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2

Max Weber and the Rationalization of Magic

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"Magic, for example, has been just as systematically 'rationalized' as physics."
—Max Weber, *Der Sinn der "Wertfreiheit,"* 1917

To state my thesis bluntly at the outset: the standard account of Max Weber's notion of "disenchantment" is wrong. There are a few bright exceptions, but most of what scholars have been saying for decades about Weber's poetical phrase "die Entzauberung der Welt" (usually translated as "the disenchantment of the world" but more literally "the de-magic-ing of the world") is based on a mistaken reading of his project. The error originates in a very reasonable interpretation of Weber's most famous lecture "Science as a Vocation" (*Wissenschaft als Beruf*) (1917). The problem is that for many nonspecialists, disenchantment is understood as a poetical synonym for secularization and even most Weber scholars take the phrase at face value and assume that a disenchanted world has absolutely no magic in it.

As illustrative of the standard view, one of the world's leading Weber scholars, Peter Ghosh has argued that "for Weber, by contrast, the defining feature of 'magic' (if such a thing existed at all) was that it formed a conceptual antithesis to rational conduct …. Weber had no developed idea of magic as such, except as the miscellany of non-rational behavior."[1] Ghosh's claim is far from unique and instead reflects the general opinion of most scholarship on Weber.

Yet, the epigraph above should already begin to put pressure on the standard account, because scholars accustomed to thinking of rationality and enchantment as opposites will have trouble reckoning with how magic can itself be rationalized. This quote is no aberration in Weber's corpus, for his own published writings and letters provide plenty of evidence that Weber thought that magic persisted in modernity, albeit in rationalized forms.[2]

Building off of some of my previous work in *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (2017), this chapter demonstrates both that the belief in spirits and magic persists in the contemporary world and that Weber himself was no stranger to the occult milieu. After laying out this background in Part I, Part II provides a close reading of Weber's writings about disenchantment to show the textual evidence for undoing the standard account of disenchantment. There are two main myths about Weber I would like to dispel: that Weber saw magic and rationality as incompatible, and that he thought that magic had vanished in modernity. Both of these statements prove to be false. Indeed, as I interpret Weber, we live in a *disenchanting* world where magic is besieged and intermittently contained within its own cultural sphere, but not in a *disenchanted* world in which magic is gone. The difference is significant. A brief third part of this chapter is a thought experiment gesturing at how Weber might have conceived of the rationalization of the magic sphere in different cultures.

Part I: In the Realm of Enchantment

> From indescribable transformation hails
> such creations—Feel! and believe!
> We suffer often: flames become ash; but, in art: flames come from dust.
> Here is magic. In the realm of enchantment [*das Bereich des Zaubers*].
>
> –Rainer Marie Rilke, *Magie*, 1924[3]

Munich, 1917. A group of artists, poets, students, and other bohemians gathered at the home of Gustav Willibald Freytag (1876–1943), a professor of ophthalmology and son of a famous novelist. They were assembled on that particular cold December night to listen to a lecture by a man named Alfred Schuler (1865–1923), a charismatic local eccentric who lived with his mother but who claimed that he was the reincarnation of a pre-Christian Roman leader and that he received clairvoyant visions and direct communications from pagan gods.[4] By way of explanation, Schuler maintained that he had a mystical experience whenever he came into contact with an artifact from classical antiquity.[5] Hence, he claimed that archaeological objects were condensed figures of a distant time that he could decode through a kind of oracular psychometry as his fingertips unlocked new revelations and visions from ancient eons.[6]

With Freytag's home as his headquarters, Schuler delivered a series of seven lectures under the title *Vom Wesen der ewigen Stadt* (On the Essence of the Eternal City), which he advertised as evoking "telesmatic" energies and intended to "develop their listener's inner light."[7] But Schuler's grand narrative was about the gradual alienation of humanity from the sacred cosmos and Great Mother Goddess (Magna Mater) initiated by the Jewish rejection of idolatry and exacerbated by the Christian banishment of the pagan gods. As the lectures unfolded, Schuler went on to share not only his idiosyncratic recovery of "esoteric" paganism but also his insights into an eternal realm of the dead (*Totenreich*) beyond the veil of ordinary space and time. This was Schuler's twist on a claim common to Swedenborg and later spiritualists that there was a timeless spirit world parallel to our own.

Although Max Weber was in Munich giving lectures in almost the same period as Schuler's series of talks, the two men still might seem to have come from different circles. Indeed, perhaps the single most quoted sentence from Weber's parallel 1917 lecture is: "The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world." But Schuler and Weber were much closer than one might think.

Indeed, at least one person—the poet Rainer Maria Rilke (quoted in the epigraph above)—attended both Max Weber's *Politik als Beruf* (Politics as a Vocation, 1919) and Alfred Schuler's *Vom Wesen der ewigen Stadt*. We do not know what Rilke thought of the content, but it might surprise you that he seems to have found Schuler to be the more enthralling figure.[8] But Rilke was not the main connection between the two theorists.

