

Between Charisma and Domination: On Max Weber's Critique of Democracy

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Prominent strands of contemporary democratic theory, by figuring genuine democratic agency as fundamentally disruptive, present conventional social and political institutions merely as sites of calculation and normalization. This article challenges such a view by tracing its origins in Max Weber's theory of domination. Even as many democratic theorists repudiate the political consequences of Weber's thought, they fail to fully confront the sociotheoretic categories underpinning his vision, such that these categories continue to structure conceptions of democratic agency and horizons of practical possibility in democratic theory. Here, I argue that Weber's democratic skepticism arises not, as is commonly thought, from a philosophical repudiation of the concept of legitimacy, but rather from his analysis of the origins of value systems in extraordinary ruptures with everyday experience. To move beyond Weber, democratic theorists must challenge both his distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary and his reduction of institutional politics to domination and technical control.

Can the ideal of democratic self-determination be reconciled with the realities of modern political life? For Max Weber, the answer is no, and his pessimism continues to loom large on the terrain of contemporary democratic theory. In a letter to Robert Michels, Weber famously declares utopian "every thought of abolishing the 'domination of man by man' through *any* kind of 'socialist' social system or the *most* elaborated form of 'democracy'" (quoted in Hennis [1988, 246], emphasis in original; see also Lassman 2000). While Weber's continued presence is most resonant in avowedly realist modes of democratic theory (Green 2009), his influence also extends to thinkers who seek to preserve a vision of democratic agency that transcends the terms of liberal-democratic institutionalism. Focusing on the tensions between democratic agency and existing, institutional forms, such radical democratic theorists seek to harness "democratic energy, insight, and imagination without, however, immediately subordinating this vitality to the potentially deadening weight of procedures, rules, and institutions" (Norval 2012, 811). Perhaps surprisingly, given the pessimism evident in his letter to Michels, Weber has provided resources for this vitalist view of democracy: many theorists advancing such a view use his thought to identify how authentic democratic

action can result in the extraordinary constitution of new political forms (Kalyvas 2008).

Yet, given Weber's skepticism concerning modern democracy, can these radical strands of democratic theory appropriate Weber for their more vitalist understanding of political agency? In the following, I argue that many forms of contemporary democratic theory are held captive by Weber's thought, reproducing, rather than overcoming, his opposition between political agency and inevitably hierarchical institutional structures. In addition to intervening in these current debates, my way of pursuing the issue challenges readings of Weber's thought that trace his resignation regarding domination to any one of the following sources: his nationalist belief in German self-assertion (Mommson 1990), an ideological justification of capitalist irrationality (Marcuse 1968), his positivist approach to legitimacy (Campbell 1986; Habermas 1971), or an inability to pursue his own analysis in a more popularly democratic direction (Breiner 1996; Kalyvas 2008). All such readings, I contend, fail to explicate the sociotheoretical roots of Weber's approach to domination. As a result, they do not fully challenge and displace Weber's political realism and so find themselves defending democratic ideals and institutions with concepts already structured by his stance.

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Research for this article was supported by the Mellon Foundation and a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Doctoral Fellowship (grant 752-2012-0710).

Drawing together his methodological writings with his sociology of religion and of domination, here I reconstruct the underlying sociotheoretic commitments that drive Weber's view of democracy and domination. I argue, in particular, that Weber's view of democracy is generated by his understanding of the relationship between "the everyday," "personality," and "value," a relationship that in turn rests on his distinction between ordinary and extraordinary needs.¹ Personality, I contend, constitutes the normative horizon for Weber's thought. In his view, one becomes a personality by orienting oneself toward ultimate values, and these values arise in response to the extraordinary need for meaning in the face of suffering. Thus, Weber's understanding of personality crucially buttresses his pessimistic account of domination, insofar as personality and value are both sustained in constant tension with the demands of everyday needs and the structures of domination that those needs generate.

Before reading Weber's sociology of religion as an account of the origin of values, I first turn to his methodological writings and his discussion of Protestantism to gain a handle on his view of personality. Showing that these writings are united by a concern with the burdens faced by individuals attempting to form a personality in late modernity, I then examine how that same concern animates Weber's discussion of domination and religion in *Economy and Society*. Against the impression that Weber's later sociology is fundamentally eclectic, I show how both the sociologies of domination and of religion are systematically unified around Weber's distinction between ordinary and extraordinary needs. Value ultimately arises from the demand to satisfy extraordinary needs—paradigmatically, the need for salvation—needs that stand in permanent tension with the demands of everyday, material life. And while extraordinary needs are also, in their purest form, egalitarian, the demands of the everyday inevitably produce hierarchical structures of domination.

Thus, Weber determines that democratic ideals and egalitarian claims are incompatible with the instrumental imperatives of the everyday and the hierarchical relationships demanded by the ongoing satisfaction of everyday needs. Prominent modes of contemporary democratic theorists, even as they seek to move beyond Weber, reproduce his vision of both everyday needs and political institutions. Identifying democracy with the ruptural, anti-institutional agency of the

people, they concur with Weber in reducing institutions to calculation and normalization. I conclude, then, by examining in more detail how Weber's assumptions continue to inform democratic theory. I argue, in particular, that in order to overcome Weber, democratic theorists must displace both the view that the everyday is primarily a domain of instrumentality as well as the idea that stable institutions inherently render political phenomena predictable and calculable. Only then can democratic theory articulate the possibilities for popular mobilization and judgment within institutional forms of which Weber was deeply skeptical.

PERSONALITY AND VALUE

Read together, Weber's methodological writings and his account of the structure of *The Protestant Ethic* emerge as fundamentally concerned with the relationship between personality and value—and, most centrally, with confronting his reader with the burden of forming a personality without metaphysical certainties. While previous commentators have called attention to both the political subtext of Weber's methodological writings (Wolin 1981) and the importance for them of Weber's concept of personality (Owen and Strong 2004), my reading, by focusing on the role played by ultimate values in constituting personality, discloses the intimate connections between Weber's understanding of personality and his view of domination.

Central to this connection is his distinction between material/ordinary needs and ideal/extraordinary needs. For Weber, humans, as cultural beings, have an ideal need for a meaningful explanation of their activities, and these needs are often in tension with our ordinary need to secure material sustenance. Ultimately, Weber thinks we have an ideal need for systems of meaning that can explain the existence of suffering in the world and provide individuals with a path to overcoming their existential guilt. While he thinks such a need is universal, in Weber's view most people tend to unreflectively accept the inherited meanings of their society. For Weber, though, these inherited meaningful systems originate in movements that enact extraordinary ruptures with everyday activities. The ideal need for meaning thus is an extraordinary need because efforts to fully satisfy it reject our immersion in the everyday in favor of an exclusive focus on salvation. Similarly, Weber construes personality as arising through the pursuit of a calling as an end in itself, without searching for a guarantee of meaning in the structure of the world. And this leads him, in his dramatization of the burden of forming a personality, to construct an opposition between our instrumental and calculable everyday pursuits within structures of domination and the ultimate values that provide them with meaning—values that arise from and retain a

1. For previous efforts to relate Weber's democratic theory to his understanding of personality, see Shaw (2008) and Warren (1988). While Shaw goes further than most in identifying the connections between Weber's views of personality, religion, and democracy, she does not examine how Weber's interpretation of Christianity is itself produced by his understanding of value and the ordinary/extraordinary distinction.

connection to extraordinary ruptures with instituted forms of domination.

