

Weber, Goethe, and the Nietzschean Allusion: Capturing the Source of the "Iron Cage" Metaphor*

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Edward Tiryakian recently argued that Max Weber was so deeply affected by John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress that he personally identified with one of its characters, a man who was trapped in an iron cage of despair. Therein, Tiryakian claimed, lies the origins of the famous "iron cage" metaphor that appears in the final pages of Talcott Parsons' translation of The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Challenging his view, this article argues that Weber was little affected by his reading of Puritan material, since he subsumed its example of inner worldly asceticism into German ideational models provided by Nietzsche and Goethe. The "iron cage" metaphor is the result of a mistranslation by Parsons, and cannot be attributed to Weber. Moreover, by conceiving of the Puritans as Übermenschen, Weber was unable to see the extent to which a desire for revenge against those in power helped to shape the economic activities of at least one Puritan group, the Quakers.

A recent article by Edward Tiryakian (1981) has attempted to locate the source of the provocative "iron cage" metaphor in Talcott Parsons' translation of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Tiryakian was fortunate to have considered the origins of this metaphor while Parsons himself was still alive, and he has supplemented his article with a portion of a letter that Parsons wrote to him in response to a query about his decision to translate *ein stahlhartes Gehäuse* as "an iron cage" (Parsons, 1981). Tiryakian's article proved to be so stimulating that Stephen P. Turner used it as the basis upon which to comment on Weber's notions of "freedom" and "unfreedom" ([sic] 1982:85, 84), which he considered implicit in Weber's work as a whole, and in the "iron cage" metaphor itself.¹

Both Tiryakian and Turner are aware of the "puzzle" (Tiryakian, 1981:29) arising from the fact that Parsons' "iron cage" translation is, at best, a figurative rendition of the original German. Tiryakian points out that Reinhard Bendix and Arthur Mitzman prefer more literal translations (despite Mitzman's use of "the iron cage" in the title of his well-

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¹Another suggestion about the origins of the "iron cage" metaphor appears in Michael Hill's sympathetic study of Weber. He speculates that, "Matthew Arnold, who apparently took the relationship [between Protestantism and capitalism] so much for granted that he only refers to it incidentally, may well have stimulated Weber into using one of his most vivid images, for he spoke of the English middle class as having 'entered the prison of Puritanism' at the beginning of the seventeenth century and having 'had the key turned upon its spirit there for two hundred years.'" (Hill, 1973:102). While Hill cites a secondary source for Arnold's quotation, it originally appeared twice in an 1879 publication, *Mixed Essays*, one in an essay entitled "Falkland," the other in "Equality" (Arnold, 1972:201, 297). As I am about to argue, however, the phrase, "iron cage," is a mistranslation, and therefore responsibility for it cannot be assigned to Weber. Besides, Arnold used the phrase

known book), while the translator of Weber's biography, Harry Zohn, adopted Parsons' English phrase (Tiryakian, 1981:28-29). Tiryakian also agrees with Parsons, and bases his decision not only on the fact that the "iron cage" metaphor existed in one of Weber's important Puritan sources, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, but also on the assertion that Weber was deeply moved by this particular Puritan image (1981:30). Stephen Turner is less certain of the accuracy of Parsons' translation but finally skirts the issue by shifting the discussion to the *appropriateness* of the iron cage metaphor, regardless of its linguistic accuracy (1982:84).

We must address the translation problem, however, if we are to understand what Weber himself meant to convey. Weber's intended meaning becomes clearer on examination of the phrase, *ein stahlhartes Gehäuse*, alongside the passages immediately preceding and following it in the original text. These passages indicate that Weber was far less "inspired" by Puritan material than Tiryakian believes, since he interpreted Puritan asceticism within the framework of the German ascetic models provided by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Nietzsche. Weber did not have Bunyan in mind when he wrote the phrase, and its inaccurate rendition as "an iron cage" is solely Parsons' responsibility. Weber meant it to have mechanistic overtones, as the pessimistic content of related passages makes clear. Indeed, Weber's general pessimism about modernity is similar to views developed previously by Goethe and Nietzsche with which he was intimately familiar.²

Tiryakian correctly points out that Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* contains an allegory involving a man who has become inexorably trapped in an iron cage. The man's despair is the result of his having hardened his heart toward God through his entanglements with "the Lusts, Pleasures, and Profits of this World" (Bunyan, 1678c:35).³ Tiryakian then suggests "that Weber was inspired by this passage and that he strongly identified not only with 'the Man' of despair but also with Christian." The latter is a figure in the allegory who had embarked on a spiritual journey away from the City of Destruction and toward the Celestial City (Tiryakian, 1981:30-31). Weber identified with the man of despair on a psychological level, Tiryakian believes, because he had recovered from a debilitating mental breakdown only a few years before he researched and wrote *The Protestant*

in a section that disparaged Puritanism in the strongest possible terms, and this interpretation ran contrary to Weber's. It certainly would not have "stimulated" him to construct a metaphor based upon it. Arnold argued, for example, "is it meant that the Puritan triumph was the triumph of religion,—of conduct and righteousness? Alas! it was its defeat. So grossly imperfect, so false, was the Puritan conception and presentation of righteousness, so at war with the ancient and inbred integrity, piety, good nature, and good humour of the English people, that it led straight to moral anarchy, the profligacy of the Restoration . . . It led, amongst that middle class where religion still lived on, to a narrowness, an intellectual poverty, almost incredible . . . It led to that character of their steady and respectable life which makes one shiver: its hideousness, its immense ennui" (Arnold, 1972:201). Weber did not reveal which of Arnold's works he had read, but he mentioned the essayist in at least two places (1920b:191, 280; 1920a:28n.3, 196n.2).

²This article will deal primarily with the effect of Nietzsche's pessimism about modernity on Weber, since this relationship is a direct one. Goethe's pessimism, however, was similar to Nietzsche's, as is evidenced by the unattractive advice (see Goethe, 1795-96:78) that one of Goethe's characters, Werner, gave to his brother-in-law, Wilhelm Meister, in *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Apprenticeship*. "This then is my merry confession of faith: to do business, make money, amuse yourself with your own people and have no further care for the rest of the world, except in so far as you can make use of it" (Goethe, 1795-96:77).

³I use the critical edition of Bunyan's story, which is different from the edition that Tiryakian used. Nonetheless, the story of the Man in the Iron Cage is the same in both versions.

Ethic. At the same time, Weber saw himself as a pilgrim fleeing from mental paralysis into which he had fallen by seeking a personal kind of Celestial City—"a new selfhood" (Tiryakian, 1981:30).

On a cultural or perhaps political level, Tiryakian claimed also that Weber:

had come to realize that Wilhelmine Germany—
that contemporary modern industrial society—
was the 'City of Destruction'; like Christian at
the beginning of *Pilgrim's Progress* . . . he had
to (symbolically) leave it to save himself,
though his neighbors thought him insane

(Tiryakian, 1981:31).

Thus "the identity crisis of Weber was not only a personal one but also one of the entire technological society" (Tiryakian, 1981:31).

While much of Tiryakian's analysis addresses issues involving Weber's personal struggles and social impressions, Stephen Turner's commentary (1982:84-87) expands upon Weber's conceptions of "freedom" and "unfreedom," especially with regard to the effect of religion on "political orders" (1982:85). Turner discusses the Calvinists' and Bunyan's "ascetic notions of freedom, freedom understood as an inner quality," and claims that Weber shared this view (1982:85). He also asserts that "when Weber thinks of freedom as 'threatened' he characteristically speaks of the penetration of the bureaucratic into the sphere of the political" (1982:86), which produces, presumably, the "specialists without spirit" whom Weber scorns (Weber, 1905:109; 1920a:204; 1920b:182; see Turner, 1982:87).

Tiryakian and Turner's analyses offer insightful speculations concerning both the nature of the personal and cultural entrapment that Weber felt and the appropriateness of the "iron cage" metaphor in light of Weber's ideas about personal and cultural freedom. Yet Turner's interpretation of the *spirit* of Weber's message avoids the questions of both Weber's use of the metaphor and Tiryakian's claim to have identified the metaphor's origins. Turner says that "whether Weber intended to invoke [sic] it or not, Bunyan's man in the cage is indeed a fine image for a particular idea of unfreedom" (1982:84). The trouble with the image, however, is that Weber did not intend to evoke it, especially because he had other equally poignant images in mind when he wrote the final sections of *The Protestant Ethic*.