Schuler was the leader of a Munich-based group of poets and neo-pagans known as the Cosmic Circle (*Kosmikerkreis*, *Kosmische Runde*, or *Kosmiker*). Beyond Schuler, the Cosmic Circle included the German-Jewish poet and translator Karl Wolfskehl (1869–1948), the neo-pagan philosopher Ludwig Klages (1872–1956), and for a time the famous mystical poet Stefan George (1868–1933). I discuss this group and their beliefs in greater detail in *The Myth of Disenchantment*, but in many respects the Cosmic Circle resembled many other *fin-de-siècle* occult movements. One thing that made them distinctive—but not unique—was that they shared a reverence for Friedrich Nietzsche, whom they described as one of the great "pagan martyrs: whose soul fought and died for the ardor of Life."[9]

Like many of their contemporaries, the Cosmic Circle also believed in magic. Their particular philosophy of magic was described by the German author

and translator Franziska zu Reventlow (1871–1918), who had a relationship with Klages and who was for a time an unofficial member of the group. In her account:

> They claim to have discovered secrets of immeasurable importance and thereby have gone so far as to achieve mastery of certain inner powers. Hence sooner or later they will be in a position to work magic [*zaubern*] …. They explained it to me like this: one succeeds by means of a mystical procedure—I believe by absolute self-absorption in the primordial cosmic principle …. When this is successful, one's essence is completely permeated by the primordial cosmic substance, which is in itself all-powerful. Then one is made just as powerful, and those who are all-powerful can work magic [*zaubern*].[10]

Paraphrased, the Kosmikers had a theory about the source of a-causal supernatural power. Elsewhere in her work, Reventlow also discussed how the Kosmikers had an account of how the enchantments of a primordial matriarchy had been lost.[11]

The beliefs of the Cosmic Circle are relevant for two reasons—first, based on archival evidence I discuss in *The Myth of Disenchantment*, we know that Weber read this paragraph describing the Kosmikers' magical beliefs in 1913 while he was vacationing at the Monte Verità neo-pagan commune in Switzerland. The dating is significant because this is before Weber began publishing about disenchantment, and there is some reason to think that he came to his notion of *Entzauberung* after visiting with neo-pagans and reading Reventlow's account of the Munich Cosmic Circle.[12] Moreover, he knew that Reventlow's account referred to real people.

Second, while it is unclear if Weber ever met Schuler, Weber definitely knew Wolfskehl, George, and Klages.[13] Wolfskehl's contact with Weber was fairly limited, but Weber met with George on multiple occasions and there is evidence that George had a significant impact on Weber's notion of mysticism and his sense of how the history of religion centered on charismatic leadership.[14] Indeed, the sociologist's first reference to "charisma" was in a letter about George to his student Dora Jellinek.[15]

It was Weber's interactions with Klages, however, that were likely the most important on his later formation of a notion of enchantment. Again, I devote a chapter to Klages in *The Myth of Disenchantment*, but two significant takeaways are relevant here—first, Klages articulated a further philosophy of magic and, second, more importantly, it was enmeshed in a later disenchantment narrative.

At times Klages referred to his project as "magical philosophy" (*magische Philosophie*), which he explained as follows:

> Magic is the practice of our philosophy and our philosophy is the theory of magic. The philosophy of the academy is mechanistic theory and their practice is mechanical. Magical philosophy rejects the [Aristotelian] Law of Identity [in favor of flux], hence, it denies unity, objects, duration, reoccurrence, and mathematics; it denies concepts and causality, because causality is the functional parallel to the logical correlation [*Verknüpfung*]. Magical philosophy works with images and symbols, and its method is the method of analogy. The most important terms it uses are: element, substance, principle, demon, cosmos, microcosm, macrocosm, essence, image, primal image, vortex, tangle, and fire. Its final formulas are spells [*Zaubersprüche*] that have magical power.[16]

In this passage, we can see Klages working out in greater detail the philosophy of magic associated with the Cosmic Circle as a whole. One of Klages's contributions, however, was to ground it in a Heraclitean (or Nietzschean) ontology of becoming.