Weber's methodological essays were an intervention in the so-called value-judgment dispute (*Werturteilsstreit*) in German sociology (see Ciaffa 1998). The dispute concerned the appropriate role that the social sciences should play in guiding social and political decisions. And although Weber argued vehemently that social scientists should refrain from prescribing political ideologies, thus associating him with the ideal of value-freedom in scientific research (Ciaffa 1998, 105–14), I contend here that Weber's defense of value-freedom was more basically driven by his concern that the apparent objectivity of the social sciences masks substantive value disagreements and so the necessity of taking a stance on values. Thus, for example, he argued at the 1909 Vienna conference of the Verein für Sozialpolitik that the concept of "productivity" transformed problems of "world-shaking importance" into "a technical and economic question" to be solved by specialized disciplines (Weber 2012a, 359). Neither a silencing of value judgments nor a denial of their importance for the construction of empirical knowledge, Weber advances these concepts to clarify the unavoidable basis of cultural knowledge in the normative demand to form an autonomous personality.

To make this case, Weber's methodological writings seek to derive, through a quasi-transcendental argument, the possibility of a social science from the notion of personality. And personality, for Weber, exists only in relationship to values. "The dignity of a personality," he writes, "is that it espouses certain values to which it relates its life" (Weber 2012b, 103, hereafter cited as "O"). By values and value systems, Weber is thinking of the ultimate, orienting ends the consistent pursuit of which gives an individual life consistency and meaning. Weber worries that if those values are taken as objectively given features of the world rather than as subjective commitments, individuals will see no need to consciously reflect on and affirm them and so will not live a life of "meaning and significance" (O, 103). While these values are object-like in the sense that they are historically inherited as part of our cultural world, they are only binding insofar as individuals subjectively take them up by making them the basis of their activities. Humans, Weber writes, "are cultural beings, endowed with the capacity and the will to adopt a deliberate *position* towards the world, and to bestow *meaning* upon it," and this is "the transcendental presupposition of every *cultural science*" (O, 119, emphasis in original). Values reflect our ability to take a stance toward external reality and relate brute facts to complexes of meaning and the realization of ends.

Weber further accentuates the subjective basis of all knowledge of cultural reality through a critique of attempts to exceed the transcendental limits of such knowledge. Echoing

Kant, Weber argues that the great intellectual threat to human autonomy is precisely the metaphysical exaggeration of human capacities.² Against the view that the ultimate goal of the social sciences is simply an accurate description of external reality, Weber argues that, in itself, social reality is just a manifold of discrete appearances: "as soon as we seek to reflect upon the way in which we encounter life in its immediate aspect, [we see that] it presents an absolute infinite multiplicity of events 'within' and 'outside' ourselves, [events that] emerge and fade away successively and concurrently" (O, 114). Without the constitutive role of human subjectivity via cultural values, cultural reality is infinitely unknowable. Consequently, Weber emphasizes that individuals only form the infinite manifold of sense perception into an object of study selecting those aspects that "have significance and importance [for us] *today*" (O, 116, emphasis in original). He writes, "the concept of culture is a *value-concept*. Empirical reality becomes 'culture' to us because and insofar as we relate it to value ideas. It includes those segments of reality which have become significant to us because of this value-relevance" (O, 76, emphasis in original). Crucially, this means that values *constitute* the object of social scientific study rather than just leading the social scientists in the selection of objects of study (see Habermas 1971, 61–62).

In drawing out these points, Weber wants to compel social scientific researchers to acknowledge that they have chosen a certain value position in pursuing their research. The overarching goal of the methodological writings is to critically establish the boundaries of social scientific knowledge so that such knowledge can further, rather than efface, this human capacity to autonomously determine the ultimate ends of social action. For Weber, the pursuit of a presuppositionless description of the social world rests on an evasion of the individual responsibility to form a personality by affirming and sustaining values. In this respect, Weber's argument for the transcendental role of subjective values in giving form to concrete experience further accentuates the importance of personality for social scientific research: even if they are not fully aware of it, social scientific researchers ultimately deploy their capacity to affirm values in constituting their objects of study (see Goldman 1992, 73; Owen and Strong 2004, xxvii). Weber's emphasis on the constitutive role of value relations is an attack on the lingering metaphysics implicit in the work of his contemporary social scientists. According to Weber, dominant approaches in the social sciences are tempted into a metaphysical stance by thinking that their theoretical constructs, at least as a regulative ideal, should strive for an accurate re-

2. For the neo-Kantian roots of Weber's view, see especially Ringer (1997).

flection of reality. From there, it is only a small step to think that the value commitments motivating social scientific research are not chosen commitments but rather grounded in the nature of that described reality. As such, Weber argues that only through an awareness of the critical foundations of the knowledge of cultural reality, and by incorporating such awareness into research, can social science actualize the human capacity to autonomously choose values and become a personality.

Towards the end of "Objectivity," Weber remarks that, while most social scientists are either fact-obsessed specialists or else grandiose interpreters who disdain facts, the "genuine artistry" of great social science "precisely consists in relating *known* facts to *known* viewpoints but nevertheless creating something new" (O, 138, emphasis in original). I now turn to examine Weber's seminal work of social science, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism* (Weber 2002), to show how it continues the project Weber announces in "Objectivity": to reformulate the "historically given value-judgments and ideas" that animate capitalism so as to disclose what it would entail to embrace or renounce them as ultimate values. Such a formulation will enable individuals to become aware "of the ultimate standards of value" which we do not "make explicit" to ourselves (O, 103). In short, Weber makes it clear that the contribution of the essay is not to bring to light previously unknown empirical facts. Rather, he opposes his essay to received interpretations of the cultural significance of the emergence of modern capitalism—that is, its significance in relation to values and personality. This effort, then, introduces a historical dimension into Weber's critical aspirations. It is not sufficient to delineate the transcendental limits of social scientific knowledge. Weber also seeks to disclose the historical conditions of possibility of the value orientations currently available to self-determining subjects. Weber indicates that this historical effort has two dimensions: the first, to understand the emergence of a world within which something like modern economic theory is descriptively useful; and second, to unearth the implicit value orientations that make that world possible, so as to critically aid the formation of autonomous personalities in his contemporary capitalist society.

Thus, Weber takes it for granted that Protestantism had a consequential influence on the development of capitalism—the real debate, for him, is over the cultural structure of this influence and so of its cultural relevance for those who, unlike the Puritans, are forced to live in a world structured around "the calling" as an absolute end (Weber 2002, 120, hereafter cited as *PSC*). In this regard, Weber positions his analysis against the tendency of his contemporaries to view capitalism in terms of "the 'spirit of labor,' of 'progress' . . . the

awakening of which is customarily attributed to Protestantism . . . in an 'Enlightenment' sense" (*PSC*, 7). Indeed, in his last lectures Weber portrays "the optimism of the Enlightenment which believed in the harmony of interests" as the "heir" of Protestantism in the realm of economic ideas (Weber 1981, 369). Ironically, then, his contemporaries' interpretations of the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism already presuppose the value orientation produced by the Protestant ethic—an instance of how the sediment of past values enables the evasion of personality. In particular, Weber argues that the awareness of the constitutive role of subjectivity and so personality in social scientific research has been obscured by the idea, inherited from less rigorous strains of Protestantism, that "economic processes were governed by immutably invariant laws of nature, and, later, the belief that they conformed to an unambiguous evolutionary principle. Consequently, what *ought to be* was seen as coinciding, in the first case, with what immutably *existed*, and, in the second case, with what would inevitably *emerge*" (O 101, emphasis in original).