Credit for the "iron cage" metaphor in *The Protestant Ethic* rests solely with Parsons, not Weber, and the evidence for this is definite. First, as Tiryakian (1981:28-29) and Turner (1982:84) are aware, "an iron cage" is not an adequate translation of *ein stahlhartes Gehäuse* (Mitzam, 1970:172). Turner checked, for example, the German translation of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* by the American Tract Society and found that "iron cage" appeared as *eiserner Käfig* (1982:84), and I found the same German phrase used in a Berlin translation of the work that was published in 1852 (Bunyan, 1678b:77).⁴ Furthermore, in 1978, Parsons himself wrote to Tiryakian that "I am pretty sure that I did look

⁴With the kind assistance of Arlene Balkansky, who served formerly on the staff of the Library of Congress, I also was able to check a German translation of *Pilgrim's Progress* that originated in the United States (see Bunyan, 1678a:32). Much to my surprise, the crucial phrase, "an iron cage," had been mistranslated as "*einer eisernen höhle*,"—an iron cave!

up *Pilgrim's Progress* at the time I was working on the translation and that this influenced my choice of the phrase iron cage in my own translation . . ." (Parsons, 1981:35). Finally, in a 1978 work Parsons took full responsibility for the phrase:

Perhaps it is well to remind the reader that I, not Weber, was responsible for the expression "iron cage." As translator of Weber's essay into English, I found it awkward to render his phrase, *ein stahlhartes Gehäuse*: "iron cage" was the nearest equivalent I could think of. It seems to have caught on (Parsons, 1978:53n.5, my emphasis).⁵

We must conclude that Parsons, a minister's son who was probably exposed to Bunyan's work at an early age (see Martel, 1979:610), should receive credit for the "iron cage" metaphor. The phrase may have come to him because, in the previous sentence in *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber quoted the anti-materialist attitude of another prominent Puritan from the same era, Richard Baxter. Baxter's quotation about external goods "resting on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak'" (Weber, 1920b:181),⁶ may have brought to Parsons' mind the opinions on materialism of another great Puritan, John Bunyan.

To offer a fresh interpretation of the troublesome phrase, I believe that Weber intended *ein stahlhartes Gehäuse* to represent an industrial, mechanistic image for his readers, perhaps a steel housing or casing for motors.⁷ This image would, after all, be in keeping with the most accurate translation of the phrase as "casing (or housing) hard as steel" (Tiryakian, 1981:28-29; Turner, 1982:84; see Runciman, 1978:170). Furthermore, it would establish a relationship with three references to mechanistic functions that appear in the same section of the text. In the first, Weber described "the modern economic order" as being "bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production" ("*an die technischen und ökonomischen Voraussetzungen mechanisch-maschinelles Produktion gebundenen*") [Weber, 1920b:181; 1905:108; 1920a:203]. In the next, Weber spoke of the "mechanical foundations" ("*mechanischer Grundlage*") on which "victorious capitalism" rests (Weber, 1920b:181-182; 1905:108; 1920a:204). In the last, Weber lamented the condition of "mechanized petrification" ("*mechanisierte Versteinerung*") settling in upon the modern world (Weber, 1920b:182; 1920a:204).⁸ Weber used each of these three

⁵My thanks go to Theodore Long of Washington and Jefferson College for bringing this quote to my attention. Worth mentioning is the fact that, early in *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber also described modernity as a *Gehäuse*. He stated that "the modern capitalistic economic-order" presented itself to the individual "as an unalterably real casing" ("*als faktisch unabänderliches Gehäuse*") in which he or she must live (1920a:37; 1904:18). Parsons' less precise translation of this phrase reads, "as an unalterable order of things" (1920b:54).

⁶Weber gave the source of this quotation as "*Saints' Everlasting Rest*, chap. xii." In the first edition of this work, the phrase appears less polished. In "Part Four, 'Containing some Hindrances of a Heavenly Life,' Sect. II," the original text reads: "Keep these things [i.e., material possessions] as thy upper Garments, still loose about thee, that thou maist lay them by, when ever there is cause" (Baxter, 1649:650). Obviously the English in Weber's source had been modernized.

⁷When used, for example, in relation to a pump, motor, or engine, *Gehäuse* specifically means "housing, casing, frame" (Springer, 1974:s.v.). Never does the word mean 'cage'—it indicates a solid enclosure, not a barred one (see Spalding, 1967:944). Occasionally, however, *Stahl* means 'iron': *Nerven wie Stahl* (iron nerves); *hart wie Stahl sein* (to be as hard as iron); *Stahlkeil* (iron wedge); and *Stahlross* (iron horse [i.e., locomotive]) (Springer, 1974:s.v. *Stahl*).

⁸Worth noting is that, in the 1905 version, Weber had not used the phrase, "mechanized petrification," but instead had used "Chinese petrification" ("*chinesische Versteinerung*") (1905:109). No doubt this referred to a condition of modern bureaucracies in which conformity became more highly valued than innovation, as Weber believed happened in the Chinese bureaucratic governmental structure with its dependence on Confu-

mechanistic images in contrast to either the world as it had been or the world as it might become. Similarly, the "*ein stahlhartes Gehäuse*" phrase was part of a comparison between the modern condition and the idealized condition of Baxter's Puritan world.

I see no reason, therefore, to entertain the thought that Weber had Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in mind when he wrote the *ein stahlhartes Gehäuse* phrase in the last part of *The Protestant Ethic*. Furthermore, had Weber been "inspired" by Bunyan's allegorical work, as Tiryakian proposes (1981:30), then surely he would have referred to it in other writings. Outside of *The Protestant Ethic*, however, one searches in vain for references to it. Besides, within Weber's own German cultural tradition there existed literary and philosophical models which he could, and did, use to reflect upon his personal and political life. He revealed these models in the same section in which he wrote the *ein stahlhartes Gehäuse* phrase, and their universality allowed him to embrace Bunyan's allegory within their purview: Goethe, Goethe's *Faust*, and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*—all of whom represented *Übermenschen* (overmen or supermen) to Weber.

Ideas formulated by Nietzsche were major sources of Weber's inspiration for the last, pessimistic section of *The Protestant Ethic* (Mommesen, 1974:106, see 79). Those of us who know Weber's work primarily through Parsons' translation fail to realize this because, once again, of deficiencies in Parsons' rendering of a crucial and revealing phrase. Both Tiryakian (1981:27) and Turner (1982:87) quote part of the paragraph in which the telling phrase occurs; I will quote the entire paragraph, and cite the German at the appropriate points.

No one knows who will live in this cage (*Gehäuse*) in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of the old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage (*die letzten Menschen*) of this cultural development it might well be truly said: 'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved' (Weber, 1920b:182; 1920a:204).⁹

The translation problem is clear: in the original German Weber referred to Nietzsche's "last men" (Nietzsche 1883:128–131, 325) as those who would be "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart." He even put *letzten Menschen* in quotation marks, so that his readers would be certain to pick up the Nietzschean allusion to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Parsons' translation of the German phrase as "the last stage," not to mention his omission of the quotations around it, inarguably misrepresents what Weber tried to convey (Fleischmann, 1964:233; Mommesen, 1965:600–602).

The "specialists without spirit" quotation that Weber offered was not taken verbatim from Nietzsche. Rather, Weber himself constructed it with the tenor of *Zarathustra* in

cian values and Confucian intellectuals. His description of Chinese cultural traits, for example, seems also to be applicable to modern bureaucratic structures and the bureaucrats who serve in them: "the striking lack of 'nerves' in the specifically modern European meaning of the word; unlimited patience and controlled politeness; the strong attachment to the habitual; the absolute insensitivity to monotony; the capacity for uninterrupted work and the slowness in reacting to unusual stimuli, especially in the intellectual sphere" (Weber, 1951:231; 1920a:517).

⁹My thanks extend to James Daly of McMaster University, whose sensitive reading of this passage in Parsons' translation first led me to investigate its origins. For a translation of the last chapter of *The Protestant Ethic* that is more accurate than Parsons', see Matthews' translation in Runciman, 1978:138–173.

mind (Mommsen, 1965:602).¹⁰ That he would construct such a passage should not be surprising since (in contrast to Weber's limited use of Bunyan) consideration of Nietzsche's philosophy is evident throughout his life's work (see Fleischmann, 1964). An excellent example of his indebtedness to Nietzsche occurs in Weber's 1918 speech entitled "Science as a Vocation" (which was published in the following year). In this speech, Weber's scorn for the overextension of both scientific promises and scientific technique parallels his famous lament about "specialists without spirit" in the final section of *The Protestant Ethic*:

After Nietzsche's devastating criticism of those 'last men' who 'invented happiness,' I may leave aside altogether the naive optimism in which science—that is, the technique of mastering life which rests upon science—has been celebrated as the way to happiness. Who believes in this?—aside from a few big children in university chairs or editorial offices (Weber, 1946:143; 1947:13).