In a set of essays and lectures beginning with the 1913 work, *Mensch und Erde* (Man and Earth), Klages also gave an account of how humanity became alienated from the flowing flux of existence. This was his disenchantment or rationalization narrative. In his version of this narrative, the ancients knew the earth to be a "living being" and that "forest and spring, boulder and grotto were filled with sacred life; from the summits of their lofty mountains blew the storm-winds of the gods."[17] Primitive humans were in closer harmony with nature, which they sought to propitiate or protect by way of ritual and various prohibitions.[18] Nevertheless, Christianity suppressed the old gods and nature was stripped bare of animating forces. Modern Europeans, he went on to argue, see the earth instead as nothing but "an unfeeling lump of 'dead matter.'"[19]

As Klages further elaborated, "The will to rational truth is the will to the deactualization of the world."[20] In its fully articulated form, Klages's master narrative is that a progressively hyper-potentiated mind (*Geist*) or quantifying reason became yoked to the domination of nature, leading to the domination of humanity and potentially, if unchecked, to the annihilation of all life on earth. Klages argued:

> We have counted, weighed, and measured, that which could be counted, weighed, and measured. We have quantified the world in width, height, and depth. We have become accustomed to speaking of "mechanisms" and even living and psychological processes, just as we got used to seeing the microscopic and macroscopic universe in the light of supremely functional furnished laboratories. We have by means of these things obtained the famous "dominion over nature."[21]

Accordingly, Klages describes the transformation from the magical or phenomenal world of flux into the static world of objects. As he argued, rational thinking renders the world lifeless and comprehensible, a taxidermied butterfly. His words: "Whatever is touched by the ray of mentality [*Geist*] is instantly changed into a mere thing, a quantifiable object that is afterwards connected to other objects only 'mechanically.'"[22] This is Klages's version of something Marxists have long critiqued, namely the process of reification, which, after all, literally means "thing-ification." But even more importantly, he provides a philosophical narrative about the displacement of magic and humanity's alienation from nature. Klages and Weber had very different accounts, but my main point is that some notion of loss of magic (or at least its marginalization) was being worked out within an occult milieu, and Weber knew about this.

Although it is unclear if Weber and Klages were acquainted by 1913, Weber began reading Klages's works sometime in that period. It is possible that Weber knew Klages through his brother Alfred Weber, because in 1913 Alfred and Klages both participated in the Free German Youth Movement.[23] But Max Weber and Klages shared multiple friends, so the connection could have come through multiple venues.[24] Later, Weber had his handwriting analyzed by Klages, whose readings he thought were accurate.[25] More importantly, however, they read each other's work.

In his own writings, Klages adopted Weber's famous phrase "Entzauberung der Welt" to describe the gradual distancing of humanity from the "cosmic Eros."[26] But the conversation went both ways, for Weber cited Klages on several occasions.[27] Weber observed, for example, that Klages's writings contained "very good remarks" on "the peculiar contraction and repression of natural life-impulses" brought about by rationalization.[28]

All this is to say, Max Weber must have known that many of his contemporaries believed in magic. Even if he had never encountered the Munich Circle, read Reventlow's account of them, or visited a neo-pagan commune, Weber would have only to open a German newspaper to see evidence for popular belief in witches, magic, spiritualism, and angels.[29] Thus, it seems implausible that Weber would have thought that belief in enchantment had vanished completely in his own era.

Inarguably, Weber knew about the modern persistence of belief in magic. We do too. As I recount in *The Myth of Disenchantment*, there is a lot of sociological evidence that suggests that belief in ghosts, demons, magic, psychical powers, and the like are surprisingly widespread in contemporary America and Great

Britain. The consensus seems to be that "three in four Americans believe in the paranormal."[30] The data is less robust from Western Europe, but according to a German telephone survey of 1,500 people conducted by the Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene in Freiburg in 2000, there was a widespread engagement with such beliefs in contemporary Germany. The study concluded that a surprising 73 percent of German interviewees were willing to tell an interviewer that they had personally experienced paranormal phenomena.[31] Belief in the paranormal and belief in magic are not identical, but even at this level of generality the sociological evidence puts pressure on most notions of a disenchanted modernity.

Even today, we can find a thriving occult scene just a few miles from the conference venue.[32] Theion Publishing, located in Munich, is a leading European esoteric publisher under the direction of a German practitioner named David Beth who writes about "Kosmic Gnosis" and "Gnostic Voudon." In addition to their interest in Afro-Caribbean traditions, his publishing house is keeping alive the work of Ludwig Klages and, indeed, published work on him shortly after my book came out. Beth contacted me and kindly offered to send me some of their latest publications about Klages.

Part II: The Disenchanting World

> The complete disenchantment of the world has only been carried out to its full conclusion [in Puritanism]. But that did not mean freedom from what we are today accustomed to call "superstition." Witch trials also flourished in New England … [The Puritans] came to believe all magic to be diabolical.
>
> —Max Weber, *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen*, 1916

For a variety of reasons, specialists and nonspecialists alike have had difficulty getting a handle on Weber's conception of disenchantment. Part of the issue is that later interpreters have been unduly preoccupied with "Science as a Vocation" (*Wissenschaft als Beruf*), often to the exclusion of Weber's other discussions of the subject. To be sure, "Science as a Vocation" was an important lecture and indeed crucial to Weber's subsequent canonization in the academy. But fixating on this lecture has been a mistake, in good part because it is not Weber's most systematic exposition of his notion of disenchantment and, moreover, as a speech for a popular audience it contains poetical flourishes that have misled later readers.