Weber's imagined interlocutor, then, is not someone who would deny that Protestantism was decisive for the emergence of capitalism but rather someone who thinks that the crucial link between Protestantism and capitalism is to be found in "allegedly more or less materialistic or at least anti-ascetic 'worldly happiness'" (*PSC*, 7). And he is concerned to provide an alternate account of this relationship—one that focuses on the "purely *religious* features" of Protestantism (*PSC*, 7, emphasis in original)—because he thinks that the notion of a transition from an idealistic to a materialistic set of motivations obscures the ultimate values embedded in a capitalist form of life, instead presenting it as just a structure of material needs. In order to draw out the meaning of this transition for those who would take up the burden of forming a personality, Weber emphasizes its ideal-typical character. His notion of the "spirit" of capitalism is "a complex of configuration in historical reality which we consolidate together conceptually from the point of view of their *cultural significance* to form a single whole" (*PSC*, 8, emphasis in original). To trace the spirit of capitalism back to Protestant asceticism is to call attention to one aspect of the intentional, subjective orientations toward value that is the historical condition of possibility of capitalist social relationships.

Thus, from a broad vantage point, Weber tries to imagine what it entails to construct a social order where our relationship to our everyday, economic activities has taken on a compulsive and rationalized structure so as to enable his readers to confront the value orientation they are compelled to live out. At the same time, though, *The Protestant Ethic* is itself a story about the nature of personality, with the ascetic

discipline of the Puritans dramatizing the sort of practical orientation toward personality formation that follows from the complete refusal either of transcendental fixtures or unreflective immersion in the everyday.³ In this regard, it is central that *The Protestant Ethic* is organized around a contrast between a traditional ethos and the spirit of capitalism. In Weber's description, capitalism is constituted by an ethic, "so familiar to us today and yet in reality far from self-evident," that says "that *one's duty consists in pursuing one's calling*, and that the individual should have a commitment to his 'profession' activity, whatever it may consist of" (PSC, 13, emphasis in original). The spirit of capitalism, Weber declares, is "irrational from the point of view of pure eudaemonistic self-interest" (PSC, 28); it marks a "reversal . . . of what we may call the 'natural' state of affairs" of traditionalism (PSC, 12). Put differently, ordinary or material needs alone cannot generate self-perpetuating accumulation. Primitive accumulation requires precisely that entrepreneurs produce beyond their immediate needs and reinvest their profits (see Breiner 2005).

In short, capitalism simply cannot be about the satisfaction of material wants, which, because of their repetitive character, Weber ties to a traditionalist ethos that he takes pains to present as rational. The origins of capitalism must, then, reside in some mode of satisfaction of nonmaterial needs, what Weber also calls ideal needs and which I examine in more depth in my analysis of the extraordinary. This is brought out in Weber's account of the relationship between the rationalization of conduct, secular everyday labor (*weltlichen Alltagsarbeit*), and the "extremely effective *psychological premiums* (not economic in character)" that the Puritans received (PSC, 349, emphasis in original). It was the fact that they went about satisfying their extraordinary needs in a way that refused all magic, and thus direct contact with transcendence, that led the Puritans to channel their needs (asceticism) into everyday activities (innerworldly). Weber's narrative is that the progressive removal of transcendental guarantees of salvation, driven by Protestant prophetic attacks on the confusion of the sacred and the profane, forced the satisfaction of extraordinary needs into "secular everyday life" (PSC, 105). The further the transcendent receded, the more important the everyday became for activities that were nonetheless "neither of this world nor for it" (PSC, 105, emphasis in original).

3. Although Weber's ideal of personality is clearly indebted to the Protestant calling—and certainly his contemporary historical conditions demand a reckoning with the Protestant iteration of personality—his notion of personality is broader, as evinced, for instance, in Weber's interpretation of the prophet, who in many respects also embodies the ideal of personality.

For instance, Luther's rejection of monastic asceticism as a transcendental justification before God led him to argue for the "religious significance of secular everyday labor (*weltlichen Alltagsarbeit*)" (PSC, 29, emphasis in original). The pursuit of a calling could provide the transcendental assurance that was previously supplied through contact with the sanctity of the monastic orders. Yet, in Weber's account, Luther still relied on a transcendental promise that one's station was "a special *command* of God" (PSC, 31, emphasis in original). In other words, the Lutherans were not thrown back entirely upon their own subjectivity: there was still an "objective historical order" that could secure their salvation and leave most ordinary activity oriented toward the routine fulfillment of their ordinary needs (PSC, 31, emphasis in original). The Lutherans were not forced to rely entirely on their own ability to lend meaning and value to their existence. They could still find, immanent to their ordinary existence (i.e., their given station of life into which they were born), objective guarantees that satisfied their extraordinary needs and so left their everyday, economic conduct relatively untouched. It was only with the pure, rational refusal of any contact with the transcendental that the Puritans turned the pursuit of a calling into "an end-in-itself," something "wholly transcendent . . . beyond the 'happiness' or the 'benefit' of singular individuals" (PSC, 12). For the Puritans, there were *no* objective sources of intelligibility or order within the world. They had to create, alone, their own justification before God. As a result, the demands of transcendence—that one approach an activity without any instrumentality or egoism whatsoever—was channeled into the only available source of justification, which was inner-worldly activity. And here Weber's description of the Puritan pursuit of the calling intersects with his own understanding of personality.

Recall that Weber insisted that social scientists should conduct research such that they methodically foreground the subjective value constitution of their topic of study and never confuse their own value stance for something that is objectively guaranteed. Similarly, the Puritan pursuit of a calling was driven by the attempt to satisfy what Weber takes to be the original question that generates value systems—what justifies existence in the face of suffering?—without recourse to any extrasubjective supports (see Weber 1946).⁴ The ascetic response to this problem was to rationalize a method of living such that it released the individual "from dependency on the world and nature" and subjected the self "to the supremacy of the purposeful will" (PSC, 81). The goal of methodical conduct, Weber writes, is to turn the Puritan into

4. Weber calls the desire for an answer to this question an "ineradicable need" (*unausrottbare Bedürfnis*) (1946, 275).

“a ‘*personality*’” (emphasis added), one who “‘*creates*’ his salvation *himself*” (PSC, 81, 79, emphasis in original). In this description, personality is found in the alienation from the immediate world and the pursuit of something that goes beyond the given. It is only once the Puritans rejected magical and transcendental guarantees evident in the everyday that they oriented themselves entirely toward becoming a personality, someone who methodically subordinates their given, ordinary needs and conduct to a higher purpose.

