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Organizational Environments and Organizational Discourse: Bureaucracy between Two Worlds

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Abstract

The controversy around Weber's theory of bureaucracy that occupied post-war American organization theorists serves as a backdrop to consider differences in the institutional and cultural environments of American and continental European, notably German, organizations. I suggest that formal organizations in the United States emerged under institutional and cultural conditions sufficiently different from those Weber witnessed as to account for the differences in the European and American organizational discourses. European institutional-cultural conditions favored a centralized, hierarchical, obedience-based organizational form with little uncertainty tolerance emphasizing loyalty. In the US, by contrast, the primacy of the large business organization which operated in volatile markets under the cultural imperative of equality favored flatter, less hierarchical, and more nearly decomposable organizations in which compliance was based on a temporary contract. Indifference vis-à-vis the national and cultural particulars of formal organizations may have led early organization research to prematurely close off a potentially fruitful line of inquiry in the field of comparative organization.

(*Cutlure*; *Organizations*; *Bureaucracy*

Introduction

The theory of bureaucracy (Weber 1946 tr., 1968 tr.) has met with an ironic fate. Conceived in light of the turn-of-the-century continental European organizational experience, and recognized as a great achievement of one of the founders of modern sociology, it was applied in large-scale empirical research for the first time in the postwar United States (Parsons 1947, Merton et al. 1952, Gouldner 1954, Blau 1955, Stinchcombe 1959, Udy 1959). There it was, by a resounding consensus, found wanting on numerous counts, e.g., as overly concerned with rationality and overemphasizing the hierarchical and coercive aspects of organization. Having nevertheless found acceptance as an important model of rational organization (e.g., Perrow 1989, pp. 1–49), the theory has since been reimported to Europe and the rest of the world, "deficiencies" and all (cf. Lammers 1990, p. 199).

In the decades since the theory of bureaucracy was examined as to its ability to guide organizational research, the intellectual orientation of the field has, of course, changed. Among other things, research into the cultural and national dimensions of organization and management has progressed remarkably, changing in scope and appeal from the pursuit of a few dissident scholars questioning the ethnocentric implications of "Western" ideas of management to a broad, empirically oriented inquiry into differences between national forms and practices of management and organization (Lammers and Hickson 1979, Hofstede 1980, Maurice et al. 1982, Laurent 1986, Lodge and Vogel 1987, d'Iribarne 1989). With increased sensitivity for the structural variety in the global organizational experience has come an increased scepticism as to the universal applicability of some of the core concepts of organization theory (Lammers 1990, Amado et al. 1991). All the more salient is the fact that as *basic* a concept as bureaucracy seems with few exceptions, largely to have escaped cross-cultural examination.[1] One reason for this oversight may be that the postwar generation of American organizational researchers has done its job too well. Their assessment of the theory of bureaucracy may not only have led to today's widespread view of the theory as a museum piece of organization theory.[2] One suspects that with it some far-reaching assumptions about the universal validity of organizational theory also passed into the field's taken-for-granted stock of knowledge.

Bureaucracy: Different Receptions

For an undertaking designed to explore the cross-cultural implications of an important building block of

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organizational theory, it might be apt to leave the brief but intense affair of American organizational theorists with the theory of bureaucracy to its place in the textbooks of organization theory, were it not for the fact that this encounter essentially established the frame of reference through which the theory of bureaucracy continues to be seen to this day. Thus a few brief recapitulations are in order.

Having used Weber's basic model of bureaucratic organization to guide their field work in US industrial plants, government agencies, coal mines, accounting firms, and universities, most American researchers reported huge discrepancies between theory and data. The tenor of the studies indicated that the investigated organizations:

• were less hierarchical than expected, often incorporating professional work groups or entire departments that seemed resistant to bureaucratic rule (Scott 1966):

• that Weber's formal organization of hierarchical supervision and rule and regulations was often rivaled by an informal organization through which much of the actual coordination of tasks was carried out (Gross 1953, Blau 1955),

• that relevant relations and decisions were made not only along universalistic but also particularistic lines (Blau 1955), a finding later replicated in the context of research universities by Pfeffer and Salancik (1974);

• that coercive or "punishment-centered" bureaucracies were frequently rivaled by "representative" bureaucratic organizations not compatible with Weber's theory (Gouldner 1954).