The "last men" are "contemptible" figures in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, men who "make . . . everything small." They share a deadening equality of emotions and sentiments through their "little pleasure[s] for the day and [their] little pleasure[s] for the night," yet they claim to have "invented happiness" (1883:129–130). In contrast to these figures is the *Übermensch*, the "overman" or "superman" (see Kaufmann, 1974:307–333),¹¹ who "makes his first important public appearance" as Zarathustra himself. "To Nietzsche these *Übermenschen* appear as symbols of repudiation of any conformity to a single norm: antithesis to mediocrity and stagnation" (Kaufmann, 1974:309). Each *Übermensch* "has overcome his animal nature, organized the chaos of his passions, sublimated his impulses, and given style to his character" (Kaufmann, 1974:316). One person who epitomized the *Übermensch* was Goethe, a figure who plays an unexpected role in Weber's *Protestant Ethic*, as well as in several other works.

Goethe was, of course, a celebrated figure in German culture: Weber himself wrote that "a man like Goethe . . . appears once in a thousand years" (Weber, 1946:137; 1947:5). Nietzsche shared Weber's adulation and even proclaimed that "Goethe is the last German for whom I feel any reverence" (Nietzsche, 1889:555). This respect ran deep, so deep that Nietzsche saw him as an historical representative of his *Übermensch* concept (Kaufmann, 1974:316, 131 and n.).

Goethe—[was] not a German event, but a European one. . . . He bore [the eighteenth century's] strongest instincts within himself. . . . He sought help . . . , above all, from practical activity; he surrounded himself with limited horizons; he did not retire from life but put himself into the midst of it; he was not fainthearted but took as much as possible upon himself, over himself, into himself. What he wanted was *totality* . . . Goethe conceived a human being . . . for whom there is no longer anything that is forbidden—unless it be *weakness*, whether called vice or virtue (1889:553–554).

¹⁰As Mommsen (1965:600) says, this passage is a definite *allusion* to *Zarathustra* ("die unmittelbar von Nietzsches 'Also sprach Zarathustra' angeregt sind"). It is not, therefore, a quote from Goethe, as Anthony Giddens had thought (Giddens, 1976:9), nor even from *Faust*, as he had suggested to me in correspondence (1983: March 15). This explains why Dr. Giddens, who was kind enough to search for the origins of this passage, was unable to find it. He suggested to me that the Goethe citation might have appeared in Baumgarten (1964), but I was unable to find such a citation in that study.

¹¹For a discussion of the accuracy of the term "overman" rather than "superman" for Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, see Kaufmann, 1974:307–308. Kaufmann (1974:308) also pointed out that the term appears in Goethe's poem, *Zueignung*, and that *Faust* (Part I, line 490) is called *Übermensch* (which, in this instance, Kaufmann chose to translate as "superman" [see Goethe, 1790, 1833:103]).

Inflated as this evaluation might sound about the admittedly remarkable man, Max Weber's wife, Marianne, did not hesitate to refer to Goethe as the "superman" ("*den Übermenschen*") [Marianne Weber, 1926a:179; 126b:155-156]).

While Weber himself deeply respected Goethe, he cautioned against "trying to make his 'life' into a work of art" (1946:137; 1947:5). Marianne Weber indicated that her husband "refused to venerate Goethe as an untouchable sphere removed from human judgement . . . Goethe never embodied for him the *totality* of the human" (1926b:155; 1926a:179). Nonetheless, Goethe, particularly Goethe's masterpiece *Faust*, remained a lifetime source of inspiration for Weber. While still a teenager, Weber read all forty volumes of Goethe's works (Marianne Weber, 1926b:47-48; 1926a:53), and throughout his adulthood he quoted passages from them (Marianne Weber, 1926b:155, 309, 454, 595; Max Weber, 1920b:151, 172 n.83, 115 n.64; see 1946:131; also Weber, 1921c:62; 1920d:60, referring to *Faust*, lines 2836-2848). Even when Weber was in his mid-forties he still read *Faust* for enjoyment (Marianne Weber, 1926b:454, see Max Weber, 1946:22), and concluded one of his famous essays, "Objectivity' in Social Science," with a quotation from it (Weber, 1949:112; 1947:86, quoting *Faust*, lines 1085-1088).

By any measure *Faust* is an enormously rich work, and an attempt to identify the ideas or passages in it that edified Weber must necessarily be simplistic. Nevertheless, the culminating message of *Faust* (whose main character is a former bookish philosophy professor) is a song of praise to human action, and this message, I believe, reached Weber's heart (see Weber, 1920b:181; 1920a:203):

This is the highest wisdom that I own,
The best that mankind ever knew:
Freedom and life are earned by those alone
Who conquer them each day anew.
Surrounded by such danger, each one thrives,
Childhood, manhood, and age lead active lives.
At such a throng I would fain stare,
With free men on free ground their freedom share.
Abide, you are so fair!
(Goethe, 1790, 1833:469 [lines 11573-11582]).

In sum, Faust's vision was one of "human beings, young and old, *surrounded by danger* which shall compel them to great striving and great deeds" (Passage, 1965:xxxxviii). These people, therefore, would be engaged in constant, restless activity (Goethe, 1790, 1833:459 [lines 11448-11452]).

In Goethe's creation, Faust, Weber saw a figure who had realized that a person gains the highest wisdom, freedom, and fullness of life itself only through continuous human activity. The similarity between Goethe's Faust and Nietzsche's Zarathustra must have struck Weber as well, especially when Zarathustra proclaimed:

I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice,
but who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may some day become the overman's.
I love him who works and invents to build a house for the overman and to prepare earth, animal,
and plant for him. . . .
I love him who casts golden words before his deeds and always does even more than he promises. . . . (Nietzsche, 1883:127-128).

Within the works of the two giants of German culture, Goethe and Nietzsche, Weber saw, I propose, a similar message concerning the value of human activity. Although he remained critical of the *Übermensch* concept as Nietzsche had presented it, he nonetheless saw Goethe's Faust (if not Goethe himself) and Nietzsche's Zarathustra as *Übermenschen* who strove to attain knowledge and discover meaning through their ceaseless worldly strivings. Worth noting in this regard is that Weber's German contemporary and friend, Georg Simmel, held a similar view of Goethe, whom he eulogized along with Nietzsche.¹²

Beyond these figures in German culture, Weber identified a loosely-related group of Englishmen whose religious values and comportment had the practical consequence of conveying a similar message about the value of human action. These Englishmen were the mid-to-late-seventeenth century Puritans—Calvinists, Independents, Congregationalists, General Baptists, and Quakers (Weber, 1920b:217n.2; 1920a:85n.1; 1905:2n.2).¹³ Just as Weber saw modern bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, and the middle classes as “the last men” (Weber, 1920a:203; 1920b:182, 180–181), so too did he see the Puritans, especially Puritan businessmen, as *Übermenschen*. In the “Protestant Sects” essay, for example, Weber mentioned the “‘economic supermen’” (*ökonomischen Übermenschen*) who lived “during the age of the Puritans” (Weber, 1946:308; 1920a:214 [original quotation marks]), and then referred to several contemporary capitalist magnates (e.g., Pierpont Morgan, [John Davison] Rockefeller, and Jay Gould) as standing “‘beyond good and evil’” (*jenseits von Gut und Böse*) [Weber, 1946:309; 1920a:214, original quotation marks]; see Nietzsche, 1886). Weber even claimed in *The Protestant Ethic* that “‘economic supermen’ who like the present captains of industry, have stood beyond good and evil, have always existed” (1920b:258n.187; 1920a:160n.2; 1905:71n.139), but once again Parsons failed to include Weber's original quotation marks in the translation. The two key phrases, of course, allude to Nietzschean concepts, and the “superman” term was first developed by Nietzsche in contrast to the “last men” in *Zarathustra*.