In its pure form, the Calvinist pursued their calling without any regard to the content of that calling or the consequences of their activities. However, while the ideal-typical Puritan, like Calvin himself, could endure the inability to know where they fit into God’s plan, the psychological burden this placed on “ordinary people” transformed the nature of the pursuit of a noninstrumental purpose (PSC, 76). And crucially, these nonvirtuosos looked to the domain of everyday, material needs for such an objective and intelligible guarantee. Less rigorous Puritan thinkers such as Baxter argued for “the providential character of the interplay of private economic interests” which “one can recognize . . . by their *fruits*,” a notion Weber links to “Adam Smith’s well-known apotheosis of the division of labor” (PSC, 109, emphasis in original). For Puritans who could not bear the full burden of pursuing their calling entirely as an end in itself, the objective result of the economic system, such as profits, became a providential sign that satisfied their need for an objective justification before God—thereby laying the groundwork for Weber’s above-noted critique of the inherited erasure of the gap between values and the world.

Weber seems to think that these objective and calculable outcomes of market forces are a lure for a secular theodicy that obscures its subjective basis through seemingly technical concepts like productivity and progress. It is in order to disabuse his reader of this temptation that Weber portrays the individual confronting the “mighty cosmos of the modern economic order” whose “overwhelming coercion” determines the minutest details of individual life conduct (PSC, 120) as strictly analogous to the experience of the highest Puritan in front of a fully inaccessible God, “remote from any human understanding, a being who had allotted to each individual his destiny according to his entirely unfathomable decree, and who controlled the tiniest detail of the cosmos” (PSC, 73). Just as the strict Puritan could find no source of justification in God’s cosmos, so too, Weber seems to be saying, should we give up any hope of finding an immanent source of meaning in the modern economic and administrative cosmos. In short, it was only when the economic order was enchanted as a source of justification that the Protestant spirit could be sustained by enough nonvirtuosos

such that it would lead to the development of a capitalist cosmos. Yet it is precisely this enchantment Weber wants to dissolve so as again to compel his readers to confront the burden of constructing a personality with no metaphysical buttresses. Social scientific research can unearth and bring to the fore the ultimate values embedded in the structures of our everyday activities and experiences. And on this basis one can then recognize and affirm those values as ends in themselves and thereby pursue those activities such as to become a personality.

However, even as Weber’s account of personality rests on an opposition between unreflective immersion in the everyday and the achievement of personality, it is vital to note that personality does not exist in complete opposition to or flight from the everyday. The specific content of a calling, such as the vocation of being a scientist or an artist, is always, to an extent, pre-given by the existing routines and structures of various value spheres. Indeed, Weber criticizes, especially in his later writings such as “Science as a Vocation,” those who are unable to “meet the challenge of . . . *everyday life*” and so seek escape into undifferentiated artistic or religious experiences (Weber 2004, 24, emphasis in original). Thus, as Harvey Goldman emphasizes, a crucial aspect of forming a personality is “submission or devotion to the work or object” (Goldman 1992, 73). Yet the embrace of a pre-given calling is not itself sufficient. One must also come to recognize the values embedded in the everyday as ultimate values, values that arise in response to our ideal or extraordinary needs, and so to achieve an appropriate distance from one’s own calling. Like the strict Calvinist, we must learn to pursue a calling because of a devotion to those ultimate values as ends in themselves and not because of the specific content of one’s chosen vocation. Only then can one potentially generate the emergence of something extraordinary and new: “inspiration” in science and, more importantly, the charismatic leadership in the political world that can perhaps generate the new values and loyalties that would overcome bureaucratic inertia (Weber 2004, 8, 74–75).⁵

I have dealt with these works by Weber not just to reveal the underlying normative impulse animating them. Weber’s

5. For an insightful reading of how Weber’s view of personality in politics—responsible leadership—balances commitment to the everyday with an openness to the incalculable, see Satkunanandan (2014). I am less sanguine than Satkunanandan, however, that Weber’s conception of responsibility can be divorced from his elitist political program. In my reading, Weber’s view of everyday norms as instrumentally calculable is precisely what grounds his view that political institutions are inevitably structures of domination—a central tenet informing his political worldview.

conception of the relationship between value and personality also crucially illuminates his account of domination, helping to reveal the systematic coherence of his view. Indeed, the central distinction driving Weber's view of personality—between heteronomous acceptance of the everyday and the achievement of personality by recognizing values as ends in themselves and acting on that basis—reappears as the structuring thought of Weber's view of domination. Even as it can be achieved within the everyday, Weber's notion of personality presupposes that our mundane activities and routines are characteristically calculable and instrumental, such that we can only confront them properly when we recognize the ultimate values that structure and give meaning to their instrumental routines. Similarly, Weber's view of domination is based on an opposition between everyday needs and the extraordinary needs that find satisfaction through ruptures with existing orders of domination.

Thus, Weber's account of personality and his view of domination are mutually reinforcing: his portrayal of everyday institutions as inherently structured by instrumentality and domination further accentuates the burden of forming a personality and achieving the requisite distance from the everyday. Although the achievement of personality must occur through a negotiation of the demands of the everyday, it also requires taking a distance from the everyday and the affirmation of ultimate values—a distance that is possible because values retain a connection to extraordinary breaks with the everyday. Thus, while personality itself can be sustained outside of such moments of extraordinary rupture, the necessary distance from the everyday reflects the lingering traces of the extraordinary in ultimate values, as exemplified in the Calvinist subordination of the everyday to the value of salvation. And, in turn, much of Weber's interpretations of epochal political tendencies, such as the rationalization of domination into bureaucracy or the susceptibility of the masses to demagogic leadership, are deeply informed by his normative goal of compelling some people to take on the task of achieving a personality even in our disenchanting world (see Goldman 184–92).

DOMINATION AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

In his later work, Weber more fully develops the conceptual linkages, only implicit in *The Protestant Ethic*, between values and extraordinary ruptures with the everyday. In his account of the interrelated nature of the extraordinary, charisma, and value rationality, Weber intimates that our capacity to autonomously form a personality is predicated on past, and perhaps future, charismatic movements that proclaim new values through ruptures with the everyday. Here, I examine the fragments collected as *Economy and Society*

to show how Weber's concept of personality and his distinction between ideal and ordinary needs translates into a sociology of domination organized around a fundamental differentiation between “ordinariness” or “everydayness” (*Alltäglichkeit*) and “extraordinariness” (*Außeralltäglichkeit*). Moreover, Weber's sociology of domination adds a collective dimension to his understanding of personality. From the vantage of his account of domination, the demand to form a personality represents the traces of collective autonomy in an era of legal-rational domination. While he never explicitly theorizes it as such, Weber's analysis of value rationality and natural law both point to an ideal of collective autonomy—of political institutions that unite our individual wills with the general will embodied in law. Weber's account of domination, centered on his distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary, grounds his rejection of the possibility of collective autonomy in late modernity and his alternate demand for individuals to take on the burden of personality. And, as I discuss in the next section, even as contemporary democratic theorists reject Weber's concrete prescriptions, they nonetheless inherit this distinction in how they conceive of democratic agency in the modern state.