As a result the theory of bureaucratic organization was cited as overly concerned with rationality, making few or no provisions for informal relations or for dysfunctions and unanticipated consequences of rational action in organizations (Merton 1940, Blau and Scott 1962). Another line of criticism, introduced by Parsons (1947) and elaborated by Gouldner (1954, 1957) has faulted Weber for his overemphasis of the hierarchy of office and the power of office incumbency while neglecting the authority of professional expertise. Judging by the number of subsequent citations, Parsons summed up the prevailing feeling among organizational researchers when he said that Weber had "thrown together two essentially different types [of authority] which, though shading into one another, are analytically separate" (Parsons 1947, p. 58), authority based on technical and professional competence and authority based on incumbency of office. "Weber's neglect to analyse professional authority is associated with a tendency to overemphasize the coercive aspect of authority and hierarchy in human relations in general" (p. 60). Subsequent to Parsons' critique a number of empirical studies appeared analyzing the conflict between bureaucratic systems of rules and regulations and self-governed, self-directed professionals struggling for autonomy (Kornhauser 1962, Blau and Scott 1962, Hall 1968).

On the European continent Weber's theory had in the meantime given rise to a theoretical discourse significantly different from the combination of critical rejection and distant respect with which American scholars treated it. Even if taking the long spell of social scientific inactivity forced by the assault on European democracy into account, it remains noteworthy that the dominant view of Weber's theory was that of a brilliant and largely irrefutable summary of the occidental process of rationalization which few scholars saw in need of empirical verification. Where the theory was challenged, the challenges were motivated by adherence to a competing, mostly Marxian school of thought (Antonio and Glassman 1985). For the rest, Weber's characterization of formal organization entered the literature on public administration, focusing, for example, on the role of the civil servant and the bureaucratic machine in which he operated, highlighting the dangers of the self-perpetuating and iniative-stifling machine, as well as the associated dangers for individual liberty. Another theme of that literature was the increasing dominance of the executive branch of government over the other two branches (Eschenburg 1952, Sultan and Abendroth 1955). The few studies using Weberian terminology for empirical studies of industrial organizations tended to be far less critical of the theory as such than their American counterparts (e.g., Bahrdt 1958).

The different discourses spawned by theory of bureaucracy in the US and Europe has led some writers to wonder whether the American reception of Weber's sociology was systematically biased. Some authors have pointed to a selective or inadequate reading of Weber's complex work by American scholars, partly facilitated by large gaps in the availability of his works for an English-speaking audience. Thus, Roth and Bendix (1959) early on called attention to the selectivity with which Weber's ideas were received by US social scientists. They pointed out that American sociologists concentrated on narrow parts of Weber's typological expositions and methodological writings while neglecting the larger historical-comparative context of his work. More recently Guenther Roth has suggested that a valid appreciation of Weberian sociology needs to be

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sensitive to the whole of Weber's multilayered work (Roth and Schluchter 1979, pp. 195–206). Roth points out that Weber's analyses differ in scope and in their empirical applicability, depending on whether they belong to his theories of "secular trends" (such as his theory of occidental rationalization), his "typological models" (that is, his conspicuous "ideal-types"), or to his "situational analyses" in which Weber uses his general theories to analyze concrete manifestations of empirical reality.[3]

While I am sympathetic to the view that American organizational theorists may have failed to appreciate Weber's theory of bureaucracy in all its complexity (Trice and Beyer 1986, Meyer and Buttel 1988), I believe that interpretation-bias accounts of the American-European difference concerning the discourse on bureaucracy remain ultimately unsatisfying. If indeed American organization theorists constructed a picture of the theory of bureaucracy significantly different from the European, the reasons might well lie deeper than selective reading or differences in the dominant intellectual styles. Instead I shall raise the question in this paper whether differences in the *organizational discourse* might not reflect underlying differences in the *organizational realities* on the two continents. I will pursue this claim by scrutinizing the institutional and cultural conditions under which formal organizations began to evolve in the United States and continental Europe.

Institutional Environments and Organizational Evolution

Organizations proliferate through a process of imitating organizational forms that have gained social legitimacy in a given environment (Meyer and Rowan 1977, DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Tolbert and Zucker 1983, Zucker 1987). An established generation of organizations will thus always wield normative pressure over subsequent generations of organizations for which it has, as it were, carved out a *path* (North 1991). In other words: sequence matters. Taking the institutional argument seriously, I want to raise the question in this section whether the differences that American organizational researchers found between the Weberian model of bureaucracy and empirical data collected in American organizations could be explained by differences in the European and American institutional environments of organizations.

Institutional Environments of Bureaucracy

Alfred D. Chandler (1977, 1980) is to be credited for having introduced a simple but momentous fact into the organizational literature concerning the evolution of organizations in continental Europe and the US: whereas in Europe large scale organizations came to life as state and church bureaucracies, with private firms following only much later; in the US large scale private business organizations everywhere *preceded* the bureaucratization of government.

> With the coming of large-scale business enterprise, first on the railroads and then in industry, a new class of businessmen appeared—full time salaried managers who made a lifetime career out of working up the managerial ladder.... At the federal level, the number of public administrators remained small until the coming of the Great Depression pushed the government into taking an active role in restoring the nation's economic health. Then with World War II and the continuing cold war, the number of government workers rose at an unprecedented rate. *In no other country, however, were large managerial business hierarchies created before the formation of an extensive government civil service* (Chandler 1980, p. 3, italics added).

