

READING QUESTIONS: MAX WEBER

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

1. What does Weber mean by describing the modern world as an “iron cage” (also translated, more exactly, as “shell as hard as steel”)? What role did asceticism play in creating it? What has happened to the original meaning of asceticism?
2. Look carefully at the list of possibilities he outlines in the paragraph that begins “No one knows who will live in this cage in the future...”
3. Why will the age of “full and beautiful humanity” never return?

“Bureaucracy”

1. Is Weber discussing only the state? (197)
2. What are the “technical advantages” of bureaucracy? How are its principles like those of the market? If this is rationality, what sort of rationality is it?
3. Weber sees an affinity between bureaucracy and “mass democracy” (224). What is it?
4. If bureaucracy is “permanent,” what are the prospects for political change (228ff)?
5. “One has to remember that bureaucracy as such is a precision instrument which can put itself at the disposal of quite varied—purely political as well as purely economic, or any other sort—interests in domination” (231). Explain.

“The Sociology of Charismatic Authority”

1. How does charismatic authority differ from rational bureaucratic authority?
2. Why does Weber call charismatic authority “unstable” (248)? What can destabilize it, and what does this tell us about the preconditions for charismatic authority?
3. Would we expect to find much charismatic authority in modern societies? What might happen if “new prophets” were to get hold of modern forms of power?

“Science as a Vocation”

1. Having an “inner” calling or vocation for “science” means confronting the fact of academic specialization. What is Weber’s attitude toward specialization? (*FMW*, 134ff) (*VL*, 7ff)
2. Weber speaks of a process of intellectualization that leads to the “disenchantment of the world.” (*FMW*, 138ff, also 155) (*VL*, 12ff, also 30) How did that process work? What does he mean by “disenchantment?” What should our attitude and conduct be in light of it?
3. Weber discusses the relationship of science to values twice. First, he looks at some practical considerations. What, for instance, should teaching look like if we see this issue his way? What should it not involve? And why? (*FMW*, 143ff) (*VL*, 17ff)
4. He then takes up logical issues about the relationship of science to values. What does he mean by modern polytheism and the conflict of value spheres? In light of this, can

science deal with values at all? If so, how can it do so responsibly? (Find three suggestions.) (*FMW*, 147ff) (*VL*, 22ff)

5. What is “the courage to clarify one’s own ultimate standpoint?” (*FMW*, 155) (*VL*, 31, translates it as “the courage to make up [one’s] mind about [one’s] ultimate standpoint”)

“Politics as a Vocation”

1. To have an “inner” calling or vocation for politics under modern conditions, what qualities are needed? (*FMW*, 115ff) (*VL*, 76ff)

2. What is the proper relationship of ethics to politics, for Weber? Work out the difference and the relationship between the two most famous concepts from this essay, the “ethic of ultimate ends” (in *VL* translated as “ethics of conviction”) and the “ethic of responsibility.” (*FMW*, 120ff) (*VL*, 83ff)

3. “Politics means a slow, powerful drilling through hard boards.” Explain this famous line. (*FMW*, 128, translates it a little differently) (*VL*, 93)