It may seem strange to identify autonomy as one of the guiding concerns for Weber in *Economy and Society*. It is, at first glance, Weber's most cold and “value-free” text, his attempt to construct, as he wrote to his publisher, a “closed sociological theory and account that relates all major forms of community to the economy” (quoted in Radkau 2012, 412). Nonetheless, I think that a systematic reconstruction of Weber's core concepts reveals there to be several questions and analytic distinctions that, to a large extent, structure his effort in *Economy and Society*, all of which circle around the question of autonomy. At the core of Weber's conceptual terrain is his tripartite definition of domination—traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic—which in turn are structured around two binaries: ordinary/extraordinary and naturalistic/rationalized. For Weber, values are essentially noninstrumental, a quality he associates most deeply with extraordinary charismatic experiences and the satisfaction of our ideal needs—paradigmatically the need for salvation. Instrumentality and domination are thus relegated to domains entirely determined by material needs, which Weber links with traditional and legal-rational domination. Thus, Weber tends to map the division between the ordinary and the extraordinary onto that between autonomy and heteronomy, where autonomy is secured by orienting action toward the values revealed in extraordinary ruptures and so is in tension with the heteronomous domain of everyday economic necessity and institutional domination. Thus, contrary to the appearance that *Economy and Society* is eclectic and fragmentary, I con-

tend that it is far from accidental that Weber selects these three modes of legitimating domination as the framework for his general sociological theory.

While previous commentators have examined the important interrelations between Weber's accounts of personality, charisma, and domination, they have failed to specify the role of the ordinary/extraordinary distinction in generating Weber's pessimistic view of democracy. Though Kalyvas (2008) highlights the extraordinary as a category in Weber, he fails to account for the importance of natural law in the structure of Weber's argument, such that Kalyvas does not acknowledge that Weber has a well-developed view of "collective self-determination, in the sense of a union of particular wills capable of issuing higher laws" and why it is no longer a viable political model (Kalyvas 2008, 69, cf. 65). Breiner's (1996) important account more fully addresses this problem and, as do I, points to the mutually constitutive relationship between Weber's analyses of personality and his account of domination. Weber's "typology of legitimate forms of domination . . . [is] constructed from the vantage point of the very ethic [of personality] they are meant to instantiate," writes Breiner (1996, 212). The following builds on Breiner's insight by drawing attention to the importance of the extraordinary in how Weber constructs his typology of domination in relation to personality and value. The apparent circularity of Weber's argument is dissolved once we see how both his account of domination and his view of personality arise from the idea that ultimate values originate in the demand to satisfy extraordinary needs—and so in charismatic ruptures with instituted orders of domination.⁶

In my reading, the central problem for understanding Weber's critique of democracy is grasping why he rejects value rationality as a legitimating basis for stable social orders.⁷ While value rationality is, in Weber's initial sociological categories, one of the four possible grounds for the belief in the validity of an order (alongside affective, traditional, and legal-rational), when it comes to his discussion of legitimate domination, only the latter three of the catego-

ries are enumerated as a possible basis for legitimate orders (charismatic, traditional, and rational, respectively). Why does value rationality fall out? As we will see, it is because value rationality is actually charisma in its most ethically rigorous and so most extraordinary form, whereby it fully answers the extraordinary need for meaning and salvation but is irreconcilably opposed to the domain of everyday, material concerns.

So, to begin with, Weber defines domination (*Herrschaft*) as "the situation in which the manifested will (*command*) of the ruler or rulers is meant to influence the conduct of one or more others (*the ruled*) and actually does influence it in such a way that their conduct to a socially relevant degree occurs as if the ruled had made the content of the command the maxim of their conduct for its very own sake" (Weber 1978, 946, hereafter cited in text as *ES*).⁸ Two things are worth noting about this definition. First, Weber does not emphasize the substantive content of the beliefs that ground orders of domination. Rather, his analysis occurs on a more formal level: he is interested in the structures that relate the commands of rulers to the conduct of the ruled. And second, he emphasizes how in relations of domination, the dominated come to act as though the command is an end in itself. That is, they act in the exact opposite manner of a personality. And so acting in complete accordance with a structure of domination is the inverse of becoming a personality.

This definition already starts to indicate why value rationality vanishes from Weber's inventory of domination. In his first discussion of how actors may "ascribe legitimacy to a social order," Weber includes "value-rational belief: valid is that which has been deduced as an absolute" (*ES*, 36). The pure type of legitimacy grounded through this belief is, Weber says, "*natural law*," which consists of the "the sum total of all those norms which are valid independently of, and superior to, any positive law" (*ES*, 37, 867 emphasis in original). Yet, in an ideal-typical order grounded in natural law, rulers and ruled would be in a situation of equality vis-à-vis the dictates of natural law, which emerge not from a particular will but from the "immanent and teleological qualities" of the meaningful universe (*ES*, 867). In other words, legitimate domination and value rationality operate as something like opposed ends of a continuum in Weber's thought—the belief in the latter entails the denial of the presence of the former (domination/instrumentality) in a given social situation. This, however, only begins to indicate an answer to the question of why Weber excludes value rationality from the

6. For Breiner, the circularity of Weber's argument means that we can divorce his analysis of responsible political action from his normative effort to reinforce an "aristocratic" account of selfhood, such that Weber's ethic of responsibility could support participatory democracy (Breiner 1996, 165, cf. 182–92). Although I am sympathetic to this effort, Breiner's approach leaves unchallenged the conceptual and practical gulf between ultimate values and the mundane world of instrumental, means-ends calculations—precisely the divide that grounds both Weber's pessimistic analysis of domination and his defense of the ideal of personality.

7. For a helpful discussion of Weber's exclusion of value rationality from his notion of legitimate domination, on which the following builds, see the discussion in Barker (1980) and Breiner (1996, 143–44).

8. I check this translation against Weber (1980) and modify where necessary.

legitimizing grounds for domination. Indeed, the question then becomes why Weber assumes it is historically and empirically impossible to ground a social order in natural law and thus render domination value rational. To return to my earlier question: what entitles him to the claim that domination—the rule of some over others—is an ineradicable feature of social existence?

The answer to this question resides in the relationship among Weber's three forms of legitimate domination, which is organized around the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary needs. At the center of his sociology of domination, Weber places three types of social orders and three distinct "claims to legitimacy" (ES, 215): traditional domination legitimates itself on the basis of "the sanctity of immemorial traditions" (ES, 215), legal-rational on the basis of a system of formal rules that empowers officeholders, and charisma on the basis of the extraordinary personal qualities of the ruler. Crucially, unlike the possible subject orientations by which actors "ascribe" legitimacy to an order—traditional, affectual, legal, and value rational—Weber develops these three forms of domination from an external perspective that considers the necessary objective and material conditions of their sustained existence. Put differently, Weber folds into his conceptualizations the problem of how sustained relationships of domination confront the need to materially reproduce themselves. This is reflected in the centrality of material needs and the demands of the everyday in Weber's account of the three forms of legitimate domination. Thus, despite their differences, bureaucracy (legal-rational domination) and patrimony (traditional domination) are both "structures of everyday life [*Alltagsgebilde*] . . . concerned with the satisfaction of recurring, normal everyday needs [*Alltagsbedarfs*]" (ES, 1111). In contrast, charisma is the mode of domination characteristic of the satisfaction of "extraordinary needs, i.e., those which go beyond the sphere of everyday economic routines [*ökonomischen Alltags*]" (ES, 1111, emphasis in original) and so is a form of domination in constant tension with the ongoing demand for material reproduction. Charisma satisfies a different category of needs from traditional and bureaucratic domination: the extraordinary need for meaning and ultimately for salvation, an answer to the problems posed by theodicy.