Within *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber spoke about Goethe in terms that resonate with Nietzsche's *Übermensch* concept, and each of Weber's uses of Goethe is directly connected to Calvinism or Puritanism (Weber, 1920b:115n.64, 151, 180–181, 261, 172n.83).¹⁴

¹²In 1908 Simmel wrote, “It is popularly held that all intentions which do not break through the orbit of the individual existence and interests are of an egoistic nature, and that egoism is overcome only when concern shifts toward the welfare of the Thou or of society. Yet it is already some time that a deeper reflection on the values of life has ascertained [another] alternative, most impressively perhaps in the figures of Goethe and Nietzsche (though not in any abstract formula). It is the possibility that the perfection of the individual as such constitutes an objective value, quite irrespective of its significance for any other individuals, or in merely accidental connection with it. This value, moreover, may exist in utter disregard for the happiness or unhappiness of the individual himself, or may even be in conflict with them . . . All that can be said about [the qualities that such an individual possesses] is that the world is enriched by the existence in it of a valuable human being who is perfect in himself” (Simmel, 1950:60).

¹³In addition to these seventeenth century English groups, Weber also discussed the Mennonites, Pietists, and the eighteenth century Methodists. He did not, however, devote much attention to the General Baptists in his study (Weber, 1920b:252n.169; 1920a:150n.4). Interesting to note at this point in my argument is Weber's reference to the Indian Brahman who has entered the renunciate stage as an “*Übermensch*” (1920d:61; 1920c:63).

¹⁴Several of Weber's references to Goethe's works require qualification. First, two sentences of Goethe that Weber cited (1920b:232n.64; 1920a:111n.4; 1905:24) are from *Maxims and Reflections* 442–443 (Goethe, 1840: 93; 1964:208–209). Likewise, another quote from Goethe (1920b:151; 1920a:160–161; 1905:71) is from *Maxims*

Weber's discussion, for example, of the role played by "good works" within Calvinistic theology demonstrates how intimate was the association between Puritans and Goethe in his mind:

[For the Calvinist, good works] are the technical means, not of purchasing salvation, but of getting rid of the fear of damnation. In this sense they are occasionally referred to as directly necessary for salvation, or the *possessio salutis* [possession of salvation] is made essential by them.

In practice this means that God helps those who help themselves. Thus the Calvinist, as it is sometimes put, creates his own salvation, or as would be more correct, the conviction of it (Weber, 1920b:115; 1920a:110–111; 1905:24).

In the footnote to this section Weber added:

One is reminded of a saying by Goethe with essentially the same meaning: "How can a man know himself? Never by observation, but through action. Try to do your duty and you will know what is in you. And what is your duty? Your daily task" (*Die Forderung des Tages*) [Weber, 1920b:232n.64; 1920a:111n.2; 1905:24n.46].

Weber also, by the way, used part of this same quotation (from Goethe's *Maxims and Reflections* 442 and 443) to conclude his well-known essay, "Science as a Vocation" (Weber, 1946:156; 1947:32).

Similarly, in an essay that appeared in 1906, one year after the publication of the first edition of *The Protestant Ethic* essay, Weber again associated Goethe and Puritanism, this time through the character, Faust. In a discussion about historical interpretation, Weber claimed that:

from the point of view of history, [interpretation of an object] constitutes the *formation* of an "historical entity." The "interpretation" of "Faust" or of "Puritanism" or of some specific aspect of "Greek culture" in this sense is an inquiry into those "values" which "we" can find "embodied" in these objects (Weber, 1906:181; 1922:122, original emphasis).

Weber felt justified in associating Goethe and the Puritans, I believe, because they represented *Übermensch* to him, at least insofar as he was willing to accept the term (see Marianne Weber, 1926b:155–156).¹⁵

and *Reflections* 241 (Goethe, 1840:42), to which Weber alluded also in *The Religion of India* (1920d:210; 1920c:224–225). A quote that Weber constructed in *The Protestant Ethic* (1920b:172; 1920a:191; 1905:100) is, as Parsons indicates in a footnote, based upon *Faust*, Act I [lines 1336–1337]. The original German is, however, slightly different from what Parsons provided. It should read: "Ein Teil von jener Kraft, Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft," which Kaufmann translates as, "Part of that force which would do evil evermore, and yet creates the good." Nietzsche, by the way, may have had in mind this same passage in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, third essay, section 13 (1887:121 [see note]). In *The Religion of India* Weber mentioned "a well-known passage in Goethe's *Faust* (concerning the stomach of the church)" (1920d:60; 1920c:62), and this referred to *Faust* lines 2836–2848. Weber also quoted *Faust* in his discussion of "Confucianism and Puritanism": "With regard to the beyond the Confucian might say with old Faust, 'Fool who turns his eyes blinking in that direction'; but like Faust he would have to make the reservation, 'If only I could remove magic from my path . . .'" (Weber, 1951:229; 1920a:516). The first part of Faust's quote is from *Faust*, lines 11443–11444 (with, according to Kaufmann's German text, a slight but inconsequential variation), and the second part is from *Faust*, line 11404. The sole reference, however, that Weber made to Goethe in *Ancient Judaism* (1920f:197; 1920e:210) eludes me. Peter Qweck of McMaster University was a great help to me in locating the origins of some of these quotes.

¹⁵Weber seems not to have been bothered by the fact that Nietzsche never would have used the term, *Übermenschen*, to refer to the Puritan groups, especially the Calvinistic ones. His attack against practiced Christianity, for example, could have been levelled directly against most Puritans: "There resides a madness of

A complicated and revealing example of the *Übermensch* association that Weber made between the Puritans and Goethe occurs in the final section of *The Protestant Ethic*, in which Weber contrasted the asceticism of Benjamin Franklin's era with that of the Puritan period. Also in this section he made an additional contrast between the modern way of life and an ideal way of life by juxtaposing "the fundamentally ascetic middle class life" with the higher asceticism taught by Goethe. Weber followed this discussion in the text with the passage in which appears the *ein stahlhartes Gehäuse* phrase. The entire section is crucial for the construction of my argument, and I will refer to it throughout the remaining part of this essay.

One of the constituents of the modern capitalist spirit, and not only of this, but of modern civilization generally, the rational conduct of life on the basis of the idea of the calling, thus has its origins, as the present discussion should have shown, in the spirit of Christian asceticism. One has only to re-read again now Franklin's treatise cited at the beginning of this essay to see that the essential elements of the frame of mind there referred to as the 'spirit of capitalism' are precisely those to which we have pointed in the foregoing discussion as forming the content of the Puritan asceticism of the calling, only without the religious foundation which had already crumbled even in Franklin's time. The idea that modern work in a calling is ascetic in character is not, indeed, a new one. In his most profound insights, in *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Travel* and the ending which he gave to his *Faust*, Goethe too sought to teach us that it is in the present-day world a condition of doing anything of value that one should confine oneself to specialised work, with all the renunciation of man's Faustian omniscience which that implies; that therefore 'doing' and 'renunciation' are today inextricably linked—which is the ascetic basis of the bourgeois style of life, if indeed it is to be a style of life and not a lack of style. For Goethe, this knowledge meant a renunciatory parting from a time of complete and beautiful humanity, which will no more be repeated in the course of our cultural development than will the period of the flowering of ancient Athens (Matthews trans. in Runciman, 1978:169–170; see Weber, 1920b:180–181; Weber, 1920a:202–203; 1905:107–108).¹⁶

This long passage demands careful attention, since it contains direct references to Goethe and his work as well as a critical allusion to Goethe and Nietzsche. I shall postpone a discussion of the allusion to Goethe and Nietzsche until later and for now examine the direct references to Goethe and his writings. These direct references indicate the extent to which Weber's interpretation of Puritan asceticism was influenced by this imposing figure in Germany's intellectual tradition. The influence will become clear as I explain the meaning of Weber's Goethean references.

To begin, the "Faustian universality of man" which Weber realized had to be sacrificed in the modern world refers to the fact that Faust, in his long life ostensibly in the sixteenth century, had been a philosopher, a lover, a court poet, a scientist, an artist, a general, and a ruler (Passage, 1965:xcii). Such diversity, Weber believed, was no longer

the will which is absolutely unexampled: the *will* of man to find himself guilty and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for; punishment becoming equal to the guilt; . . . his *will* to erect an ideal—that of the "holy God"—and in the face of it to feel the palpable certainty of his own absolute unworthiness. Oh this insane, pathetic beast—man!" (Nietzsche, 1887:93). When appropriating the *Übermensch* concept to the Puritans, however, Weber ignored these and similar passages.

¹⁶I have adopted the English title of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* that H. M. Waidson uses in his new translation of the work, rather than the title that Matthews chose. I also have not followed Matthews's (and Parsons's) translation of "Faust" as a book title in this passage. Generally, however, I find Matthews's partial translation of *The Protestant Ethic* to be more accurate than Parsons' attempt.

possible, even though Goethe himself had lived such a life less than a century earlier. In the modern world, people had to specialize in their callings (see Simmel, 1950:79–80). What was nonetheless possible, indeed necessary, for modern specialists was that they lead active but inner-worldly ascetic lives, the value of which Faust had realized moments before his death.

