

techniques based on a formal ordering of the world by accounting procedure. Formal rationality can thus refer to the conscious orientation of action for the purpose of regulating different departments of life, and it can indicate circumstances where there is a consistent attitude toward methodical action in order to obtain mastery of the external world by ordering its content.

A fourth type of rationality discussed by Weber is substantive rationality. Weber used this term to refer to a type of rationality that takes up an orientation to the world based on ultimate values and value standards to which the actor is bound by principles of justice and ethics.<sup>275</sup> In contrast to formal rationality, substantive rationality is not bound by purely formal criteria of decision-making or by an orientation to reality geared to obtaining goals by strict calculable standards, but rather is bound by criteria of ultimate values which may be shaped by ethical norms or egalitarian standards as these are measured against a scale of values. Where formal rationality involves a practical orientation of action regarding outcomes, substantive rationality involves an orientation to values that guide action in the world along a path to which the actor may be formally and morally bound. In contrast to formal rationality, substantive rationality is at home in a number of different 'value scales' and thereby always involves considerations of social justice, ethical standards and a concern for social equity.<sup>276</sup> While formal rationality is based on norms of efficiency and practical cost procedures, substantive rationality is based on the qualitative content of judgments which may be bound by ethical or aesthetic criteria. Weber believed that formal and substantive rationality are opposed, and that ultimately substantive rationality views formal rationality as inimical to its own purpose.<sup>277</sup> Lastly, according to Weber, rationality can be applied in one of two ways. First it can be 'subjectively oriented,' in which case it refers to the degree of inner evaluation which the actor engages in cognitively before the act. Second it can be 'objectively oriented,' in which case it refers to the degree to which an action embodies rational principles by adhering to formal rules or to specific means-ends calculations and standards of conduct.<sup>278</sup>

#### ***Four Types of Social Action and their Forms of Rationality***

After outlining the different forms of rationality, Weber went on to categorize social action in terms of four basic types: traditional, emotional, value rational and instrumental.

***Traditional Action*** The first type of social action discussed by Weber is called traditional action. This is a form of social action in which the individual reacts 'automatically' to problems in the outside world and to external circumstances in a

<sup>275</sup> *Economy and Society*, pp. 85–6.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>278</sup> For further discussion of the distinction between subjective and objective rationality see Donald Levine, 'Rationality and Freedom: Weber and Beyond,' pp. 11–13.

habitual manner. Traditional action is based on a habitual response to the world that guides the behavior of the actor 'in a course of action which has been repeatedly followed in the past.'<sup>279</sup> To act in this way, Weber argued, the actor need not imagine a goal, picture an outcome or be conscious of a specific commitment to values or to value scales. Rather, action of this type is patterned by an orientation to a fixed body of traditional beliefs which act as imperatives upon the actor's judgment. According to Weber, the great bulk of everyday action corresponds to this type. In traditional action the ends and means of action are fixed by custom, there is no calculation in the attainment of ends, and there is little or no judgment. To the extent that traditional action lacks a specific orientation to rationality, it lies close to what Weber called the 'borderline of what can be justifiably called meaningfully oriented action.'<sup>280</sup> Traditional action is therefore devoid of a specific rational orientation to reality because it reflects the actor's habitual responses to the outside world and the degree to which these responses act as guides for future behavior. Traditional action thus lacks evaluative criteria and obeys no specific means-ends calculation and no weighing up of alternatives. A religious leader, for instance, may exhibit traditional action by a devotion to routine or to ways of living in the world that are frozen in tradition. In traditional action an individual may employ a 'practical rationalism' in their orientation to reality so far as their conduct is conditioned 'by the nature of their way of life' and upon a mastery of the outside world by the limited means at their disposal. Weber thought that traditional action constitutes a form of practical rationality so far as it orients to reality by the 'techniques of living frozen in traditionalism which are handed down from the past and which are repeated everywhere' in all departments of life. Its purpose is the 'regulation of life' by an adherence to maxims that act as guides to action.<sup>281</sup>

Traditional action is distinguished from the other types of action by the absence of a subjective meaning that is attached by the actor to the situation, and from this perspective Weber believed that traditional action forgoes a specific orientation to subjective meaning since the actor largely responds to situations based on a customary view of reality that is handed down from the past. To the extent that traditional action is determined by habit, the actor need not attach a subjective meaning to their own action since the aim of traditional action is to control external reality by maxims that confront reality through prophecy. In this respect, traditional action adopts a 'practical rationality' based on the control of all external reality by the will of the actor, the authority of tradition and the established ways of living handed down from the past. Traditional action thus systematizes the world by an application of formal maxims to external circumstances and means which put operative norms into play.

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<sup>279</sup> *Economy and Society*, p. 25

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>281</sup> Weber, 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions,' p. 284.

**Affectual (Emotional) Action** The second type of action referred to by Weber is affectual or emotional action. Action is emotional when it 'satisfies a need for revenge, sensual gratification, devotion, contemplative bliss, or the working off of emotional tensions.'<sup>282</sup> In this context, the actor is directly impelled to act on the basis of an emotional response to a situation or external circumstance that is determined by the state of mind of the actor. Like traditional action, emotional action lacks a specific orientation to a goal or to a set of ultimate values since its means of expression is based on the emotional state of the actor in a given circumstance. Under these conditions, emotional action lacks a specific rational orientation to the world and forgoes means and ends calculation since it is governed in the main by impulsive acts which often have no goal or aim. Like traditional action, emotional action is on the borderline of what is considered to be meaningful action and, in this sense, it is irrational in that it forgoes inner evaluation and subjective meaning.<sup>283</sup>