But the bigger source of confusion about disenchantment is that scholars have often presumed an opposition between rationality and magic that Weber did not share (see my discussion of Ghosh above). Moreover, they have often imputed to Weber the belief that magic had vanished (or would vanish) in modernity. To counter these misreadings of Weber, in this section, I'd like to focus on Weber's less read but more systematic discussion of the issue.

Weber's "disenchantment of the world" first appears in print in the article "Über einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie" (Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology), which appeared in *Logos* in 1913.[33] This essay was Weber's first attempt to formulate a systematic account of his own vision for sociology. He does this by carefully distinguishing the objects of sociological knowledge from other disciplines, in particular psychology. It is in this context that Weber first refers to the relationship between magic and disenchantment. He is in the process of arguing that actions can be rational for a given actor, even if they are directed toward an aim that sociologists might not grant as rational. As he goes on to note:

> For instance, action that is oriented to magical notions is subjectively of an often much more instrumentally rational character than any non-magical "religious" conduct, since as the *disenchantment of the world* increases, religiosity is compelled increasingly to adopt subjectively, instrumentally irrational meanings [*Sinnbezogenheiten*] (for example, of a "conscientious" [*Gesinnungshaft*] or mystical kind).[34]

For Weber, magic is subjectively, instrumentally rational. Spells are intended for specific pragmatic purposes. We'll return to the second part of this quotation and his reference to disenchantment in a moment, but I want to further hit home Weber's notion of rational magic.

Weber frequently refers to magic and enchantment in the context of his later writings on religion, but the closest he comes to making an explicit definition of magic is in a footnote in the section *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen* (The Economic Ethics of the World Religions) dealing with the religions of China. In the relevant section of the text Weber remarks:

> A strict separation between what is "enchantment" [*Zauber*] and what is not is impossible in the world of pre-animistic [*präanimistische*] and animistic ideas. Even plowing and other everyday achievement-oriented activities were "enchantment" in the sense of employing specific "forces" and later "spirits."[35]

It appears that enchantment or magic (the German *Zauber* could mean either) was initially instrumentally rational. Indeed, Weber elsewhere associates magical powers with "world-mastery" (*Weltbeherrschung*).[36] At the very least,

early magic was not different from practical technologies except insofar as it was connected to the notion of spirits and pre-animistic occult forces.[37] That Weber saw a connection between (at least early) enchantment and technology is worth underscoring because multitudes of contemporary theorists think they are one-upping Weber when they point to enchanting technology.[38] But Weber would not have been surprised by this, especially as this passage was not the only place where he theorized the coincidence of magic and technology.[39]

Significantly, Weber both provides his most systematic theorization of magic and even charts a whole trajectory of the history of enchantment in his incomplete final work, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Economy and Society, 1922). In brief, here Weber reiterates that magic is originally this-worldly instrumentally rational, focused on producing particular ends like starting fires and calling rain.[40] Throughout his writings, Weber cautions his readers against anachronistically viewing the past from the standpoint of modern science and assuming that everything that looks irrational from that vantage is primitive magic. As he puts it, "[we cannot] objectively distinguish in such behaviors those which are 'correct' from those which are 'incorrect,' and then designate the [false] attributions of causality as irrational, and the corresponding actions as 'magic' [*Zauberei*]."[41] To underscore the main claim of this text, Weber was very explicitly arguing against the idea that magic is irrational or that primitive behaviors that don't make sense from the perspective of contemporary science were magical.

Weber argued that early magic was based on neither its irrationality nor a sense that magic violated the laws of nature. Instead, as he elaborated, belief in magic was rooted in the sense that some objects and people possess "extraordinary powers" (*außeralltäglichen Kräfte*) often referred to as "'*mana*,' '*orenda*,' and the Iranian '*maga*' (which became '*magic*'), and which we will henceforth call 'charisma.'"[42] Crucially, in this passage magic and charisma are equivalent. Charisma, as Weber elaborates, can be an attribute of both people and objects, and is either claimed for one's self or bestowed, such as in an act of consecration.[43] Given that Weber is famous for importing the notion of charismatic authority into sociology, it is striking that in this early usage charisma is primarily a synonym for magic.