Faust's final vision, which came to him despite his blindness, was of a utopian community that he hoped to create by reclaiming land from a large swamp. He envisioned a "land [that] will be a paradise, a Utopia, populated by a race of Faustlike, striving men" whose happiness came through the continual pursuit of the "great ideals of great existences, as he had done" (Passage, 1965:lxviii). So pleasing was this vision to Faust that he was moved to utter, "Abide, you are so fair!" (Goethe, 1790, 1833:395 [line 11582]). After a lifetime of seeking for the secret to meaningful life, Faust realized that the secret lay in action and effort itself. Paradoxical as it might sound, Faust took solace only in the thought of continual human striving. These words, "Abide, you are so fair!", were, however, fateful ones for Faust, because years earlier he had agreed with Mephistopheles that if he were to say this phrase and thereby signify that he had become complacent with an aspect of living, then the devil could end his life and thereby gain possession of his soul. His soul, nevertheless, was saved from hell by a band of heavenly angels. Their ode indicates that they saved it because of the passionate way in which he had conducted his quest to find life's meaning:

Saved is the spirit kingdom's flower
From evil and the grave.
"Who ever strives with all his power,
We are allowed to save"
(Goethe, 1790, 1833:493
[lines 11934–11937]).

It is to this vision, and to Faust's "renunciatory parting from a time of complete and beautiful humanity" which resulted from it, that Weber referred to as Faust's realization at the end of his life. The final section of *Faust*, therefore, presented a justification for inner worldly asceticism that, in Weber's mind, was analogous to the practical content of the Puritans' message.

In addition to Weber's references to *Faust*, which is Goethe's best known work, Weber also mentioned *Wanderjahre*, a book that Goethe published in 1829, only a few years before his death. A rambling book, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* [*Wilhelm Meister's Years of Travel*] was appropriately subtitled *Die Entsagenden* [*Those Who Renounce or The Resigned*]. It tells the story of Wilhelm Meister, who initially vowed to live the life of a wanderer, but who eventually decided to forego his travels in order to study medicine (Reiss, 1969:222–225). When Weber mentioned it along with *Faust* in the section of *The Protestant Ethic* quoted earlier, he also claimed in a footnote that its theme of asceticism was "well analyzed in Bielschowsky's *Goethe* II chp. xviii" (1920b:283n.113; 1905:108n.84; 1920a:203n.1). The two themes of asceticism that Bielschowsky identified, work and renunciation, were also ones that Weber analyzed throughout *The Protestant Ethic* with regard to mid-to-late seventeenth century ascetic Protestantism (Matthews trans. in Run-ciman, 1978:139n.2; Weber, 1920a:165n.2; 1920b:259n.3):

The two great fundamental ideas running through *Die Wanderjahre* are work and resignation [or renunciation]. Resignation [or renunciation] means much. It means limitation, concentration. It is man's duty to limit his striving and to concentrate all his powers on the limited field. Resignation [or renunciation] means the conquering of passions, means the giving up of many inherited and earned advantages, rights, and possessions. It transforms the man of impulses into a man of reason, the selfish man into a public-spirited man, the egoist into an altruist. It exerts such a profound influence on man's nature and development that Goethe considered it, next to his work, the most important principle of life (Bielschowsky, 1905-8:195).

With the possible exception of his comment that renunciation turns one into a publicly spirited man, Bielschowsky's description of the themes, work and renunciation, in *Wanderjahre* could have been applied directly to the Puritans that Weber studied (see Weber, 1920b:89-90; 1920a:82; 1904:52-53).¹⁷ This was, no doubt, Weber's reason for footnoting the work.

Also worth noting is that the term, "elective affinities" (*wahlverwandtschaften*), which Weber used to associate the civic strata with inner worldly asceticism, was borrowed directly from a book that Goethe wrote by that name (Weber, 1946:284-285; 1920a:256-257; 1910a:1112 and n.3, 1122; Howe, 1978:366-373; Goethe, 1809).¹⁸ When Weber used the term *wahlverwandtschaften* in the 1920 version of *The Protestant Ethic*, he even put it in quotations, which Parsons once again omitted in his translation.¹⁹ Furthermore, Parsons unfortunately chose to translate the term as "correlations" and "relationships" (Weber, 1920b:91-92), which later prompted Reinhard Bendix to retranslate the section in which the German word twice appeared (Bendix, 1962:63-64 and n.).

Elsewhere in *The Protestant Ethic* Weber used Goethe's *Wanderjahre* to elucidate a point made by the Puritan, Richard Baxter, about the value of well-spent time (Weber, 1920b:157-158, 261n.14; 1920a:168n.1; 1905:77n.11).²⁰ While doing so Weber also mentioned Benjamin Franklin, as he had done in the long and important passage quoted

¹⁷Weber deemphasized the public spirit of the Puritans, although I have argued that he did so incorrectly, at least with regard to Quakerism (Kent, 1983). He asserted, for example, that, "Once and for all it must be remembered that programmes of ethical reform never were at the centre of interest for any of the religious reformers (among whom, for our purposes, we must include men like Menno [Simons], George Fox, and [John] Wesley). They were not the founders of societies for ethical culture nor the proponents of humanitarian projects for social reform or cultural ideals. The salvation of the soul and that alone was the centre of their life and work" (1920b:89-90; 1920a:82; 1904:52-53). For examples of Quakers' moral and political awareness, see Cole (1956:347).

¹⁸Weber argued the following: "Of course, the religions of all strata are certainly far from unambiguously dependent upon the character of the strata we have presented as having special affinities with them. Yet, at first sight, civic strata appear, in this respect and on the whole, to lend themselves to a more varied determination. Yet it is precisely among these strata that elective affinities (*Wahlverwandtschaften*) for special types of religion stand out . . . [W]here prophecy has provided a religious basis, this basis could be one of two fundamental types of prophecy which we shall repeatedly discuss: 'exemplary' prophecy and 'emissary' prophecy . . . The emissary type of prophecy addresses its demands to the world in the name of a god. Naturally these demands are ethical; and they are often of an active ascetic character" (Weber, 1946:284-285; 1920a:256-257).

¹⁹The quotations did not appear, however, in the 1904 version (1904:54).

²⁰H. M. Waidson of the University of Swansea was kind enough to locate the passage in *Wanderjahre* to which Weber referred when he spoke about measuring "the degree of capitalistic development by the fact that the clocks strike every quarter-hour" (1920b:261n.14; 1920a:168n.1). Appropriately, the passage occurs in a chapter that is devoted primarily to a discussion of religion and morality (Goethe, 1829:74-78 [Book Three, Chapter 11]). The paragraph in question begins with the statement of an attitude that caught Weber's atten-

earlier. In still a third instance, Weber again associated (Calvinistic) Puritans and Goethe in a discussion of business morality (Weber, 1920b:151; 1920a:160-161; 1905:71).²¹

Goethe's recurrent appearance in Weber's discussions of the Puritans and Franklin occurred because all of them cherished an analogous type of human activity. When Weber asserted that "virtue and proficiency in a calling . . . are . . . the real Alpha and Omega of Franklin's ethic" (1920b:54; 1920a:36; 1904:17), he also could have been describing the form of Goethe's ethic as well. The contents, however, of their respective ethics were different: the Puritans' and Goethe's were superior to Franklin's. In their seventeenth century English world, Puritans had achieved an ethic of social responsibility solely through individual efforts at glorifying God (see Weber, 1920b:225n.34; 1920a:100-101n.3; 1905:16n.21b), especially by practicing brotherly love (Weber, 1920b:108-109; 1920a:100-101; 1905:15-17). Inner-worldly asceticism served as the vehicle by which Puritans controlled and regulated their emotions to the end of glorifying Him (see 1920b:158; 1920a:170; 1905:79). In the modern world, Goethe had advocated a social ethic that emerged naturally out of his insistence that one should attempt to know oneself as the highest possible goal in life. One obtained knowledge of oneself in part through ascetically working in a specialized calling. Although this goal seems to be more of a cultural value rather than a religious one, it nonetheless is true that the social ethic which emerged from it insisted on the necessity of constant human activity and productivity in a manner that was analogous to that of the Puritans. This ethic, nonetheless, was only a consequence of persons' efforts at obtaining self-knowledge, and cannot be understood apart from it.