The relationship between the forms of domination is thus organized around this distinction between everyday and extraordinary needs (see table 1). On the one side is legal-rational and patriarchal domination, with the first rationalized and the second naturalistic; on the other, charisma and (while empirically nonexistent) value-rational domination. And charisma, and, by extension, value rationality, have a privileged location in Weber's account: as that which breaks

Table 1. Forms of Domination in Weber's Sociology

| | Material/Ordinary Needs | Ideal/Extraordinary Needs |
|------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Naturalistic Rationalized | Patriarchal Bureaucratic (legal-rational) | Charismatic Value-rational |

with the ordinary, charisma is "the specifically creative revolutionary force of history," the only form of domination which, rather than being subject to necessity, "seeks to make material and social conditions according to its revolutionary will" (ES, 1116–17). Furthermore, the charismatic satisfaction of extraordinary needs, once rationalized, provides the ground for value-rational action, which Weber defines as action "determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some [action] . . . independently of its prospects of success" (ES, 24–25). In Weber's theory, value-rational action finds its historical basis insofar as charismatic movements satisfy and respond to the extraordinary need for meaning in the face of suffering. And it is this value-rational subordination of material needs to methodical conduct that, for Weber, is the precondition for autonomy—for forming oneself into a personality.

The important associations between the extraordinary, value rationality, and autonomy are thrown into high relief by Weber's description of social orders based on everyday, material needs, a description that positions them as thoroughly heteronomous. Weber repeatedly emphasizes how patriarchal and bureaucratic domination are based on specific modes of economic accumulation. Each is constituted by a distinctive mode of satisfying everyday, material needs. Patriarchy rests on an economic system that is fixed within the limits set by natural needs, while bureaucratic domination is tied to the self-aggrandizing dynamic of capitalist accumulation. Based on "personal relations that are perceived as natural" (ES, 1007), patrimonial domination is the form of domination that is least perceived as the product of conscious human effort or will. And central to its logic, according to Weber, are the static material needs of the patrimonial master. Patrimonial domination "is not direct toward monetary acquisition but toward the satisfaction of the master's wants" (ES, 1010, cf. ES, 1014). Because the master's wants are only "quantitatively different from that of his subjects," the patrimonial ruler can use surplus production to reduce the exploitation of his subjects, a possibility that is absent where there is "a qualitative expansion of needs which is in principle limitless" (ES, 1011). In sum, patrimonial domination

is, in Weber's description, a mode of satisfying ordinary needs that is in principle delimited by the actual or real biological needs of individuals.

Bureaucracy, the institutional form legitimated through legal-rational means, is, in Weber's description, opposed to patrimonial domination in every respect save one. Where patrimonial domination is personal, bureaucratic domination is impersonal; where the origins of the traditional norms constraining patrimonial domination are shrouded in mystery, the entire validity of the norms governing bureaucracy consists in the nature of their enactment; where the will of the patrimonial ruler is free unless constrained by tradition, the bureaucrat can only issue a command if it is in conformity with a rational system of norms and thus, in a strict sense, is as much dominated by the abstract order as are the subordinates. At the same time, both bureaucracy and patrimonial domination are instrumentally oriented toward satisfying everyday, material needs. Yet, there is again one crucial difference in their respective foundations in everyday needs, and from this difference flows, in Weber's account, all the other oppositions enumerated above. While patrimonial domination rests concretely on the fixed needs of the patrimonial ruler and his subordinates, bureaucratic domination is tied abstractly to the, in principle, unlimited drive for capitalist accumulation. "The development of the *money economy* is the presupposition of a modern bureaucracy," writes Weber (*ES*, 963, emphasis in original; cf. *ES*, 968). The crucial point is that the market economy is characterized by the fact that economic actors do not orient themselves toward "the satisfaction of wants" but toward "estimated profitability by means of calculation" (*ES*, 91, 101). Unlike the satisfaction of material wants, the calculation of profit is unlimited, and in Weber's famous description of the "mighty cosmos of the modern economic order" in *The Protestant Ethic*, it is precisely this limitless accumulation that gives capitalism its structuring force—Weber's "overwhelming coercion"—in relation to everyday life conduct (*PSC*, 120). Thus, bureaucracy too rests on a peculiar means of satisfying material, everyday needs. Only now, the material demands of society are satisfied through the rational accumulation of capital, a form of need satisfaction that produces a self-aggrandizing functional logic of profit seeking. And this demands a system of domination "whose functioning can be rationally predicted, at least in principle, by virtue of its fixed general norms, just like the expected performance of a machine" (*ES*, 1394).

The fact that patrimonial and bureaucratic domination are both instrumentally oriented toward the satisfaction of everyday needs reveals a further similarity: they are both, in Weber's account, structures of heteronomy. Again, though,

they represent two opposed ideal-typical descriptions of what it means to live in a heteronomous order. At one end, in patrimony, heteronomy consists of direct subjection to the will of another in a context where norms of action are experienced as natural and given. In many ways, patrimonial domination, as resting on the master-slave relationship, is the paradigmatic case of heteronomy, where the ruler expects the unquestioned obedience of those subject to his direct command. At the other end, bureaucratic heteronomy consists in indirect subjection to an impersonal system of rules that, while experienced as enacted, are ultimately followed simply because of the empirical circumstances of their enactment rather than because they align with a meaningful or transcendental order. Here, heteronomy is at the same time obscured and intensified, as now even "the typical person in authority . . . [is] subject to an impersonal order by orienting his actions to it in his own dispositions and commands" (*ES*, 217). However, individuals within a bureaucratic order (ideal-typically) do not view themselves as obeying the concrete will of another or working to secure their master's and their own happiness. Rather, they obey the command as an end in itself, out of a disposition of duty that disregards "personal considerations," as they owe their obedience to an "impersonal order" (*ES*, 218, 225 see also 959). That is, in a bureaucratic order, individuals recognize themselves as having the capacity to act autonomously, in the Kantian sense—placing their particular will underneath a formally general system of laws. Yet, while acting out of a sense of pure duty, Weber's bureaucrats are means without ends, subjected to whatever force or movement imposes values, from without, on the bureaucratic structure.

So far, we have seen how Weber folds the question of material reproduction into his account of legitimate domination. Identifying material or everyday needs as the basis of both patrimonial and bureaucratic domination, he presents both as social orders of heteronomy. The question, then, is where autonomy can be located in Weber's social theory; to find it, we must look to his theory of charisma. Turning to Weber's account of charisma, I argue that it functions as a contradictory form of domination in Weber's thought. While charisma often can and does legitimate rule, in its most extreme manifestations it constitutes an orientation toward ultimate values that is strictly the opposite of domination. Weber locates democracy in this space, and so his account of the impossibility of sustaining purely or value-rational social order is also, implicitly, an attack on the possibility of a democratic social order freed of the rule of man over man.