The implications of Chandler's thesis for a culturally sensitive study of organizational evolution are far-reaching. I will explore three.

1. Public Bureaucracy and Private Industry

Taking the early 19th century as a convenient reference point, government was still carried out in small townships based on community participation in North America. In the private sector, few organizations had exceeded the limits of the small craft shop or the family enterprise in the New World. This situation changed drastically in the following half century when a novel organizational type came to life in North America in the form of large-scale private enterprise. Whether one traces the beginning of formal organizations to the Lowell textile mills (Dalzell 1987), Eli Whitney's musket production (Boorstin 1965) or the transcontinental railroad company (Chandler 1977), in any case the new organizational species, exceeding for the first time the limits of family or close-knit village or religious community, arrives on American soil as *private business* organization. "By the 1890s when the railroads had already become giants and the industrials were not far behind, the federal establishment remained tiny" (Chandler op. cit.).

On the European continent,[4] by contrast, large-scale formal organization can be traced to the expansion of the money economy which allowed the heads of the former feudal empires to compensate their regional and local placeholders through salaries and stipends rather than through land grants. As land grants had always favored the independent strivings on the part of the feudal lords, abolishing the land grant system un-

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dercut the centrifugal, decentralizing forces of the feudal administration and replaced it by a regime governed strictly from the top. This resulted in an unprecedented centralization and bureaucratization of the administrative functions (Elias 1982, Vol. 2). A corps of professional administrators emerged, especially in the form of university-trained jurists who represented the largest pool from which the new class of bureaucratic functionaries was recruited. Their emergence as a new group of administrators, who replaced the avocational administrators of the royal households, coincided with the reception of Roman law in Europe. The administrative functions fulfilled by these new, large scale organizations were oriented toward *Gemeinwohl* (public good), and the ideal of *public* service: dispensing justice, collecting taxes, and maintaining public order. The bureaucrat civil servant expected compliance (in the form of tax payment and behavioral deference) from his subjects in exchange for public order and justice.

While the tendency toward administrative centralization and bureaucratization can be observed in most of continental Europe, the development in France and Germany exhibits some significant differences. In both countries the formerly independent feudal nobility had to be subjugated under the will of an absolute ruler. However, in France a well-to-do nobility conceitfully shunned bureaucratic work which consequently became the province of young educated bourgeois (the "*noblesse de la robe*," as the old nobility disdainfully called them). In Prussian Germany, by contrast, the 30-year-war had created a large class of impoverished nobility. There the newly developing bureaucracy, instead of subjugating the independent nobles, made peace with them and essentially coopted them. Many *Junkers* found in high bureaucratic office the means to influence, prestige, and financial security that they had not found in their impoverished noble life. The "marriage with the nobels" not only lent Prussian bureaucracy additional halo, it also paved the way for the specific organizational culture it spawned.

The prominent role taken by the Prussian nobility in creating the new type of administration is one reason why bureaucracy in Prussia retained strong *paternalistic features* from the feudal period. For example, until the 19th century Prussian civil servants were obliged to obtain permission to marry from their official superior (Hintze 1911). The paternalistic trait of the new bureaucratic organization was enforced by the state's *monopoly of physical coercion* giving it control of army and police. The coincidence of physical force and administrative rationality was perhaps the most potent mechanism to socialize an entire people in the habit of paternalistic deference. Inside the bureaucratic organizations such deference was demanded by special officials (*kommissarische Beamte* in Prussia and *intendants* in France) appointed to keep the independent strivings of the civil servants in check. Often, these inspectors were drawn from the ranks of former military officials: "Former army officers were a crucial element in tax administration. For them the army was the paragon of their professional behavior. The absence of the bourgeois spirit of commercialism and the dominance of military discipline were, according to Schmoller, consequential in the conceptualization of Prussian bureaucracy" (Jacoby 1969, p. 50). In fact, many bureaucratic offices emerged directly from military predecessors, the *Kriegskomissariate* (war bureaus).

Frederick II, under whom bureaucracy in Prussia was perfected, shrewdly encouraged the dissociation of bureaucratic administration from the people by two means: secrecy and special privileges. While held to the highest standards of secrecy, civil servants were at the same time exempted from paying taxes and from prosecution by the lower courts. As in the military, dissent was punished vigorously. A high-ranking civil servant of the financial ministry who had dared to hand in a memorandum expressing widespread concerns about tax hikes was thrown into jail. Frederick's comment: "... the malice and corruption of the concipient has to be punished, otherwise I'll never bring the *Canaille* into subordination" (Jacoby 1969, p. 56).