Franklin's ethic, in contrast, reflected a utilitarian attitude in which persons performed socially responsible actions for "the good of the many, the common good" (Weber, 1920b:265n.33; 1920a:173-174n.3; 1905:83n.27), while they held an attitude that moral virtues were virtues so long as they were "actually useful to the individual, and the surrogate of mere appearance [was] always sufficient when it accomplish[ed] the end in view" (1920b:52; 1920a:35; 1904:16). Asceticism served as the vehicle by which persons earned money at their callings, and the utilitarians' desire to succeed in this manner took on a dominating, almost compulsive, and "transcendental" meaning (Weber, 1920b:53-54; 1920a:35-36; 1904:16-17). This system of meaning, however, was not driven by an absolute religious or cultural goal.

Franklin's utilitarianism represented, in most instances, an intermediate stage between the ethical systems that were motivated by individuals striving to obtain either an absolute religious value (as with the Puritans) or an absolute cultural one (as with Goethe) and persons of the modern age who appeared as unreflective "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart" who were possessed with their own sense of self-importance. Their mundane, materialistic values derived from the mechanistic foundations of mod-

tion: "It is impressed upon everyone that there should be the highest respect for time as the greatest gift of God and Nature and as the most attentive companion to us on Life's way. We have many clocks, all of which indicate the quarter hours by means of hands and strokes . . ." (1829:75). For an excellent analysis of the relationship between time and industrial capitalism, see Thompson (1967).

²¹This quote comes from Goethe's *Maxims and Reflections* 241. Weber also mentioned it in *The Religion of India* (1920d:210; 1920c:224-225).

ern society. As Weber himself wrote, "Where 'fulfilment of one's calling' cannot be directly related to the highest spiritual values of culture, or where it is not necessarily felt subjectively as simple economic pressure, the individual today generally ceases to reflect on it. In the United States, where it has been given most freedom, acquisitiveness, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends today to be associated with purely competitive passions, which often give it the character of a sporting contest" (Matthews' trans. in Runciman, 1978:171; Weber, 1920a:204; 1905:108-109 [with slight differences]). In this threefold scheme, Weber once again contrasted both Goethe's *Übermensch*, Faust, and the Puritans with the "last men" of the contemporary world.

In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber gave one concrete example of "'specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart'"—contemporary doctors who were specializing in sex therapy (1905:79-80; 1920a:170; 1920b:263-264). In Weber's opinion, therefore, they were among the "last men" of his era.²² He even acknowledged that some Puritan groups had held beliefs regarding sex and marriage that were similar to the attitudes of these "last men." He nonetheless realized that on these topics Puritan groups had differed significantly among themselves, and at least one Puritan group, the Quakers, held views on sex that were befitting of *Übermenschen*. He was critical, for example, of the Calvinistic Puritan attitude, originating with Luther, that "marriage is accepted as one of the divine ordinations given to man as a creature who is hopelessly wretched by virtue of his 'concupiscence'" (1946:349; 1920a:563). Calvinistic Puritans would not have been able to "distinguish the powerful sway of human passions from sexual intercourse for hygienic reasons," and like the "last men"/sex therapists in his own era, would have seen Margaret in the *Faust* story as a prostitute (1920b:263-264; 1920a:170n.1; 1905:80n.). Quakerism, however, which was a non-Calvinistic Puritan group, held a much more elevated attitude toward marriage than did the Calvinists. Indeed, Quakerism's lofty attitude resembled Goethe's, and as such it epitomized the ideals of *Übermenschen*:

The ethic of the Quakers (as it is displayed in William Penn's letters to his wife) may well have achieved a genuinely humane interpretation of the inner and religious value of marriage. In this

²²This early reference by Weber to sex therapists predates by about two years his letter of rejection for the article that the renegade Freudian analyst and self-styled moralist, Otto Gross, had submitted for publication consideration to the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*. It is impossible to determine to whom Weber is referring in his comments of 1905, since, As Dr. Martin Green informed me in private correspondence (1982), many so-called 'sex-therapists' existed within Wilhelmine Germany (Green, 1974:54, 65, see 73ff). Perhaps Weber was referring to Emil Kraepelin, whom Green described as follows: "Kraepelin was himself an embodiment of health, physical and moral, and a crusading anti-alcoholic and even anti-erotic. We are told that he 'favored' sexual intercourse for the purposes of reproduction or of lessening appetitive tension, which is a good example of the attitude toward sex which the erotic movement attacked—the patriarchal attitude" (Green, 1974:65). In Weber's September 13, 1907 rejection of Gross's article, he may have alluded to the "duty" (*Pflicht*) that Goethe assigned in *Maxims and Reflections* 442 to "know oneself" (*sich selbst kennen lernen*) and which he had quoted in *The Protestant Ethic* (1920b:232n.64; 1920a:111n.4; 1905:24n.46): "... I am saying [this] only to make the point that the categorical imperative which reads, 'Go to Freud or come to us, his pupils, in order to learn the historical truth about yourself and your actions; otherwise you are a coward,' not only betrays a somewhat naive 'departmental patriotism' on the part of a psychiatrist and professional 'directeur de l'ame' ['spiritual advisor'], but, owing to its unfortunate amalgamation with 'hygienic' motives, deprives itself of any ethical value. But, as I have indicated, from [Gross's] essay, which is moralizing from beginning to end, I cannot derive any other practical postulate but this 'duty to know oneself' (*Pflicht zur Selbsterkenntnis*) with psychiatric help" (Marianne Weber, 1926b:379; Baumgarten, 1964:647). For an analysis of Weber's criticism of Gross's use of Nietzsche, see Mitzman (1970:281-282).

respect the Quaker ethic went beyond the rather gross Lutheran interpretation of the meaning of marriage.

From a purely inner-worldly point of view, only the linkage of marriage with the thought of ethical responsibility for one another—hence a category heterogeneous to the purely erotic sphere—can carry the sentiment that something unique and supreme might be embodied in marriage; that it might be the transformation of the feeling of love which is conscious of responsibility throughout all the nuances of the organic life process, 'up to the pianissimo of old age' (*bis ins Pianissimo des höchsten Alters*), and a mutual granting of oneself to another and the becoming indebted to each other (in Goethe's sense). Rarely does life grant such value in pure form (1946:350; 1920a:653).²³

Worth mentioning here is that Mitzman used an amended version of this passage to suggest that in Quakerism Weber found "a sense of responsibility and respect for the personality which did not exclude modified forms of either the mystical or the erotic sense of communion and which moreover reproduced, for the individual if not [for] the social order, that sense of a meaningful life cycle whose destruction at the hands of modernity was one of [his] concerns in his last years" (Mitzman, 1970:219). Mitzman even proposed that Weber interpreted his marriage in terms of this Quaker ethic (1970:291 and n.). If these claims were convincing, then they would be striking examples of the deep impression that at least one form of Puritanism made on Weber, and thereby would lend indirect support for Tiryakian's argument about the impact of Bunyan on Weber. Moreover, Mitzman specifically argued against interpreting Weber's ethics as having been influenced by Goethe, and cited in support of this claim a letter in which Weber stated that (in Mitzman's summation), "Goethe's morality suffers from a one-sided eudaemonism" (1970:55; Weber, 1936:238–239).

Three facts, however, indicate that Mitzman's argument is inaccurate. First, the critical letter that he cites was written by Weber while he was still in his twenties, well before he tackled the questions of asceticism, specialization and moral obligation in the modern world. Marianne Weber recognized this, and when she quoted the same letter she prefaced it by saying that it was "a statement about Goethe that is characteristic of that period (1887) . . . when [Weber] was twenty-three." Immediately after the letter-excerpt, however, she added that "the mature Weber admired in Goethe the all-encompassing genius and recognized that the primary determinant of his life was not a need for 'happiness' but a titanic struggle for perfection in the exertion of his own creative powers and a reverent sense of oneness with the laws of the universe" (1926b:154; 1926a:177–178).

²³Worth noting is Goethe's description of "the illustrious William Penn" which appeared in *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Travel*: "The great goodwill, the pure intentions and the unswerving activity of such an excellent man, the conflict with the world which he was consequently involved in, and the dangers and afflictions by which the noble man seemed to be overcome, evoked a definite interest in the receptive spirit" of a young man in the story. Philadelphia, which was the city known in the United States for its Quaker influence, had "contributed to a generally freer practice of religion in the colonies," and had encouraged "free thinking as far as general ethical and religious ideas were concerned" (Goethe, 1829:74–75). Also worth noting are the comments that Weber made about the impact of the Baptists on the role of women in society, especially because he probably had Quakerism in mind when he wrote them (see Weber 1920b:252n.169; 1920a:252n.169; 1905:61–62n.122): "Baptist influences have played a part in the emancipation of woman; the protection of her freedom of conscience, and the extension of the idea of the universal priesthood to her were here also the first breaches in patriarchal ideas" (1920b:264n.22; 1920a:170–171n.1; see 1905:80–81n.17).