However, to be fair, Weber was not fully consistent in maintaining an equivalence between charisma and magic. While he often treats them as synonymous, Weber also argued that "charismatic authority" (*charismatische Herrschaft*) is "often thought of as resting on magical powers."[44] So in this passage at least, charisma and magic are being distinguished even if they are seen often to go together.[45] Moreover, in this passage Weber suggests that in

its pure or primal form "charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules."[46] There is lot more that could be said about how Weber's theories of magic and charisma fit together, but space prohibits a full explanation. Nonetheless, in the broadest of strokes we can say that while pure magic for Weber is instrumentally rational, pure charisma is antinomian and hence formally irrational (see the typology of rationality offered below). But that said, Weber was interested in how, despite charisma's inherent tension with institutional forms of rationality, it inevitably fell prey to them over time. Charismatic authority itself became divested from the person and attributed instead to the office or institution. In effect, antinomianism became the source of new norms and raw charisma was transposed into routine and even bureaucratic statecraft. Moreover, by way of foreshadowing, just as Weber wrote about the "routinization of charisma," he also referred to the rationalization of magic.[47]

To return to the "Kategorien" essay, it is only after having established the rationality of magic that Weber goes on to refer to the disenchantment of the world. I want to underscore that Weber's very first use of disenchantment is connected to his account of the rationality of magic. The two concepts are conjoined. Weber's main point is that, in contrast to the rationality of primitive magic, in an increasingly disenchanted world that has foreclosed meaning in nature, religiously motivated actors often perform actions that are instrumentally *irrational*: in other words, actions that are directed against their seemingly rational interests but are instead invested with subjective meaning rooted in their specific convictions or mystical experiences.

To get a better sense of what disenchantment meant in this context, we have to realize that Weber saw early human societies shifting their basic orientation toward the natural world, making it symbolic. The magical arts then come to occupy the position of interpretation (divination) and manipulation (spells) of this invisible, symbolic world. Later, magicians and priests will professionalize partially according to whether they compel gods or worship them, although Weber notes this differentiation is incomplete.[48] But the important thing is that humanity has come to read this world as symbolically significant by producing a contrasting other world.

Weber thought that human cultures eventually encounter a fork in the road. They can cling to their notion of magic, as he thinks happened in China and India (note the implicit Orientalism). This preserves the culture's image of the world as a meaningful "enchanted garden" (*Zaubergarten*), but it comes at a cost.[49] In part this is because Weber thinks that over time magic/charisma

gets invested in particular institutions (like the Brahmans or the Chinese emperor), which then exert a conservative function on the culture that delays its growth.

According to Weber, however, the Occident took a different route, namely disenchantment. The history of the West's rejection of magic is a story that Weber sketched many times but never finished elaborating. One version occurs in a famous passage from the second edition of *The Protestant Ethic*:

> That great historic process in the development of religions, the disenchantment of the world, which had begun with the old Hebrew prophets and, in conjunction with Hellenistic scientific thought, had repudiated all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin, came here to its logical conclusion. The genuine Puritan even rejected all signs of religious ceremony at the grave and buried his nearest and dearest without song or ritual in order that no superstition, no trust in the effects of magical and sacramental forces on salvation, should creep in.[50]

Paraphrased, instead of producing an entrenched magical caste in the Occident, the Hebrew prophets' demonization of magic culminated in the Protestant, and especially Puritan, disenchantment of the world. The Puritans thus overcame not only the demonology of the Gentiles and the Catholic priesthood but also Jewish mysteries and rituals.

Weber's account of Protestant disenchantment has attracted the most attention in the secondary scholarship. But surprisingly, later interpreters have generally overlooked that Weber asserted that Puritans and Jews did not doubt "the reality of magic" and repeatedly reminded his readers that "witches were also burned in New England."[51] Moreover, Protestants continued to believe in angels and demons.[52] As Weber emphasized: "Nowhere, not even during the Reformation, was the existence of the spirit-world and demons permanently eliminated; rather, they were simply subordinated unconditionally to the one god, at least in theory."[53]

It is important to emphasize what the "disenchantment of the world" is not. It is not the end of belief in magic. It is not the end of belief in animating spirits. It is not a new pessimistic state of mind, nor is it the fragmentation of social cohesion. It is not the rise of instrumental reason because magic is itself instrumental. It is not yet secularization insofar as disenchantment happens earlier and is first and foremost internal to religion. It is not the evolution from magic to religion, and finally to science, because Weber repeatedly reminds his readers that magic and religion often coincide.[54]

Many scholars, even sophisticated Weberians, mistake disenchantment for the various things I have dismissed above.[55] A certain amount of the secondary literature promotes the idea that disenchantment means banishing the "mysterious" or losing a sense of wonder. But the parallel passage in the "Kategorien" essay where Weber spells out his theory makes no mention of mystery in reference to "savage" belief and instead refers to primitive attempts to influence the world. So it is hard to imagine that the "mysterious" is central to Weber's account.[56] Having rejected these, the question becomes: What then is disenchantment?