If bureaucratic organization in Prussia took on a coercive and paternalistic character, relying for integration almost exclusively on loyalty, with "voice" and "exit" virtually unavailable, to use Hirschman's (1970) terms, that tendency was further reinforced after Prussia's victory over France in the war of 1870–1871, when bureaucracies became subject to another wave of militarization that swept Germany. High bureaucratic officials such as the *Regierungsräte* (executive council) began donning military uniform for their ceremonial public appearances (Elias 1990, p. 108). The tradition of recruiting members of the landed nobility to top military and bureaucratic positions was extended. Figures like Bismarck, Roon, or von Moltke are only a few of the better known members of the Prussian nobility, the *Junker*, to assume leading military or public bureaucratic office, at the same time at which public service came to be the domain of the middle class in France or the United States. The high esteem in which the aristocratic bureaucrats were held in Prussian Germany was mirrored in that the business leaders ranked distinctly below military and civil service officials, and

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were often considered as *parvenues* by the members of good society (Elias 1990, p. 74). To make up for their low social standing, industrialists with military service apparently required to be addressed by their military rank as "*Herr Leutnant*" or "*Herr Hauptmann*" around the turn of the century (Hellpach 1954, p. 196).

Bureaucracy as the Blueprint for Industrial Administration. With the public bureaucracy an organizational type had developed in Germany which provided the blueprint for later forms of large-scale organization. When in the middle and late 19th century large-scale industrial enterprises emerged, the "organizational skill developed earlier in public bureaucracies could be adapted to commercial enterprises" (Kocka 1980, p. 107). The transfer of organizational skill from public government to industry was furthered, moreover, by the fact that some of the new giant undertakings, like railways or telephone and telegraph communication, were carried out as *state enterprises*, which were naturally managed by bureaucratically trained civil servants.

The extent to which public bureaucratic organization served as *the* model for any large scale administration, may also be inferred from the fact that in the late 19th century many of the emerging German business schools modelled their curriculum on the civil servant training: "Many firms were of the opinion that the legalistic training of civil servants should also be the model for the training of a 'firm's civil servants'" (Alpach 1990, p. 247). The prevailing opinion that the administrative skill of civil servants provided the model for and was superior to administrative expertise from any other domain can also help explain why the development of management as a separate profession remained comparatively undeveloped in Germany. As we shall see below, a large scale attempt to introduce American-type business schools around the turn of the century failed not least because of the resistance from the ranks of civil servants.

Bureaucrat versus Manager. The type of official bred in the German public bureaucracies, especially their militarized version, differed drastically from the official who came to form the backbone of the large-scale American organization. If the former was a *bureaucrat*, the latter was an *organizer*. Compared to their European counterparts, the enterprises that sprang up in what was then the backwater of colonial America soon excelled not for the skill of their craftsmen or the engineering genius of their founders, but for their ability to *innovate through organization*. The Lowell textile mills revolutionized the production of cloth not by inventing new machines, but by aggregating in one coordinated process the various technically known operations of cloth making, from spinning to weaving. The American factory innovated by shifting emphasis from chronically scarce *artisan skill* to *managerial know-how*. In the words of one of its pioneers, Eli Whitney: "One of my primary objects is to form the tools so the tools themselves shall fashion the work and give to every part its just proportion" (Boorstin 1965, p. 33). In the railroad industry—another field, in which large scale organizations sprang up in the US—"administration" meant to plan and supervise the laying of railroad tracks, planning schedules and calculating prices. The technology for each of these managerial tasks was relatively simple and well-understood (Chandler 1977). What was new was the *organization* required to carry out these functions under one roof and as the coordinated activities of one executive will.

While formal organizations thrived in the American private sector, spreading from textiles and railroads to retail and chemical processing, the bureaucratization of American government was held back for decades by a tradition of decentralized government, supported by that distrust in big government that the authors of the "Federalist Papers" had inscribed into the young nation's conscience. When American public administration finally reached continental European proportions in the wake of the New Deal, the resulting organization still showed few signs of converging on the model of European-style centralized bureaucracy. For example, where the European tradition supports a paternalistic relation between business and government, business-government relations in the US are characterized by most observers as adversarial (Wilson 1989, Lodge and Vogel 1987). One source of that difference can be found in the relative autonomy and social prestige of public bureaucracy in Germany, which gives it both the bargaining power as well the gate-keeping centrality to mediate or gently coerce the centrifugal forces of private business into compromise solutions. By contrast, the American distrust of big government has, despite the federal government's dramatic growth in size and numbers, meditated against the emergence of a continental-style autonomous bureaucracy.[5]

Summarizing, one can say that in Europe the historic primacy of public bureaucracy created a model of large-scale organization characterized by:

- large, stable and predictable environments characterized by few, if any, risks of organizational failure as neither state nor religious organizations were likely to "go out of business;"
- a legitimation process that oriented the newly emerging organization toward public service;

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• a strong paternalistic and, at times, militaristic streak.