Mitzman, it seems, did not acknowledge that Weber's opinion of Goethe evolved as he matured.

Second, Mitzman claimed that "the dedication of *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* [Vol. 1] to Marianne is a quotation from this presentation of the Quaker ethic: 'bis ins Pianissimo des höchsten Alters' " (1970:291n.). He does not provide the source of that quotation, and I do not know of anything like it in Quaker literature. It certainly is not from the letter that William Penn wrote to his wife and to which Weber referred (Evans and Evans, 1841:166–169), nor for that matter is it from Goethe (Waidson, 1983: March 21). I believe that the phrase was written by Weber himself, but see no reason to assume that it indicates a Quaker influence on his interpretation of his marriage.

Third, when Mitzman translated the passage in which Weber praised Penn's attitude toward marriage and equated that attitude with Goethe's, he elided Weber's mention of Goethe! Perhaps he did this because Goethe's presence in the quote mitigated his claim that Weber interpreted his marriage in Quaker, and not Goethean, terms.²⁴

That Weber interpreted the Puritans in light of his conceptions about Goethe and the Nietzschean *Übermensch* should now be clearly established. From their economic activities to the Quakers' sense of ethical responsibility in marriage, Weber viewed the Puritan groups through the eyes of a man who was steeped in a German intellectual tradition that maintained enormous respect for the work of these two men. On an important point, however, Weber was critical of Nietzsche's formulation of the *Übermensch* concept, and here we see most clearly Weber's pessimism regarding modernity and its future. Weber differed from Nietzsche regarding the doctrine of 'eternal return' or 'eternal recurrence,' and this doctrine was central to *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and to the *Übermensch* concept that Nietzsche first presented in this work.

Nietzsche introduced the doctrine when Zarathustra is convalescing among the animals of the woods. The animals say to him, "behold, you are the teacher of the eternal recurrence—that is your destiny!" (Nietzsche, 1884:332). They then speak to Zarathustra with the words that they know he would speak if he were dying: "I come back eternally to this same, selfsame life, in what is greatest as in what is smallest, to teach again the eternal recurrence of all things, to speak again the word of the great noon of earth and man, to proclaim the overman again to men" (1884:333).

Weber was aware of the importance of this concept to Nietzsche's philosophy, if not to the idea of the *Übermensch* itself (see Kaufmann, 1974:316–333). In the 1920 version of *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber briefly discussed the 'eternal recurrence' doctrine and did so by contrasting it with the psychological consequences of the Puritan belief in predestination. He acknowledged that fatalism was "the only logical consequence of predestination." He realized, however, that the predestinarian Puritans rejected it because, psychologically, their attempts to prove their salvation had the practical effect of making them accept personal responsibility for the consequences of their actions. In contrast to the

²⁴I realize that Weber was moved by the one Quaker meeting that he, and apparently his wife, attended, but he was unimpressed by the "uncongenial components" of worldliness and wealth that he saw at Haverford College (a Quaker school outside of Philadelphia [Marianne Weber, 1926b:288; 1926a:327]). To the extent, therefore, that he maintained any lasting respect for the group it was with regard to an historically idealized image of it as a society of Puritan *Übermenschen*. This interpretation of Weber's opinion of Quakerism is a modification of what I thought previously (Kent, 1983:16).

Puritans, "the followers of Nietzsche," who believed in the doctrine of eternal recurrence, did not accept "responsibility for a future life" that had any "conscious thread of continuity" with the active individual (Weber, 1920b:232n.66; 1920a:111n.4).²⁵ Although fatalism would seem to have been the logical conclusion of both Calvinistic Puritanism's predestinarianism and the Nietzschean doctrine of eternal return, Puritans were not fatalistic in interpreting the consequences of their actions.

In this example Weber rejected the doctrine of eternal return specifically with regard to its appropriateness for interpreting Puritans' conceptions of their activities. Twice in the final paragraphs of *The Protestant Ethic* Weber expressed doubts about the doctrine for much more general reasons—it simply did not seem adequate for interpreting the fate of the modern world. One of the two expressions of doubt occurred at the end of a long passage that I quoted earlier. The passage concluded with the statement that "for Goethe, this knowledge [of the necessity of specialization] meant a renunciatory parting from a time of complete and beautiful humanity, which will no more be repeated in the course of our cultural development than will the period of the flowering of ancient Athens" (Matthews trans. in Runciman, 1978:170; Weber, 1920a:203; see 1920b:181). Why did Weber mention the impossibility of reestablishing the 'wonder' of ancient Greece in an essay on Protestantism and capitalism? The reason, I submit, was that both Nietzsche (Kaufmann, 1974:128–131, 192–201) and Goethe (Passage, 1965:lxix–lxxi, lxxvii–lxxxii) venerated ancient Greece, and Weber felt compelled to refute the hope which they (and other German intellectuals) had held concerning the reconstruction of the glory of Hellas. Put more specifically, if one accepted the doctrine of eternal recurrence, then one could entertain the possibility that the glories of an earlier culture might reappear. Weber, however, was too pessimistic (or perhaps too realistic) to accept that this could occur.

The final place where Weber expressed doubts about the doctrine of eternal recurrence occurred a few sentences later. In this instance he observed that "material goods have gained an increasing and finally inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. Today the spirit of religious asceticism—whether finally, who knows?—has escaped from the casing (*Gehäuse*)."²⁶ He continued by saying that "No one knows who will live in this casing (*Gehäuse*) in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance" (Weber, 1920b:181–182). Weber next presented his lament about the "last men" (modelled, of course, after Nietzsche), and concluded by admitting that his rumination "brings us to the world of judgements of value and faith, with which this purely historical discussion need not be burdened" (1920b:182; 1920a:204; 1905:

²⁵Weber claimed that, for the Puritan, the connection between the active individual and "responsibility for a future life" was indicated by the Puritan attitude, "*tua res agitur* [by you the thing is done]." Furthermore, the Puritan "*electi* [elect] are, on account of their election, proof against fatalism because in their rejection of it they prove themselves '*quos ipsa electio sollicitos reddit et diligentes officiorum*' [(as those) whom the election itself has rendered mindful and devoted to (i.e., lovers of) their offices']" (1920b:232n.66; 1920a:111n.4; 1905:24n.48). My thanks go to Gérard Vallée of McMaster University and Mark Zier of the University of Toronto for their help with the Latin.

²⁶I follow Parson's translation, but change "cage" to "casing."

109). The tone of these comments, however, strongly suggest that Weber doubted whether the modern world, with its historically unique emphasis on materialism, could return ever to the ideals of earlier times, or that Zarathustrean or Faustian 'new prophets' could appear ever to initiate, perhaps, a return to morally and ethically responsible ascetic values.

Rather than finding Weber's judgements of value and faith burdensome, social scientists continue to find them sobering and thought-provoking. His concerns about modernization and the "last men" who help maintain it seem tragically appropriate for our own time. The fact that Weber was so concerned with the loss of values among modern men may help explain why he insisted on conceiving of modernity's predecessors, the Puritans, as embodiments of the very values that his contemporaries lacked. In viewing Puritans as *Übermenschen*, however, Weber may have blinded himself to some of the social and material forces that also were important factors in motivating them.

