



Max Weber, one of the most important sociologists ever, introduced *Rationalization* as a sociological issue when he conducted his studies in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1904)*, may be his best known *heritage* in sociology. He concluded that there could be a close connection between 1) the *ideal of a painstaking engagement in working* (as a proof of personal success in society), and 2) the *religious-ethical belief* in a personal election by God, well represented by Protestantism with its high sense of duty.

This *causal dependency* between work and faith, said Weber, could apply for ascetic protestant religions and particularly for *Calvinism*: religious ethics, hence, would be able to convert all *human efforts in private life* into *rational efforts in public life*, for achieving economic gain, social recognition and reinvestment into next economic enterprises by, at the same time, also leading a *strait-laced* way of life,

So, the strong ascetic commitment of religious ethics could lead to *stubborn* individual engagement into the achievement of professional success and rational control over any aspect of social life: from science to economy, from justice to all social organizations. Yet the *rational roots* of this religious doctrine soon *grew incompatible* with, and larger than the religious ones: this process went on until the religious contents were eventually *discarded* and no longer maintained their original importance. Only rational patterns mattered.

Rationalization, thus, turned out to become one of the most important processes in society: one taking place not over decades, but over centuries! **Definition**: Rationalization could be seen as the continuously ongoing process of organizing the whole society on a more and more complex system of written rules, procedures, algorithms, organizational structures, coding instructions and official regulation models. These rules and structures build up such things as: *bureaucracy, administration systems, law systems, welfare state systems*.

The process of *Rationalization* grounded our current life patterns, giving birth to: coordination and planning on a large scale of human activity into enormous working systems (organizations); hierarchical division of labor, adoption of impersonal and formal rules, possibility of long range forecasts and calculation of results, superstructures (offices, departments) basing their actions on pure "rational" rules and precisely defining areas of competences; *ethical sense of "professional" duty* (the German concept of *Beruf*, according to *Martin Luther*) and the construction of a codex of ethical values. Now, what are the consequences of *Rationalization* as a global and deeply historical process which has been going on during the last five centuries?

- 1) *Rationalization* ended up to become a sort of "*Iron cage*": Rationalization, and particularly bureaucracy, seem not to be stopping and there is no hope that they ever will. Impersonal rules and procedures seem to *impinge in an overwhelming way* upon our single lives and apparently are living autonomously, regardless of individuals, They created a power of alienation and expropriation of our independence and freedom of action. *Rationalization* is typical of both capitalist and socialist systems: the power structure remains the same, with no regard to the political *backdrop*, since either of them share the same *exertion* of power.
- 2) *Rationalization* runs parallel to the process of *Secularization*: this is the direct outcome of the *Disenchantment* process. Weber means with these two concepts, that starting from the end of the middle Age and Renaissance the European society and later on the wider western society, grew up by constantly discarding the importance of religious and metaphysical thinking. It went on rejecting any belief in faith as the source and ground of human action. So western society became by the time more and more "*disenchanted*": it no longer trusted the Church and believed in religion and in God as the leading factor of human history. Science was instead put at God's place, where Marxism and Positivism, and even Nietzsche's philosophy strongly contributed to the "Death of God", to the refusal of any influence of religion into human affairs, which now had to be led only by science, rational organization and economy.

Rationalization, thus, becomes the process of *institutionalization of purposive-rational economic and administrative actions*, taking place not only within the western society, but even within any possible *modern* society in general. *Modern capitalist enterprise and bureaucratic state apparatus are now one and the same*.

*Max Weber (1864-1920) Born as Karl Emil Maximilian (Max): one of the three major columns of sociological thought, together with Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim. German sociologist and political economist at University of Heidelberg and Munich. The most important classic thinker in social sciences. He dedicated his life to issues like Rationalization, Democracy, Religion (he was among the founders of a Sociology of Religion), methodology of social sciences, theory and critic of economic capitalism and role of the intellectuals in the society of power. He also contributed to modern sociology of Knowledge with his theory of social action as based on meaning. His major and best known book is "*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904)". In "*Economy and Society*" (1922) he also analyzes the tradition and origin of rationalism in different politic and religious societies.

Notes for the Lecture

- zweckrational – wertrational
- Iron cage
- First of all as Protestant Ethics, then as larger background of rationalization.

Rationalization

'disenchantment'

Freedom from Metaphysics-Religion

Secularization

Iron cage

Nietzsche

bureaucratisation

His analysis of [bureaucracy](#) in his *Economy and Society* is still central to the modern study of organizations. Weber was the first to recognize several diverse aspects of social authority, which he respectively categorized according to their charismatic, traditional, and legal forms.

His analysis of bureaucracy emphasized that modern state institutions are based on a form of [rational-legal authority](#). Weber's fostered the issue regarding the rationalizing and [secularizing](#) tendencies of modern Western society (sometimes described as the "[Weber Thesis](#)").

the 'disenchantment' of the modern world together with the never-ending power of religion.

What Weber depicted was not only the secularization of Western *culture*, but also and especially the development of modern *societies* from the viewpoint of rationalization. The new structures of society were marked by the differentiation of the two functionally intermeshing systems that had taken shape around the organizational cores of the capitalist enterprise and the bureaucratic state apparatus. Weber understood this process as the institutionalization of purposive-rational economic and administrative action. To the degree that everyday life was affected by this cultural and societal rationalization, traditional forms of life - which in the early modern period were differentiated primarily according to one's trade - were dissolved.

– [Jürgen Habermas](#) *Modernity's Consciousness of Time*,

Other notable factors mentioned by Weber included the [rationalism](#) of scientific pursuit, merging observation with mathematics, science of scholarship and jurisprudence, rational systematization of government administration, and economic enterprise.

Weber unveils the definition of the [state](#) that has become so pivotal to Western social thought: that the state is that entity which possesses a delegatable [monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force](#).

He was well-known for his critical study of the bureaucratization of society, the rational ways in which formal social organizations apply the ideal type characteristics of a bureaucracy. It was Weber who began the studies of bureaucracy and whose works led to the popularization of this term.^[53] Many aspects of modern [public administration](#) go back to him, and a classic, hierarchically organized [civil service](#) of the Continental type is called "Weberian civil service", although this is only one ideal type of public administration and government described in his *magnum opus* *Economy and Society* (1922), and one that he did not particularly like himself – he only thought it particularly efficient and successful. In this work, Weber outlines a description, which has become famous, of rationalization (of which bureaucratization is a part) as a shift from a value-oriented organization and action (traditional authority and charismatic authority) to a goal-oriented organization and action (legal-rational authority). The result, according to Weber, is a "polar night of icy darkness", in which increasing rationalization of human life traps individuals in an "[iron cage](#)" of rule-based, rational control.^[54] Weber's bureaucracy studies also led him to his analysis that [socialism](#) in Russia would lead to over-bureaucratization rather than to the "[withering away of the state](#)" (as [Karl Marx](#) had predicted would happen in [communist](#) society).