Many interpretations of Weber tend to assume that he was describing a world without magic. You can find this claim throughout the secondary literature even though some readers have complicated this account by discussing what they see as re-enchantment. At the very least, this reading of disenchantment is easy to dismiss in terms of both Weber's own understanding of the Puritan witch trials and knowledge of magical revivals. Indeed, I cannot emphasize this enough—the disenchantment of the world does not mean it has no magic. We understand Weber better if we read him as also theorizing the persistence of magic into modernity.

What Weber envisioned can be further clarified on basic philological grounds. *Entzauberung* in German signals something that is in process. As I argued in *The Myth of Disenchantment*, one of the most straightforward implications of revisiting Weber's famous frame is that it should be translated not as "the disenchantment of the world" but instead as "the disenchanting of the world." "Disenchantment" suggests an accomplished state of affairs. But what Weber has in mind is not just a process but also a program. All he's doing is identifying that this program is in place, not that it is completed. For there to be an active, ongoing disenchant*ing* of the world, magic has to be intact somewhere, among some groups. There must therefore be pockets, entire regions, groups, or classes where magic remains. If anything, disenchanting the world might seem destined to produce a "magic sphere" with a new host of professionals, subject to its own internal rationalization process.

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that for Weber to be right, the disenchanters do not have to deny the existence of magic. They merely have to demonize it. The disenchanting of the world is in place once there are some elites who want to cut out magic as a path to salvation. In the first instance, disenchanting does not strip the earth of supernatural beings so much as it depicts the world as demon-haunted. This allows us also to see that "the disenchanting of the world" is not identical to the (putatively) anonymous process of rationalization. Yet it is still alienating.

When Weber theorized rationalization, he argued that in the modern Occident, theoretical rationalization has, if anything, been further subsumed by the onset of formalized/institutionalized rationality, resulting in an "iron cage" (*stahlhartes Gehäuse*). Weber spent time discussing the many forms of domination and violence enshrined in the modern state. To these we could add the ideas of Marx and a host of different condemnations of the contemporary capitalist world order. I mention this here because the iron cage and disenchantment are often entangled. Framed this way, however, it seems unlikely that re-enchantment (either a naïve revival of magic or even a recovery of ethics) would solve any of these issues. Leaving aside his Orientalist binary between a magical Asia and a magic-less West, Weber himself seems to have believed that Asia had not yet been disenchanted, and yet he was ambivalent about this fact (as he was about enchantment/disenchantment in general).

To put this in more systematic terms, Weber's disenchanting world, as a characterization of popular mentality, had five levels:

1. *Metaphysical realism* (the belief that the world is what it is and does not represent anything else)
2. *Ontological homogeneity* (the belief that there are no truly extramundane objects or people)
3. *Ethical predeterminism* (that God has already decided each individual's soteriological fate) or *value nihilism* (the excision of value from the world of fact)
4. *Epistemic overconfidence* (the belief that everything in the material world is in principle knowable by means of intellectualization/theoretical rationality)
5. *The construction and rationalization of the magic sphere.*[57]

In previous writings, I have discussed the first four levels, but in what follows I want to focus on the construction and rationalization of the magic sphere.

Part III: The Magic Sphere, a Thought Experiment

Although Weber refers to the rationalization of magic, he never fully articulated what it would have looked like in a Western society. In this section, I want to explore what Weber might have meant by the rationalization of the magic sphere and then use Weber's theory in a kind of thought experiment or generative mode. This will put us in position to see where it looks

different from a theory of secularization and will perhaps provide us with a more complete sense of what Weber might have thought of our current disenchanting world.

Two of Weber's most important contributions to sociology were his theory of rationalization and his notion of modernity as fragmented into distinct value spheres. Both can be critiqued; Weber's concept of rationalization tends to eliminate individual human agency from history, and his notion of the distinctiveness of the six value spheres or societal domains (*gesellschaftliche Ordnungen*) (often listed as religious, economic, political, aesthetic, erotic, intellectual), and his account of when they became differentiated historically, can also be criticized.[58] But I want to emphasize, on the one hand, that Weber had a complex account of rationalization, and, on the other, that he saw rationalization as occurring in different spheres which he described as coming increasingly to accord with their own logics and autonomous laws *(Eigengesetzlichkeit)*.

Weber never explicitly discussed a magic sphere. He may not have conceived of one at all. But we can begin to reconstruct what he might have thought of a magic sphere in distinction from the other spheres by exploring his accounts of how other value spheres came to be differentiated and rationalized.