In an earlier article, I examined Weber's interpretation of one Puritan group, the Quakers (Kent, 1983), and found that his interpretation failed to acknowledge the role played by social resentment in the formulation of their religious activities (see Cragg, 1966:80; Kent, 1982b:537; Kent, 1982a).²⁷ I was particularly surprised to learn that one of Weber's sources on Quakerism, an 1895 study written by his ~~non~~-Marxist friend, Edward Bernstein, had spelled-out clearly the social and political conditions in which Quakerism first emerged, and had identified correctly the extent to which Quakers felt frustration toward those who were in political power at the time. Subsequently I realized that Bernstein had, in his section on Quakerism, commented on a source that Weber would refer to in *The Protestant Ethic* as "an excellent book" (Weber, 1920b:219n.5; 1920a:88n.1; 1905:88n.1)—Hermann Weingarten's *Die Revolutionskirchen Englands* [Leipzig, 1868]. Bernstein stated that in this book "both the spiritual relation of the Quakers to the German Anabaptists and the original revolutionary character of Quakerism are treated with keen perception." He immediately added a comment that can be applied critically to Weber's study a decade later: "Most of the English essays on the history of Quakerism neglect the later point [about its originally revolutionary character], while the writings of the Quakers themselves and their friends studiously endeavor to efface all that might serve to throw doubts on the purely religious-ethical character of the original movement, or else they treat any such symptoms as mere vagaries of single individuals" (Bernstein, 1895b:225n.2; 1895a:291n.[2]).²⁸ Weber, however, ignored these factors in

²⁷Just as I have identified an element of revenge in early Quakerism's doctrines and ideology, so too has the contemporary historian of Britain, E. P. Thompson, identified an element of revenge in *Pilgrim's Progress*. He wrote, "As Weber noted, the 'basic atmosphere' of the book is one in which 'the after-life was not only more important, but in many ways also more certain, than all the interests of life in this world' " [Weber, 1920b: 109–110]. And this reminds us that faith in a life to come served not only as a consolation to the poor but also as some emotional compensation for present sufferings and grievances: it was possible not only to imagine the 'reward' of the humble but also to enjoy some revenge upon the oppressors, by imagining their torments to come" (Thompson, 1966:34).

²⁸Although Bernstein's description of early Quakerism as "revolutionary" might overstate the case, it is nonetheless true that the group must be viewed within the context of the political and social radicalism of the day (Kent, 1982b, 1983:20–24). Cole, for example, points out that "the first Quakers had had close connexions with the earlier Radical movement" (1956:341). Also worth citing are Cole's remarks about the common misapprehension that the early Quakers were (to use Weber's words) unpolitical or antipolitical: "It has often been

his discussion, and instead portrayed Quakerism as a group whose members were motivated strictly by absolute values. I was unable to explain why Weber ignored Bernstein's argument, and merely said that it was "mysterious" that he had done so. I concluded the paper by suggesting that Quakerism was in large measure a resentful group whose members wanted to revenge themselves against the Puritans in power, and that this desire for vengeance was evident even in their 'fixed price' doctrine. Thus, Nietzsche's general discussion about the role of "resentment" in religious doctrines had validity with regard to the early Quakers, and Weber's discussion of them was deficient because he failed to acknowledge this fact.

Having now analyzed Weber's indebtedness to Goethe and Nietzsche regarding *Übermenschen*, I am able to shed light on Weber's idealized portrait of the early Friends. To the extent that he conceived Quakers as *Übermenschen*, he was unable to maintain at the same time that they felt resentment towards, and desired vengeance against, persons in power. *Übermenschen* were, after all, beyond the desire for vengeance—a point that Zarathustra made clear when he said that "for that man be delivered from revenge—that is for me the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms" (Nietzsche, 1883: 211; see Kaufmann, 1974:371–376). Harboring resentment and desiring revenge were indications of social and moral weakness, and were not appropriate emotions for Puritan *Übermenschen*, whom Weber portrayed as upholding a "self-assured worldly ethic of heroism" ("*jeder selbstsicheren weltlichen Heldenethik*" [1946:336; 1920a:549]).

Verification of Weber's philosophically tainted conception of the Quakers (along with other Puritans) comes from a textual examination of one segment of *The Protestant Ethic* itself. In the very footnote after Weber "again expressly call[ed] attention to the excellent remarks of E[duard] Bernstein" about the specific form of inner worldly asceticism adopted especially by the Quakers (along with other Baptists [1920a:160n.1; 1905:71n.138]), he referred to "economic 'supermen'" who were "beyond good and evil" (1920a:160n.2; 1905:71n.139),²⁹ and then ended the paragraph by quoting Goethe (1920a:161; 1905:71; 1920b:151). Thus in the presence of Goethean and Nietzschean interpretations of Quaker and other Puritan businessmen Weber could cite Bernstein while ignoring his salient comment that "religion, and above all this religion [that is, Quakerism], provided an outlet for the tension caused by the proceedings on the political stage" (Bernstein, 1895b:242; 1895a:314). Quakerism's economic ethics, therefore, originated and developed in an atmosphere of heightened political awareness and increasing political frustration. In portraying the Quakers and other Puritan groups as having had "nothing to do with the political powers and their doings" (Weber, 1920b:149; 1920a:158; but not in

argued that the Quakers, unlike the Fifth Monarchists and some of the Baptists, stood entirely aloof from war and politics. In light of recent research, many Quaker historians have been more cautious, . . . [b]ut some other students of the seventeenth century have not hesitated to assert that the movement was distinguished by 'its essentially quietist character.' Thus, one writer has claimed that the Quaker leader, George Fox, 'accepted the world in all its squalor and evil'. . . . I hope to show that such judgements spring from a misunderstanding of both the nature and origin of the supposed pacifism of the early Friends. If we are to understand their position, therefore, we must first recall the political circumstances in which it developed" (Cole, 1956: 342–343).

²⁹As a result of the way in which Parsons translated the paragraph to which these footnotes refer (1920b:151), the note that mentions Bernstein comes after the one that uses the Nietzschean phrases (1920b: 258nn.187 and 188).

1905:69), Weber disallowed from his discussion the significant social and political factors that generated and sustained the reputedly religious Quaker ethic of fixed prices in business exchanges. He did this despite his apparent appreciation of the causal complexity among technical, political, economic and religious factors (1910b:456).

This article began as an attempt to capture the source of the famous "iron cage" metaphor that appears in the final pages of Parsons' translation of Weber's classic work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. After assigning responsibility for the phrase to Parsons, I proceeded to argue that neither John Bunyan, Puritanism in general or Quakerism in particular had any uniquely lasting effect on Weber's personal or social values. He simply saw Puritan formulations of inner worldly asceticism and the ethic of responsibility as ideas that paralleled ones formulated by Goethe and Nietzsche. I see no reason, therefore, to accept Tiryakian's attempt to provide a "basis for Weber's identifying with the Man in the Iron Cage" (Tiryakian, 1981:30), just as I consider it implausible that Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* "must have made a powerful impression on Weber reading it at a time in his life when he had been shaken to his inner core by an existential crisis" (Tiryakian, 1981:32). If we knew the names of the "English writers" that Weber read in 1902 then perhaps we could clarify this point. We do not, unfortunately, know them (Marianne Weber, 1926b:254). In any case, Weber's subsequent use of sources indicates that the literary works which made the most profound impressions on him were German, not English Puritan, ones, and that they included the writings of Goethe and, perhaps to a lesser degree, Nietzsche.

A more important consequence of this study is the suggestion that Weber's interpretation of Puritan asceticism was tainted by its undue dependence on German literary and philosophical influences, and therefore inadequately conceptualized the social and political sources of Puritan economic behaviour and attitudes. Neither Nietzsche's Zarathustra nor Goethe's Wilhelm Meister were politically involved, as was also true for the aged character, Faust, and for Goethe himself in his later years. These facts might explain in part why Weber asserted that the Baptist groups fostered "unpolitical and even anti-political principles" (Weber, 1920b:150; 1920a:160; 1905:70), and insisted that his discussion of the Puritan sects proceed "without entering into the whole political and social ethics of Protestant asceticism" (Weber, 1920b:151; 1920a:160; cf. 1905:71). When he analyzed therefore, the Puritan sects "by presenting [their] religious ideas in the artificial simplicity of ideal types, as they could at best seldom be found in history" (Weber, 1920b:98; 1920a:87; 1905:4), he stressed an unpolitical or antipolitical characteristic that more aptly represented asceticism as it was portrayed in his German literary and philosophical models than in mid to late seventeenth century England. A socially or politically dependent factor like resentment could not have acted, in Weber's mind, as a crucial psychological factor behind the (reputedly) religiously ascetic economic activity of the Puritans in general and the Quakers in particular.

By discussing the philosophical and literary images that underlie Weber's conceptions of the Puritans, I call attention to the fact that, unlike Nietzsche's influence on Weber, Goethe's influence on him has received little attention.³⁰ It seems most appropriate,

³⁰Mitzman pointed out a decade ago that, "though Weber's voluntarism is primarily of the more rational, Faustian variety, the best studies of Weber's thought have noted the similarities to Nietzsche" (1973:7).

therefore, to hope that someone will undertake a thorough study of Goethe's impact on Weber, especially since it appears that social science owes an unrealized debt to this towering figure in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Germany. An important chapter in the history of social scientific ideas has yet to be written.

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