**Value Rational Action** A third type of action discussed by Weber is value-rational action. This is a type of action in which ultimate values act as a guide to action. While the first two types of action were characterized by the absence of a specific meaning that is subjectively assigned by the actor, value rational action exemplifies a rational orientation to the extent that a specific meaning is applied to the action by the actor. Weber describes value rational action as a straightforward orientation to absolute values and considerations of action based on a value orientation to the world. Under these circumstances the actor seeks to 'put into practice their convictions of what seems to them to be required either by duty, honour, the pursuit of beauty, a religious call or the importance of some cause no matter in what it consists, regardless of possible cost to themselves.'<sup>284</sup>

In this case, the meaning of an action 'does not lie in the achievement of a result ulterior to it, but rather lies in carrying out the realization of the specific value considerations for its own sake,' and therefore the sole aim of value rational action is the realization of some specific value and the obligation placed on the actor by the value in question. While value rational action undertakes considerations with respect to the efficacy of the means of action, there is no weighing up of the ends against other ends, since the value pursued is paramount. The actor, in this respect, feels obligated to follow 'commands' or 'demands' which are 'binding' on the actor's commitment to specific values.<sup>285</sup> This may vary depending on how much 'value' the actor attaches to the action in question. For instance, the Dalai Lama acts on the basis of promoting peace in the world because of the meaning that attaches to the value of promoting human life and his commitment to the pursuit of such values. Since value rational

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.



action holds out valued ends as paramount, it may be considered irrational from the point of view of the political sphere or the economic sphere to the extent that ends are pursued without 'possible costs' and hence without 'rational consideration' of other ends. Gandhi's campaign against the British, for instance, involved a specific orientation to the values of 'justice and equality' that were binding on him and others to pursue, without thought for themselves, the liberation of the people of India. Gandhi's commitment to specific value scales is an example of value rational action so far as it illustrates the degree to which values act as 'binding ends' or imperatives upon the actor and become paramount ethical obligations that adhere to 'standards of beauty and excellence.'

**Instrumental Rational Action** The fourth type of action discussed by Weber is instrumental rational action. This type of action differs from value rational action by virtue of the fact that 'the ends, the means and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed' for the explicit purpose of maximizing successful outcomes and controlling unforeseen circumstances in reality.<sup>286</sup> To the extent that this type of action entails a systematic rational orientation to weighing up means and ends, in comparison with the other types of action instrumental action utilizes strategies in relation to the world based on the most effective procedures for attaining desired ends. Whereas practical rationality seeks to order the world according to some plan, instrumental action seeks to maximize personally beneficial outcomes whether they are political, economic or legal. Where practical rationality systematizes the world by ordering its content, instrumental action systematizes strategies in relation to outcomes by weighing up eventualities. In instrumental rational action, the actor is free to choose the means of action purely on the basis of its rational efficacy, and action of this type represents the greatest degree of rational orientation in as much as it systematically weighs up means and ends in relation to calculating possible outcomes. In addition to this, instrumental action utilizes an orientation to 'subjective rationality' in a manner that is distinct from the other types of action. That is, actors may choose to treat 'ends' as a given set of 'subjective wants and arrange them in a scale of consciously assessed urgency.'<sup>287</sup> To the extent that instrumental action orients itself to the 'rational achievement of ends,' it may, 'in limiting cases,' be without relation to values, and in this respect the actor may not be bound by specific values or value scales.

In addition to its rational orientation, instrumentally oriented action is broader in scope and in rationality than the other types of action. This is evident in the considerations it chooses to weigh up. For example, actors may systematically take into account the behavior of others and use this behavior as conditions to be considered in the 'attainment of the actor's rationally pursued ends.'<sup>288</sup> Under these circumstances, the most significant characteristic of instrumental rational action is the weighing up of

<sup>286</sup> Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 26.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> *Economy and Society*, p. 25.

means and ends and the systematic taking into account of 'alternative means to the ends, of the relations of the end to the secondary consequences, and of the relative importance of different possible ends.'<sup>289</sup> In this view, the actor takes into account those conditions of knowledge that are based on an understanding of the circumstances as they may lead to alternate means, and the likely behavior of relevant others in their effect on secondary consequences and the extent to which these conditions affect particular ends.

In this regard, differences between instrumental and traditional action can exist when the actor is free to choose the means purely in terms of the efficiency or success that an action may bring about. For instance, traditional action is bound by a set of means which were often determined by regulatory rules existing outside the actors' evaluations. In instrumentally rational action, by contrast, the meaning of an act is based neither on fixed customs, duty or obligation, but on the technical use of means and ends as instruments to perfect the attainment of specific goals. In action of the instrumental type, the actor takes into account those conditions of knowledge calculated to produce the best possible outcomes. In comparison with this, value rational action is always undertaken for its own sake in the light of values that are meaningful to the actor independent of their chance of success, implying a commitment to the value that goes beyond successfully attaining the goals or ends of the action. Value rational action always involves 'value scales' to which the actor feels bound despite chances of failure. Instrumental rational action, on the other hand, differs from the other types by virtue of its stress on the amount of calculation that goes into the action by weighing up the available means with which the action is carried out, and the tendency to take into account the possible outcomes based on knowledge of the situation.

### The Theory of Legitimate Domination: Weber's Political Writings

Weber's political works were written between 1914 and 1920 and appeared in the first volume of *Economy and Society*. The body of Weber's political writings cover a wide range of themes relating to state development, the exercise of political power, the organization of political communities, the rise of the democratic state, and the historical comparison of different forms of political domination.<sup>290</sup> In the main, Weber concerned himself in these writings with two specific issues of social and historical development: first, he wanted to trace the pattern of historical development leading to the decline of empires and the rise of the modern state; second, he wanted to look at the changes taking place in the form of political authority as the modern state developed.

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<sup>289</sup> *Economy and Society*, p. 26.

<sup>290</sup> *Economy and Society*, pp. 212–301.