To explain, I first need to showcase the variety of types of rationalization in Weber's project. Later scholars have proposed radically divergent readings of Weber's system of rationalization, suggesting everything from sixteen versions of rationality to arguing that Weber essentially thought rationalization could mean anything. I parse Weber's notion of social orientations into instrumental, value, theoretical, and formalized rationality versus habitual and effectual irrationality.[59] I discuss these different types of rationality in greater detail and locate the specific references to them in Weber's corpus elsewhere.[60] But here I'd like to supply a brief overview: *instrumental rationality* (*Zweckrationalität*) is basically practical ends-means rationality. Weber's second type of rational orientation is what he referred to as *value rationality* (*Wertrationalität*), or rationality vis-à-vis a particular value or conviction (encompassing what philosophers have referred to as both teleological and deontological ethics). *Theoretical rationality* (generally referred to as "intellectual rationality" or "intellectualization") describes a type of rationality directed toward abstract conjecture and clarifying theoretical concepts. *Formalized rationality* is the institutionalization of various forms of rationality and their incarnation in courts, markets, and other bureaucratic organizations. Formalized rationality has two main sub-aspects: standardization and bureaucratization.

In addition, Weber's writings suggest his underlying notions about rationalization in general. He described the rationalization of the six different value spheres in terms of their coming increasingly into accord with their own particular ultimate values, means, and ends. As a general pattern, rationalization has led toward value spheres becoming increasingly autonomous and therefore fragmented. He also implied that different disciplines, professions, and so on could be rationalized according to their own internal logics. Further, Weber's use of rationalization intimated that it was in general a trend toward standardization, consistency, and decreased complexity (or decreased entropy). Moreover, Weber implied that all forms of rationality tended to absorb irrationality, in that respect liquidating habit, tradition, and emotion into rationalized (or we might say, repressed) norms of behavior.

What might the rationalization of the magic sphere have looked like according to Weber's theoretical apparatus? Our first clue can be found in Weber's writings themselves, in which can be found tentative gestures toward his account of the rationalization of magic. In the China portion of *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen,* Weber actually wrote a subsection titled "The Systematic Rationalization of Magic" (*Die rationale Systematisierung der Magie*). As he argued there:

> In general, it could be said that every sort of rationalization of archaic empirical knowledge and craft in China has moved toward a magical world picture [*magischen Weltbildes*]. Astronomy became astrology … Medicine, and connected with it pharmacology, once manifested estimable empirical accomplishments. They were completely rationalized in an animistic direction …. Chinese "universalist" philosophy and cosmogony transformed the world into a magic garden.[61]

In the first instance, what Weber seems to have had in mind was a set of calendrical reforms under the first Qin Emperor Shihuangdi (始皇帝, birth name Ying Zheng 嬴政, 259–210 BCE). Although today scholars would place the chronology differently, based on the sources he had available Weber believed that Shihuangdi's reign resulted in the systematization of omens, oracular divination, and astrological observations (alongside astronomical calculations) resulting in the production of calendrical almanacs that tracked fortunate and unfortunate days and the like.[62] Weber also argued that something similar happened in Chinese medicine, which became a kind of rationalized "animism" under the influence of notions of *qi* (気) energy and ideas of disease spirits.[63]

The main thrust of Weber's argument in the section on the rationalization of magic as a whole is that Chinese civilization rationalized toward, rather than away from, a meaningful cosmos. In his account, Chinese thinkers came to see the world as full of legible signs, but for Weber this was also a project of rationalization insofar as it produced what he saw as professional magical specialists, a fully bureaucratized enchanted government, and more importantly a standardization and intellectualization of magical forms of knowledge. To be sure, Weber saw this as a crucial difference between Occidental and Oriental civilizations. So in that respect the "magical garden" was the Orientalist alternative to the "disenchanting world." But nonetheless, Weber suggested that magic had been rationalized in the West as well, although he never described this process. In a disenchanting world, magic should be marginalized or at least contained in its own sphere and also rationalized. What might this have looked like according to Weber's model?

One clue can be found in Weber's *Die rationalen und soziologischen Grundlagen der Musik* (The Rational and Social Foundations of Music, 1911). Some of Weber's first explicit engagements with rationalization came in this early manuscript. In the work as a whole, Weber applies his sociological insights to the history of Western music. He began by describing an ideal "primitive" music, which he saw as being rooted in ritual performance, lacking particular note divisions, and being performed by nonspecialists. Then he wanted to explain how in his time, the octave scale, polyvocality, the role of the composer, and the specific instruments used all resulted from particular sociological factors that had altered these basic musical rites into modern forms. In his attempt to explore these, Weber began thinking about rationalization and in so doing he theorized about how different kinds of rationalization (or rational orientations) had produced Western music. For our purposes, the important thing to note is that each of the different kinds of rationalization explored above transformed the unspecialized music of antiquity into its modern form.