In the US, by contrast, we see organizations:

• which, financed by private money, operate in risky and uncertain environments in which new businesses and thus new competitors crop up incessantly, some succeeding, but as many failing;

• which seek legitimacy in satisfying customers who are able to "vote with their feet" and who, unconstrained by the normative pressures of paternalism, will not hesitate to do so.

Thus, private enterprise becomes the model organizational form in the US, while in Germany public bureaucracy, at times heavily influenced by the code of military discipline, emerges as the norm-setting institution. In the former it is the strong-minded, independent, risk-taking manager-entrepreneur who sets the tone of organizational behavior. In the latter it is the procedure- and detail-oriented, risk-avoiding, and hierarchically dependent civil servant.

2. Organizations and Professionals

As formal organizations proliferate and expand, their need for trained professionals increases. Specially trained staff is required to handle the complex tasks of legal interpretation, accounting, information processing, or engineering. Large organizations absorb an increasing portion of a nation's educated work force.

The role of professionals in organizations and even in society at large is another domain in which the German or continental European and the American experience came to diverge widely. In the US managers, lawyers, medical doctors and other professionals assumed a relatively autonomous role, able to set up their practices, determine their fees and standards largely unconstrained by government interference (Rueschemeyer 1986). By contrast, in continental Europe the emerging professions developed in an institutional environment where public bureaucracies had staked out claims of monopolistic competence for many spheres of professional practice. Services offered by medical doctors were naturally subsumed under the bureaucratic jurisdiction for public health[6]; the legal expertise of jurists was harnessed for the maintenance of public order; architects were engaged as specialists of public construction, etc. The civil servant hegemony over the evolving professions must have appeared all the more "natural" as public officials also had a hand in the training and certification of these professionals in the state-run universities.

Thus it seems fair to say that in Europe "most professionals never had an existence outside of the huge bureaucracies of state and church" (Ritzer 1975). In this context the extant differences between religious organizations in the two countries also come into focus. As American religious organizations remained for a long time close to their origins as *local sects*, shunning the large bureaucratic organization of the Roman Catholic church, they would not qualify as the early employers and socializing agents of a professional priesthood the way the relatively vast organization of the Catholic church did in Europe.

That the existence of the European professional was always more closely linked to state and church bureaucracies than their American counterparts becomes apparent also in the different types of institutional settings of professional training: private universities in the US, state-run public universities in Germany and Europe. In Europe, beginning in the 17th century, *state universities* in charge of legal, theological, and philological training provide the needed professional staffs for government, schools, and churches (Parsons 1968, Ben-David 1963). In North America, by contrast, the first law schools that opened their doors in the 19th century, such as Harvard and Yale, were *private institutions* of higher learning, established through the support of private citizens associated in religious communities or, later, philanthropists who had made large fortunes in fast-growing American industries.

The greater autonomy enjoyed by the professions in the American institutional context becomes particularly clear when considering the legal profession. Under the rule of statutory law the continental legal profession was, especially since Napoleon's revision of the legal code, tightly bound to the government legislative branch. As the drafting of the Napoleonic code was guided by the ideal of providing legal rules that would unambiguously determine every potential legal dispute, the function of legal professionals was to *apply* existing law. By contrast, the doctrine of legal precedent that governs the common law tradition in the Anglo-Saxon world facilitates the legal profession's active involvement in the making of the law (Llewellyn 1989 tr.).

American and continental European managers have occasion to experience this difference anytime they try to negotiate a business contract. Not only do American managers expect a given contract to be much more detailed and extensive than their European counterparts; they are also likely to leave important parts of the contract work to their legal staff, a convention that puzzles European managers who are accustomed to

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handling these matters themselves:

> European businessmen experience surprise, if not shock, when they deal with American lawyers the first time. They come here and they see lawyers all over the place involved in the planning. They don't understand what they [the lawyers] are doing . . . . Here [in the US], you can't get away with a one-page contract. But in Germany, they feel comfortable with it. There's a feeling that the law will provide the rest. German businessmen will do legal business without lawyers. It's cultural . . . . German businessmen feel very comfortable looking over a contract without lawyers (Dahl 1989, p. 38).