Weber provides the most sustained treatment of charisma in the "Sociology of Religion" sections of *Economy and*

Society. Initially bound up with “everyday purposive conduct” (*ES*, 400), as in the use of magic for instrumental ends, charisma develops into religious systems through the removal of charismatic experiences from the realm of the everyday—for instance, through the development of orgiastic cults—and the rationalization of initially undifferentiated charismatic experiences of spiritual forces into relatively systematic theological worldviews. In Weber’s description, the most important transition comes with the moralization of these charismatic experiences. At times of collective existential crisis—Weber’s primary example is the Israelites—charisma acquires a prophetic moralism which interprets a people’s entire fate “as constituting a pattern of ‘world history’” determined, in the Israelite’s case, by their failures to meet “the ineluctable obligation resulting from Yahweh’s promises” (*ES*, 418). Insofar as Weber thinks this represents the most rigorous form of charisma, the prophet constitutes the most important charismatic figure in Weber’s sociology. Furthermore, in his discussion of the prophet we find Weber’s fullest development of the internal connections between charisma, value rationality, and natural law.

The prophet, more than any figure in Weber’s sociology, is the autonomous creator of values. The prophet is distinct from the priest because he is answering to “the personal call” rather than subordinating his will to “a sacred tradition” (or, for that matter, the calling prescribed by a bureaucratic order), and the prophet differs from the magician because he proclaims “divine revelations” through “doctrines or commandment” (*ES*, 440). The charismatic qualities of the prophet demonstrate that the prophet is providing an authentic path to salvation. But the prophet differs from the traditional charismatic leader by promulgating a doctrine that provides both a rational, moralized explanation for individual suffering and a path to salvation. In short, the prophet marks the moment when the extraordinary nature of charisma moves from a largely affective experience of extraordinary, ecstatic states to the foundation of systematic value systems. Prophets provide to their followers “a unified view of the world derived from a consciously meaningful attitude toward life,” one that can provide a “systematic and coherent meaning, to which man’s conduct must be oriented if it is to bring salvation, and after which it must be patterned in an integrally meaningful manner” (*ES*, 450). What the prophet reveals, in short, is natural law—an immanent order to the universe that prescribes value-rational actions in response to the problem of theodicy. The prophet marks the transition from affective forms of charisma, forms which are already in tension with all forms of everyday domination, to a value-rational charisma that claims to reveal natural law. Such charisma gives normative guidance in the evaluation of existing institutional

structures and requires a complete subordination of the everyday to value-rational conduct.

Weber’s discussion of natural law reveals why such value-rational legitimation is no longer available, and thus he excludes it from his typology of domination. The meaningful order of prophetic revelation provides a standard by which to evaluate existing institutions. Similarly, natural law, as we saw, represents the idea of a system of values that stand above positive law. Natural law, Weber argues, is the form that the standards inscribed into the meaningful cosmos take “once religious revelation and the authoritarian sacredness of a tradition and its bearers have lost their force” (*ES*, 867). In other words, natural law provides a value-rational legitimacy for domination: according to natural law, an order is legitimate only insofar as it conforms to the immanent, meaningful structure of the universe. As such, the doctrines of natural law point to a possible reconciliation between individual wills and the community—between autonomy and domination—that is ruled out in both patrimonial and legal-rational domination. Why does Weber think it is no longer available as a source of legitimacy? Why must we start again, so to speak, with new forms of charismatic domination that can challenge the sclerosis of bureaucracy and tradition?

In a few condensed pages of brilliant argumentation, Weber explains the transformation of natural law as a value-rational source of legitimacy into legal-rational domination. In Weber’s view, natural law represents the fusion of the substantive—that is, value-rational—and formal—that is, instrumentally rational—elements of law. Natural law found a formal basis in liberal social contract theories that sought to ground the legitimacy of positive law in “a community of economic agreement created by the full development of property” (*ES*, 869). While this could be taken as a purely formal criteria of legitimacy, Weber perceives that its force rested on substantive beliefs about “the eternal order of nature and logic” (*ES*, 870). However, this fusion of the substantive and the formal in natural law doctrines almost immediately ran up against the problem of class: the formalism was undermined by the need to accept as legitimate “the acquisition of rights which could not be derived from freedom of contract, especially acquisition through inheritance” (*ES*, 870). In other words, the formal structure of contract ran up against the substantive question of how goods were acquired in the first place (and thus the question of divergent class interests), which points toward “socialist theories of the exclusive legitimacy of the acquisition of wealth by one’s own labor” (*ES*, 871). The fusion of substantive and formal in natural law rested, Weber’s argument suggests, on the relatively homogeneous interests of the bourgeois, and thus the emergence of working-class demands in the name of natural law inevi-

tably mobilized the substantive elements of bourgeois natural law theories against the formal elements. In a way, this was a return of natural law to its prophetic origins, as Weber views socialism as largely an “ideological surrogate” for the prophetic faith in salvation, one that provides “a quasi-religious belief in the socialist eschatology” (*ES*, 486, 515, cf. 491–92).

Because of the breakdown of the fiction of unified bourgeois interests, Weber contends that “the conflict between the axioms of substantive and formal natural law is insoluble” such that “the axioms of natural law have lost all capacity to provide the fundamental basis of a legal system” (*ES*, 874). All that remains as a source for legal authority is then the formal aspect of natural law, shorn of all metaphysical dignity. Weber thinks that, as a result of the decline of natural law into class conflict, lawyers and the other members of the legal system increasingly gravitate to legal positivism, the view that legitimacy arises only from the legitimate enactment of the law and the conformity of the legal system to the demands of technical control and prediction—in short, legal-rational legitimacy and bureaucratic domination. Far from standing on the side of justice and a transcendently meaningful order, lawyers and the law now “take the side of the ‘legitimate’ authoritarian political power that happens to predominate at the given moment” (*ES*, 876).

Natural law, then, can no longer serve to reconcile the individual to domination by inscribing such domination in a meaningful order. In the long run, charisma is routinized and becomes part of the everyday order of heteronomy. Typically, charisma coexists with patrimonial domination, becoming reabsorbed into the sacred foundations of such naturalized social orders. But when it takes on a moralistic character, as it does with prophetic charisma, the valuational orientation necessary for salvation overcomes tradition and leads to methodical forms of conduct that, as we know from *The Protestant Ethic*, is Weber’s necessary preconditions for capitalist accumulation. The implicit theodicy of natural law doctrines, with their promise of autonomy, gives way to the perfect heteronomy of modern bureaucratic domination.

CONCLUSION: LOCATING CALCULATION IN DEMOCRATIC THEORY

Max Weber’s thought exercises an abiding influence in contemporary democratic theory because it so powerfully captures political experiences that are today familiar: navigating expansive bureaucratic agencies, adjusting our lives to the rationalizing demands of the economy, observing political decision making from a far remove. For Weber, these

mundane experiences reflect the deeper sociotheoretic reality that since all social and political institutions are determined by everyday, calculable needs, they must presuppose and reproduce relations of domination. To be sure, we cannot return to natural law, classical political economy, or any other doctrine that attempts to re-enchant the material world (for a contrasting view, see Bennett [2001]). Yet my concern is that, even as Weber in many respects accurately describes our modern condition, his understanding of the everyday as thoroughly instrumental and calculable blinds us to the mundane yet nontechnical judgments that always accompany technical calculation within instituted politics. Especially where state institutions make persistent claims to legal-rational legitimacy and so to having rendered political life calculable, democratic theorists need to be alert to how their theoretical categories may reinforce, rather than historicize and challenge, the very things that foreclose more expansive democratic possibilities.