In the broadest of brushstrokes, *instrumental rationality* can be seen in the increasing professionalization of music. Instead of celebrating raw talent or local amateur musicians, modernization has meant the birth of whole systems of professionalization for musicians, vocalists, composers, producers, and the like. For Weber, the expression of *value rationality* in the history of Western music can be seen in the way it established its own values, such as aesthetic enjoyment (associated with euphony, harmony, and polyvocality), and then rationalized in order to maximize these values.[64] In this respect, Weber saw modernity as shifting from a less differentiated music, such as sacerdotal music whose

function was rooted in praise of the divine, into a kind of music intended for listening pleasure. We can see *theoretical rationality* at work in the birth of music theory. We can see *formalized rationality* at work in both the standardization of music (e.g., musical notation) and the bureaucratization of music (Weber has in mind the orchestra as a kind of bureaucratic organization). In addition to these particular kinds of rationalizations, Weber also was interested in how mechanization or technological shifts contributed to producing modern forms of music.

What Weber said about the rationalization of music provides a blueprint for a discussion of what he might have thought of the rationalization of modern magic in a disenchanting world. Weber would have predicted that magic became increasingly separate from religion, as religion became increasingly contained in its own sphere, a.k.a. secularization. But alongside the secularization of religion, he would have expected to see the formation of a magic sphere with its own diverse types of professionals. The field would begin to cohere around a certain set of values. It would produce works that describe magic theory, so to speak. There would be both bureaucratic and standardization pressures. Finally, technology would result in changes in how the magic sphere operated.

To get a handle on what this magical sphere might look like, one has to begin with the *value rationality* of the magic sphere. Weber saw divination or a symbolic cosmos as a key part of his definition of enchantment. To be clear, I don't want to simplify his definition of magic excessively, but the above point suggests that fortune-telling might be one key site of analysis. One might imagine that as magic rationalized, its central value would be its ability to absorb the meaning-producing function shed by the de-ritualization of modern religion. Indeed, in parallel with Weber's example of Chinese divination above, I want to look at all the ways fortune-telling in the United States exhibits the various kinds of rationalization that Weber predicted.

First, I want to remind readers that despite grand secularization narratives, fortune-telling is widespread. Although surprisingly understudied by scholars, various forms of fortune-telling are big business in contemporary Europe and America. According to one survey from 2017, fortune-tellers and related fields make up an estimated 8 billion euros a year in Italy alone, and there is similar anecdotal evidence about the popularity of various forms of fortune-telling in the United States and Great Britain.[65] Indeed, one only has to travel to a sufficiently big urban area to find signs advertising "palm readers," "psychics," "clairvoyant readings," or "astrology." It is also easy to turn on the television to see celebrity psychics.

We only have a partial instrumental rationalization of this sphere since, despite attempts to the contrary, fortune-telling is still rather under-regulated in Europe and America.[66] That said, there are clearly different professional routes to the performance of fortune-telling due to the variety of different types of fortune-tellers—psychics, astrologers, palm readers, and so on. Looked at from the perspective of theoretical rationalization, there has been a profusion of New Age fortune-telling books that purport to explain astrology and psychical powers, or provide instructions on divination. We can also see standardization pressures at work in these various arenas, in which terminology, ritual, expectations, and (at a local level) pricing all have been standardized to some degree. Finally, it is clear that technological change is indeed motivating the transformations of fortune-telling. Astrology has branched out into iPhone apps and web subscriptions, and sellers on Etsy offer virtual "Spiritual Works" for a fee. To be sure, capitalist profit seems to be an underlying motivation, but one of the underemphasized aspects of Weber's analysis of the fragmentation of the value spheres is exactly that in modernity the economic sphere comes to dominate.

I do not want to claim that this reconstruction of Weber's theory necessarily describes contemporary American or European cultures, but it gives us a bare nub of what a Weberian account of such things might look like. At best magic is only partially rationalized in the contemporary context. We have fortune-tellers, energy workers, faith healers, New Age bookstores, and the like, but there are still many amateur magic practitioners. Moreover, the boundaries between magic and Weber's other value spheres (such as the religious or artistic) are at best incomplete. But it does suggest areas for future research.

Conclusion

The main thrust of this chapter has been an attempt to clarify various misunderstandings concerning Weber's notion of *Entzauberung*. In particular, I wanted to attack two common notions—that Weber thought magic would vanish in modernity and that Weber saw magic and rationalization as opposed. Instead, I have shown that the first is implausible both on biographical grounds and in reference to specific points in his writings. The second claim about the relationship between magic and rationality has required more explanation. But it should now be clear that a close reading of Weber's writings suggests that he specifically described the rationalization and systematization of magic.

Instead of a classic account of "the disenchantment of the world" that imagined either that belief in magic was gone or that it was displaced in favor of a subsequent revival, I have shown that Weber instead should be read as having posited a *disenchanting* world in which magic became demonized and located in its own sphere. In the above, I've sketched the barest of outlines of how he might have imagined this disenchanting world by looking at his account of the putative rationalization of magic in China and gesturing at fortune-telling in America and Western Europe.