The Training of Business Managers. Following the model of the legal profession, the American business community boosted its autonomy by founding *business schools* which, although part of universities, retained close ties with the business community. Starting with Wharton and Harvard, business schools assumed the monopoly over the training and socialization of prospective American managers. In Germany, by contrast, a similar attempt to build semi-autonomous schools of business and commerce featuring a curriculum of business administration, the *Handelshochschulen*, eventually failed. Instead of professional studies of business administration, German students of management are, to this day, directed to the study of applied economics (*Betriebswirtschaftslehre*) which is offered as a part of the academic curriculum at the universities (Lindenfeld 1990). In his recent study of this failed attempt to launch business schools in Germany, Lindenfeld cites a number of reasons. On the one hand there was rivalry by status-superior civil servants and professors of the established disciplines, backed by the fact that commerce was considered undignified and materialistic in Germany. On the other hand, even the entrepreneurs themselves were split over the merits of professionalizing the management function. An increasing number spoke out in favor of a semivocational training path of future managers, combining apprenticeships with company-designed career tracks. The latter system does, of course, constrain the mobility of company-trained managers much more than the generalist training towards the "Master of Business Administration."

In conclusion, we can cite Rueschemeyer (1986) who asserts that the institutional sequence argument outlined above also impacted the roles played by the professions on the two continents:

> Where a centralized bureaucratic state emerged in advance of full-blown capitalism, it set the cast for the expanding role of expert occupations; where the entrepreneurial transformation of exchange and production took place in the presence of a weaker administrative state apparatus, much more autonomous professional groups reorganized themselves so as to seize the new opportunities (p. 123).

Where academics, lawyers, and managers did not develop the professional autonomy and independence—ideologically and otherwise—from public bureaucratic patronage, their ability to counterbalance the centralizing forces of hierarchical organization is naturally much reduced.

3. Value Isomorphism and Bureaucratic Organization

To gain legitimacy a new organization must be isomorphic not only with the institutions dominating their environment, but also with the governing *values* (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). While the universalist view of culture implies that Western societies are increasingly governed by an identical set of core values, such as individualism, self-interest, and equality (Parsons 1964, Lerner 1958; for a recent reiteration of the universalist argument see also Fukuyama 1992), the pluralist view holds that nations and societies strive to maintain their unique value-orientations.

The classic source of the American-European value gap remains Tocqueville. Even though convinced of the irreversibility of certain social developments equated with the emergence of "modern" society Tocqueville was not a cultural universalist, subscribing instead to Montesquieu's idea that each national group exhibits its own identifying "spirit" or "character" which it would strive to maintain. His analysis of American habits of communal self-government and of the effect of the equality of rank and status on American institutions and manners is a good example of the different reservoirs of norms and values on which institutional developments on the two continents could draw.

In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville (1830) details the difference between a culture based on the equality of rank and status and a culture steeped for centuries in unbridgable status differences. Under the cultural hegemony of what Benjamin Franklin called a new American class of "middling condition," the imperative of equality influenced all other social norms. One result is visible in a people's willingness or unwillingness to submit to hierarchical authority. American lower classes serve without servitude. They do not exhibit the servile obedience and unquestioned commitment to the whim of their masters of their European counterparts. Where a feeling of obligation and duty bound the

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European servant to his master, the American servant is committed solely by the *contract* that exists between him and his master:

> In aristocracies the poor are trained from infancy to thoughts of obedience. All around, wherever they look, they see hierarchies of command. Hence, in countries where permanent inequality prevails, the master easily obtains from his servants an obedience which is prompt, complete, respectful, and easy, because they honor him not only as the master, but as representing the class of masters (p. 574).

> In democracies servants are not only equal among themselves, but one can say that in some fashion they are equal to their masters.... Why, then, has the latter the right to command, and what makes the former obey? A temporary and freely made agreement (p. 576).

From the viewpoint of European visitors to the New World who were less sympathetic of democracy than Tocqueville the new egalitarian master-servant relation manifested itself in many everyday frustrations:

> The whole class of young women, whose bread depends on their labor, are taught to believe that the most abject poverty is preferable to domestic service. Hundreds of half-naked girls work in the papermills, or in any other manufactory, for less than half the wages they would receive in service; but they think their equality is compromised by the latter, and nothing but the wish to obtain some particular article of finery will ever induce them to submit to it (Trollope 1832, p. 52).

This is not to suggest that the large organizations which later came to be run by a Vanderbilt or Carnegie were operating in a vacuum of authority. But the subordination and discipline expected from the American worker was less a result of a generalized and unquestioned obedience to a status-superior class than of the fullfillment of a temporary and limited contract, outside of which he was a free person and conducted himself as one.

Tocqueville suggested that American society had been resistant to values of obedience and status-orientation because of America's unique tradition of local, communal township government:

> Of all forms of liberty, that of a local community, which is so hard to establish, is the most prone to the encroachments of authority. Left to themselves, the institutions of a local community can hardly struggle against a strong and enterprising government; they cannot defend themselves with success unless they have reached full development and have come to form part of national ideas and habits. Hence, until communal freedom has come to form part of mores, it can be easily destroyed, and it cannot enter mores without a long recognized legal existence. [...] *Among all the nations of continental Europe, one may say, that there is not one that understands communal liberty* (p. 62, italics added).