Indeed, my interpretation of Weber allows for a new perspective into the manner in which contemporary democratic theory may inherit and reproduce central aspects of Weber’s thought, even as theorists seek to overcome his explicitly elitist political vision. My reading shifts our attention toward how and where democratic theorists locate calculation in political life—that is, to whether conceptions of democratic agency presuppose that everyday, routine politics is primarily a matter of instrumental and technical calculations. And I worry that much of radical democracy theory accepts Weber’s underlying assumption that everyday or normal politics is a domain of calculation; that in order to be stable, political institutions must render concrete phenomenon orderly and predictable; and that democratic agency can be preserved only by turning to moments of unruly popular action that escape and exceed the calculable routines of institutional life.

To an extent, the power of this view can be traced to the direct influence of Weber, insofar as seminal accounts of radical democracy, such as Sheldon Wolin’s, explicitly presuppose Weber’s diagnosis of the “peculiar exaggeration of power” characteristic of the “Weberian” of modern state (Wolin 1989, 175, 157; cf. Kateb 2001; 43, Maley 2011, 190–94). Wolin’s debt to Weber extends beyond his analysis of the contemporary state, as Wolin’s account of democratic agency as “a moment rather than a form” rests on an underlying, Weberian conception of the relationship between political institutions and technical calculation (Wolin 1996, 37). In Wolin’s influential view, political institutions work to eliminate the “contingency and variability” of political phenomena by rendering them “calculable” (Wolin 1989, 172). And this means that he tends to view large-scale political institu-

tions as irredeemably hierarchical and exclusionary: as ruptural political movements are institutionalized, “leaders begin to appear, hierarchies develop, experts of one kind or another cluster around centers of decision; order, procedure, and precedent displace a more spontaneous politics” (Wolin 1996, 39)—a fact that is as true for ancient Athens as it is for modern states born out of radical revolutions.

While subsequent democratic theorists have sought to move away from Wolin’s pronounced focus on extraordinary moments of founding political action, they nonetheless tend to reproduce Weber’s give-and-take model of political agency, where democratic claims emerge over and against the calculable rationality of instituted political forms before eventually becoming absorbed into their routines. Thus, instead of Wolin’s largely extra-institutional fugitive demos, more recent democratic theory grounds political agency in the “constitutive surplus” of the people vis-à-vis any particular institutional embodiment of their authority, a surplus that is “internal . . . [to] the order” founded on the people (Frank 2010, 6, 31). Or else theorists figure inaugural democratic agency as acts of the radical imagination that “posit an object outside the use economy” of established institutional forms (Zerilli 2005, 62). Yet, like Weber’s charismatic movements, in time these new claims come to enter into the “domain of instituted society” and “to create the closure they once questioned” (Zerilli 2005, 63). By presenting established institutions as scenes of calculation and technique, these efforts to rescue democratic agency in the contemporary world, although they are not as explicitly indebted to Weber as Wolin’s view, nonetheless implicitly accept and reinforce Weber’s reductive vision of the everyday and the inevitability of domination.

Indeed, even theorists, such as Bonnie Honig, who challenge the binary reduction of politics to either “the heroic or the everyday” by highlighting noncalculable modes of “discretion, maintenance, and orientation” within everyday political life, nonetheless at times oppose “unruly” democratic action to the calculability of ordinary politics (Honig 2009, xvi, 11, 3). Thus, on the one hand, Honig argues that the need for ruptural democratic action arises from the fact that “all institutional settlements generate remainders”—remainders that are produced by how “the rules and institutions that govern ordinary situations and constitute them as ordinary” suppress “competing possibilities” (Honig 1993, 213; cf. Honig 2009, 16, 125, 133). Insofar as she grounds radical-democratic action in the concept of the remainder, and despite her efforts to reorient democratic theory to the exceptional in the ordinary, Honig reinforces the Weberian image of political institutions as inherently producing a calculative view of the world. On the other hand, though,

Honig’s political exemplars sometimes point toward an alternate conception of democratic agency. Thus, for instance, Honig looks to Louis Post, the US Assistant Secretary of Labor during the First Red Scare (1919–20), who successfully halted the panicked deportation of suspected anarchists and communists precisely by discerning and expanding the non-technical, discretionary judgments that always accompany technical calculation in administrative routines. Such spaces for creative political action exist, Honig argues, because institutions posit “the very human agency” that they otherwise marginalize “for the sake of equity, regularity, and predictability” (Honig 2009, 85).

The foregoing reading of Weber, by alerting us to troubling political implications of the assumption that ordinary institutions render political life calculable, provides resources for articulating these modes of nontechnical orientation within the everyday, modes that can secure the possibility of democratic agency without resorting to the tropes of surplus and contingency. Examining political institutions in these terms alerts us to democratic possibilities even in those domains Weber presents as the paragons of technical rationality: administrative and bureaucratic structures. Contra Weber, Post’s actions reveal that everyday needs and routines, while to an extent reliant on means-ends calculations, also depend on and reproduce, even if they do not explicitly acknowledge, individual and collective political judgments.⁹ Attending to such interweaving of calculation and the nontechnical within administrative structures would expand on Breiner’s valuable contention that, because he positions the masses as reactive and resentful, Weber fails to consider how participatory-democratic bodies can engage in “continuous resistance to forms of rational-legal domination” (Breiner 1996, 209). Equally, we need to examine the centrality of nontechnical judgments in the operation of private and public bureaucratic structures—orientations that could authorize alternate, democratic modes of decision making even within such institutions. Weber’s account of the relationship between personality and the extraordinary seeks to foreclose just such democratic possibilities by reducing established institutions to the hierarchical management of calculable, everyday needs. And with-

9. In this respect, my critical reading of Weber could fruitfully intersect with views of democracy that, drawing on Wittgenstein, emphasize the centrality of nontechnical judgment and know-how even in supposedly automatic rule following so as to capture how “claims . . . arise from the ordinary activities of democratic citizens” (Norval 2007, 6). My engagement with Weber encourages theorists to consider, not just the emergence from and inscription of new claims into the everyday, but also how these non-instrumental aspects of everyday practices are presupposed by institutional structures that simultaneously aspire toward technical calculation.

out a confrontation with the enduring influence of Weber's categories on the horizons of practical possibility implicit in accounts of democracy, political theorists risk fighting for democratic ideals on conceptual terrain already organized by his opposition to popular-democratic mobilizations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their helpful comments, I thank Gordon Arlen, Brian Duff, Bob Gooding-Williams, Cheol-Sung Lee, Dan Luban, John McCormick, Patchen Markell, Renée Melton, Daniel Nichanian, Natasha Piano, Ethan Porter, the three anonymous reviewers, and Lisa Ellis. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2015 Western Political Science Association annual meeting, and I am grateful to the audience and my copanelists for their thoughts.

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