goals must necessarily seem completely senseless from the religious point of view [that means] the ethic of brotherliness (c, 600f).

In Weber's terms, such judgments are a form of ethical prophecy. However, virtuosi such as the Berrigans are not content just to carry a message; they also insist on following the path of *exemplary prophecy*. Within the Christian context, this takes the form of *imitatio Christi*. It is not enough for these virtuosi to *be* right; only by becoming martyrs can they *do* what is right.³ Although they are, of course, interested in political effectiveness, their kind of "divine disobedience" is first of all an insistence on living an exemplary life. The spiritual attitude is decisive, and for this reason Daniel Berrigan, for one, could discourage others from imitating his particular political tactics. However, the rebel priests become a political force by identifying the suffering of Christ and that of the masses, and by joining their own *imitatio* to them. As Daniel Berrigan succinctly put it:

What is most important to Phil and me, I believe, is the historical truth manifested in the actuality of Jesus, and the community which we believe is in continuity with His spirit and His presence—a presence which makes certain rigorous and specific demands on man at any period of time. . . . I think there is something important to be undergone, something with a certain spiritual value to it; it is almost as if to be cast out can become a way of being cast in, which means I will taste not solely or even primarily the bitterness of being an American locked up . . . but I will also taste a fate millions of others know, millions of people whose historical struggle matters very much, even if not to those who run our military machine and plan our foreign policy and invest money in the semi-colonial countries we still dominate in various parts of the world. . . . I do have the sense that to be right now in some serious trouble with respect to the 'powers and principalities' of this nation means to occupy a most important geographical position—if one wishes to struggle with others all over the world for their freedom; and by the same token to be in no trouble at all is to share in what I take to be a frightening movement toward violence and death (14, 19).

Such exemplary identification with the suffering masses can reactivate the revolutionary potential in Christ's message and passion. Although Jesus was not concerned with social and political matters, his teachings can be used politically for pacifist as well as militarist purposes. As the case of the Berrigans and their charismatic followers once again demonstrates, the insistence on a communism of love can easily turn into the practice of a communism of war. The religious virtuosi may end up using the same means as the revolutionary heroes. The only remaining difference may be one of ultimate orientation—toward the transcendental rather than the immanent legitimation of rebellion. In the end, as Weber warned, the moral dilemma is the same for all 'warriors of the faith, whether religious or revolutionary (cf. c, 12). And the moral antinomies inherent in using or foregoing force for the sake of absolute justice tend to be self-defeating for the religious virtuosi who would do away with 'politics as usual.'

The revival of religious virtuosity in the highly secularized United States was part of the rise of the counterculture. In the last section, I want briefly to sketch some features of the counterculture from the perspective of Weber's generalizations about ideological virtuosity and of his developmental theory of the course of revolutionary beliefs.

4. TRENDS IN THE COUNTERCULTURE

The Western countercultures move between two poles. An ethic of sheer commitment based on one or another version of substantive natural law contrasts with antinomian, anarchist, and hedonist attitudes and sometimes changes into them, as has happened before in the history of virtuosi and sects. There is a wide range of demands, from rights to a minimum standard of living, compatible with liberalism, to the total instinctual liberation of the individual, a kind of libertinism. The right to equality of opportunity, a fundamental legacy of formal natural law, is again under attack from the principle of equity (which demands ethnic quotas, for instance). From Weber's perspective the moral insurrection against governmental policies and the social status quo in the 1960s appears in part as a natural rights revival and a

rekindling of the charisma of Reason, whereas in other respects the rebellions amounted to a return of nihilism, although there was almost no awareness of historical precedents among adherents and thus no traditional transmission. Again the enemies are capitalism, bureaucracy, and often enough also constitutional government with their impersonal order that does not easily yield to notions of material justice.

This natural rights revival became possible, among many other reasons, because positivism and scientism have declined precipitously as a faith, just as the liberal convictions about continuous and irreversible progress have been shattered. Hence, recourse to fundamental rights and insistence on the ought over the is, positions that once were undermined by scientism, whether Marxist or not, have today been rehabilitated. If there are no iron laws of history and no ethically compelling science of behavior, ethical choices must be made, and basic rights must be asserted, without evolutionary or scientific support. It makes historical sense that evolutionary and deterministic socialism is being rivaled, if not eclipsed, by an ethically rejuvenated Marxism that has rediscovered its hidden and long repressed ethical impulses, and that this new Marxism has linked up with the natural law core of ethical socialism and even of American liberalism.