Tocqueville obviously believed that the practice and spirit of communal freedom had irreversibly entered American "national ideas and habits" in contrast to continental Europe.

The question whether these differences between a contract-oriented organizational practice leaving wide margins for the liberty of the individual to enter and exit organizations, and the more status- and loyalty-oriented German value environment persist, is obviously beyond the scope of this paper. Yet some pointers may be given. In German–American or German–Anglo-Saxon comparisons of patterns of interpersonal orientations and behavior, a number of authors have found Germans to be more status-oriented and less habituated in rational conflict resolution and noncombative conversation styles than Americans (Lewin 1948, Kalberg 1987, Elias 1990). In the area of management and organization related differences have been found. German managers have less tolerance for uncertainty (Hofstede 1980) and are more prone to interpret the superior-subordinate relationship as one of advising and directing rather than coaching and facilitating (Laurent 1986). In a comparative study of aluminum plants in the US, France, and the Netherlands, d'Iribarne (1989) found employer-employee relations in the US to be based on the contract, while in France they were based on "rank."

Discussion and Conclusion

Occasionally, it is useful to revisit past and seemingly concluded debates in the history of an academic field, especially if the controversy at issue played a role in defining the intellectual boundaries, or the explicit and implicit assumptions of a field. In the case of the debate surrounding the theory of bureaucracy that occupied a good deal of the attention of the post-war generation of American organizational researchers, this criteria seems satisfied. Recall, for example, Parsons' critique (1947, p. 59) that "Weber nowhere calls attention to the fact that medical practice like various other professional functions in the Western World has not been predominantly organized in bureaucratic form, but rather, at least to a large extent, in that of 'private practice'." Or his allegation that Weber's theory of bureaucracy shows "a tendency to overemphasize the coercive aspect of authority and hierarchy in human relations in general" (p. 60). Like Parsons, most of his contemporaries read Weber's theory as an attempt towards a definitive theoretical model of modern orga-

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nization. The awareness that Weber's theory was more than trivially influenced by the specific organizational experience of Prussian Germany was as little developed as the awareness that the American organizational species was very different from the one Weber had observed.

Apart from pointing to the need for a greater degree of cross-cultural sensitivity in the construction of models of organization, addressing the gap of American-European organizational discourse may lead us to take a new look at problems that have been vexing organizational theorizing. Just how inevitable and irreversible is, for example, the bureaucratization of organizations in the Western world? Just how compelling are the characteristics of bureaucratic organization such as the strict subordination principle or the secrecy requirement that Weber discussed?

With the benefit of hindsight we know today that "the bureaucratization of the world" proceeded neither as linearly, nor quite as inevitably as Weber expected. Systems of public and private organizations exist which do not subject their officials to the type of secrecy requirements and constraints on their free speech as is the case in the German bureaucratic tradition.[7] The success of the Japanese organizational experience with its blending of rational, paternalistic and collectivist elements would seem to fall outside the path of bureaucratization envisioned by Weber. As to his expectations concerning the spread of bureaucratic organization in the United States I am inclined to follow Guenther Roth's judgment when he asserts that Weber "tried to identify the distinctiveness of American democracy in contrast to the European development, yet he could not shake the belief that in the near future the developmental dynamics of the modern state and of modern party organization would prevail in the United States, and here lay a major error of prediction . . . . [I]n contrast to most other democracies, public bureaucracy in the United States is today more than ever juxtaposed to a highly decentralized, personalist system of political representation and governance" (Roth 1985, p. 216). Weber "tried too hard to squeeze the American case into the developmental model" (p. 224) of secular rationalization of administration.[8]

If there is a lesson in the controversy around the theory of bureaucracy it is that neither side challenged the underlying assumption that there is and can be *one* model of organization capturing the essence of the "Western" organizational experience. Albeit implicit, this assumption remained central to the thinking of both challengers and defenders of bureaucracy, thus facilitating a research lacunae that Richard Scott called "the most neglected aspect of environment-organization relations," i.e., "the analysis of the impact of cultural factors" (Scott 1981, p. 165).

To begin filling this gap, students of organization can choose from among a variety of methods and approaches. In this paper I have used historical data detailing the conditions under which the type-setting forms of organization emerged in the United States on the one hand and in continental Europe, especially Germany on the other. It goes without saying that such comparisons of the history of the institutional and value environments in which formal organizations in two countries emerge can obviously not replace the study of contemporary organizational differences, nor do differences that may have prevailed some 100 years ago warrant automatic conclusions about present-day affairs. Nevertheless, if one accepts the argument that differences of institutional sequence and normative environment set the organizational development in two domains on different institutional paths, it seems that such comparisons will not be mere historical considerations either. Instead, they may allow us to develop propositions for more informed studies of contemporary comparative organizational behavior. The proposition derived from a comparison of institutional and value environments in 19th-century United States and Germany can be put roughly as follows:

While European institutional-cultural conditions favored a centralized, hierarchical, obedience-based organizational form with very little uncertainty tolerance stressing loyalty, in the US primacy of the large business organization which operated in volatile markets under the cultural imperative of equality favored flatter, less hierarchical, and more nearly decomposable organizations in which compliance was based on a temporary contract.

Whether the paths of organizational development characterized here remain in their distinct tracks today, or whether they, as one prominent theory of modernization would have it, converge, or whether they oscillate between the extremes of convergence and divergence, is a question that cannot be addressed in this paper. A casual survey of the organizational landscape seems to provide evidence for both the convergence and the path divergence thesis. Thus we find German managers and administrators throughout this century with their gaze fixed westward, i.e., toward the US in search of new ideas and examples of innovative managerial practice. On the other hand it cannot be denied that many of the institutional differences described above persist today, e.g., the different traditions of training and socialization of managers or the

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differential rates of managerial exit and turnover prevailing in the two countries. Sorting out conflicting data such as these undoubtedly remains one of the important frontiers of organizational theory and research as the field faces up to the pressures of internationalization. All the more important that we come clear with obstacles standing in the way of this task.

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Endnotes

[1]Studies where Weber's theory was evaluated in light of the organizational tradition of a specific country remained isolated exceptions. Most notably remains Crozier (1964).

[2]As a sample for the contemporary reception see R. Moss-Kanter, who, with an eye on Weber, notes: "Global competition and ease of information access are transforming the organizational world so much that it would already be unrecognizable by classic social theorists and indescribable in their language" (1989, p. 51).

[3]Roth argues persuasively that Weber's theorizing is sensitive to the interrelationships of social forces on the level of empirical complexity only on this last, i.e., the situational level of analysis, where Weber proved more than once prepared to sacrifice conceptual purity for the sake of faithfulness to empirical detail: "...we do not claim to use the only possible approach nor do we claim that all empirical structures of domination must correspond to one of these 'pure' types. On the contrary, the great majority of empirical cases represent a combination or a state of transition among several such pure types. We shall be compelled again and again to form expressions like 'patrimonial bureaucracy' in order to make the point that the characteristic traits of the respective phenomenon belong in part to the rational form of domination, whereas other traits belong to a traditionalist form of domination.... Important aspects of these structures, however, cannot be classified smoothly under any one of the three forms we have distinguished (Weber 1946, p. 300)."

[4]The following observations are limited to continental Europe, France and especially Germany. The history of organizational evolution in England is, by contrast, much closer to that of the United States.

[5]This is not the place for a detailed comparison of contemporary public bureaucracy in Germany and the US. For some pointers, see Katzenstein (1987), Wilson (1989), Lodge and Vogel (1987). Chandler (1980) traces the adversarialism of American business-government relations to the influence of the large American class of small business owners whose calls for protection against big business had to be heeded by politicians running for re-election. In this connection see also Bendix (1949) who found in a comparison of American and Prussian civil servants that, by their social origin, American civil servants represented a socially less homogeneous group than their Prussian counterparts. Also, American administrators were more independent from central administration.

[6]Cf. this assessment of the role of physicians in 19th century Germany: "...it is clear that in the 19th century a large portion, possibly a majority of the poor in Germany—practically all of them in the towns and some in the countryside—had access to free medical care and free prescription medicine, partly from physicians on the public payroll catering to the poor (*Armenärzle*, "doctors of the poor"), partly from those in private practice who were legally obliged to give free treatment to the poor." (Helbig 1993, p. 521).

[7]Cf. for example the high degree of freedom of speech among Dutch officials: "Availing himself of the Dutch tradition of free speech even among officials, Mr. Wynaents [a Dutch envoy involved in the Bosnian peace talks] uses his own negotiating experiences... to draw up a damning exposé of Western failures that continue to haunt diplomacy:" *International Herald Tribune*, May 19, 1993, p. 5.

[8]The assertion that Weber, who opposed throughout his career the "fashionable construction of general developmental schemes" somehow managed to be more faithful to this principle in his studies of premodern social structures than in the study of modern ones, is not identical with the assertion that Weber was a cultural universalist. Nevertheless it should be noted that accounts of Weber's work as balanced as that of Schluchter come to the conclusion: "It seems to me that he [Bendix] goes too far in his anti-evolutionary stand when he writes that Weber's analysis of rationalization should free us from the assumption 'that for him this process was either inevitable, unequivocal, or irreversible'. *Weber does have a minimal evolutionary program*" (Schluchter 1979, p. 21, italics added).

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