Thus, a new ethico-political movement has emerged within intellectual strata in the United States and some other Western countries. Yet there is an important contrast to the rise of the socialist labor movement of a century ago: no new mass movement founded by intellectuals and adaptable to lower-class interests seems about to arise, not even a strongly organized student movement. Instead, many small groups of virtuosi, some pacifist, some militant, have come into being, which have their historical precedent in religious sects, utopian communes, and bands of warriors. In general, the members of these charismatic groups, which have variously embraced a new ethic of sheer commitment or a new hedonism, come again from strata without direct economic interests—from the ranks of students, a group living largely on unearned income, and from among the professoriate, which in our scheme can be classified as a group of benefice-holders. This results in the emergence of a group of declassed ideologues, mostly former students and instructors, who decided to “drop out of the system.” No matter how exalted the status of a professional-turned-guru may be within his own circle, from the dominant system’s perspective he has suffered *déclassement*; conversely, many upper-middle-class dropouts have deliberately undergone *débourgeoisement*, which contrasts vividly with the *embourgeoisement* of many workers. Finally, there are the pariah intellectuals, mostly blacks, such as Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, George Jackson, and others, who turned themselves into intellectual virtuosi in their prison cells.

The pacifist virtuosi, that means, those who in general prefer to withdraw from the dominant system rather than to fight it directly, usually embrace an eclectic world view with components of Eastern wisdom. There is also a strong Christian wing that favors fundamentalism, patriarchalism, and communalism, and in some cases, such as the Jesus Freaks, can perhaps be understood best in the typical mode

of the least rational strata with their hankering after magical salvation. By contrast, political salvation has been pursued by the secular virtuosi, who constitute the political activists and in the extreme case form warlike charismatic communities, like the Weather Underground or the Symbionese Liberation Army.

In spite of the waning of the charismatic mass excitement of the 1960s, it appears in the middle of the "calmer" seventies that a core of militant and pacifist communities are going to persist. Political terrorism and guerrilla warfare are practiced by small groups of ideological virtuosi, just as it was in the decades after 1870 when there was relative calm on the international scene. At the same time personal virtuosity challenges the institutional charisma of the established churches, from the ethico-political activism of priests and nuns to the so-called "charismatic" movement of those capable of glossolalia and other signs of personal grace and pneumatic, trance-like powers.

The new revolutionary voluntarism may be as unlikely to succeed against relatively strong governments and in the absence of profound political crises as were its predecessors between the Napoleonic period and World War I. And the new religious movements may not be able to change basically the prevailing state of affairs, namely the shrinking scope of religious influence (witness divorce and abortion legislation) and the reduction of religion to a personal choice. However, this does not mean that the new virtuosi have no impact on the world. Political and religious revolutions are very rare, but frequent has been the attempt of virtuosi to go it alone. National or world-historical success is not the decisive criterion. What counts is an exemplary way of life and personal testimony, and on this score the ideological virtuosi, whether secular revolutionaries or true religious believers, will not act differently in the future than they have in the past. Directly or indirectly, they tend to influence the ingrained patterns of thought and the life style prevailing in the dominant culture.

In conclusion, my suggestion has been that one way of comprehending some of the revolutionary challenges to the established political and religious order is through a developmental theory of modern revolutionary beliefs and through some sociological generalizations about ideological virtuosi and the propensities of groups with marginal status or without direct economic interests. Weber arrived at these generalizations in the course of his comparative study of the salvation religions and applied them with only minor modifications to modern secular ideologies. In my judgment they are indeed applicable for two reasons, one historical and one analytical: first, secularization does not mean the disappearance of basic attitudes or basic forms of social organization; rather, it does mean profound changes in the content of historical beliefs and in the combination of organizational patterns. Second, as Weber's *Sociology of Religion* moves along the path of secularization to his own time, it contributes within the architectural framework of *Economy and Society* to a sociology of the intelligentsia and of radical politics, transcending the confines of the world religions.

NOTES

1. Wolfgang Schluchter (a, b) disagrees with me on this point and argues that the ethic of responsibility is a product of secularization, since it presupposes the emergence of an ideal of individual autonomy outside of transcendental religion.
2. A first version of this section appeared in *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*.
3. This point has now also been made in an address by F. Du Plessix Gray:

The Berrigans' actions, and those of some one hundred Catholics who have participated in some twenty different draft board raids to date, are grounded in a very ancient monastic mystique that is as old as the formulation of the rule of St. Benedict. In their view, a man's witness in jail, like a monk's years of passive prayer, can aid to purify society and to abate the violence of its rulers. This view, which implies that man can help to redeem society by searching for suffering in imitation of the suffering Christ, is perhaps too utopian for most of us to bear in the 1970s.

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