



# Conventional versus Radical Moral Agents: An Exploratory Empirical Look at Weber's Moral-points-of-view and Virtues

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## Abstract

Max Weber's work suggests that conventional management theory and practice is underpinned by a moral-point-of-view that places relatively high emphasis on both materialism and individualism. He calls for the development of radical management theory and practices to serve as a counterpoint. Both the conventional and radical moral-points-of-view are associated with specific virtues and practices. Weber suggests that, from a conventional moral-point-of-view, four primary virtues — mercy, submission, obedience and non-worldliness — give rise to specialization, centralization, formalization and standardization. In contrast, from a radical moral-point-of-view, these same four primary virtues are expected to give rise to sensitization, dignification, participation and experimentation (Dyck and Schroeder 2005). Our study contrasts and compares a sample of conventional and radical managers, to provide an empirical look at these expected differences, as well as testing for differences in their personal and spiritual virtues. Implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** moral-points-of-view, materialism and individualism, conventional and radical management virtues

A century after it first appeared, Max Weber's classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958, first pub. 1904) still has important contributions to make to our thinking about organizational virtue and moral agency, and Weber remains a leading moral philosopher of management (Clegg 1996). Weber's classic argues that everyone is a moral agent, that conventional management theory and practice is underpinned by a materialist–individualist moral-point-of-view that has become an iron cage, and that there is need to develop radical management theory and practice as a counterpoint.

This paper is an attempt to take the challenge posed by Weber's masterwork seriously at a time when the popular zeitgeist is to perceive and experience a crisis of virtue and moral agency in organizations. Like a growing number of contemporary researchers (e.g. Ferraro et al. 2005; Ghoshal 2005; Miller 1999; Ostrom 1998; Weber et al. 2004), Weber was aware of the social and environmental costs associated with the materialist–individualist moral-point-of-view, and so he called for the development a non-conventional alternative that could act as an effective foil to conventional assumptions and practices.

Organization  
Studies  
27(3):429–450  
ISSN 0170–8406  
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SAGE Publications  
(London,  
Thousand Oaks,  
CA & New Delhi)

In this paper we present, contrast and compare virtues associated with two Weberian ‘ideal-types’ of management. Following Dyck and Schroeder (2005), ‘conventional managers’ refers to those who place high emphasis on materialism and individualism, and for whom management is primarily about maximizing productivity, efficiency, competitiveness and profitability. These are the prototypical managers who exemplify mainstream management theory and practice (e.g. Ferraro et al. 2005; Ghoshal 2005). The second ideal-type — ‘radical managers’ — do not place *primary* emphasis on materialism and individualism. For radical managers, productivity and efficiency do not trump other forms of well-being, like ecological, physical, social, spiritual, aesthetic and intellectual well-being. Weber’s argument calls for the development of radical management theory and practice to help escape the iron cage, or at least to render it visible through contrast (Knight 1998; MacIntyre 1981).

Weber’s analysis has two important implications for our study. First, just as we know that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so also an understanding of management virtues depends on the underpinning moral-point-of-view. For example, for conventional managers, profit-maximization, competitiveness and a narrowly construed pursuit of self-interest are seen as virtues. In contrast, a radical manager may be more likely to emphasize virtues like social justice and ecological sustainability. Although we may not be able to judge one moral-point-of-view as *more* moral or virtuous than another, we are able to compare outcomes associated with working under different moral-points-of-view. Of course, recognizing that management theory and practice are based on moral-points-of-view also compels us all, as moral agents, to become more aware of the moral-point-of-view that we apply.

Second, Weber challenges readers to describe and develop radical management theory and practice (Dyck and Schroeder 2005; Weber 1958). What are the virtues and supporting practices associated with radical management? What sustains radical managers? Thanks to high-profile events like the collapses of Enron and Worldcom, and thanks also to the work of critical theorists and others (e.g. Clegg and Hardy 1999; Kasser 2003; Perrow 1986), we have a growing understanding of the shortcomings of conventional management. The time has come to develop a better understanding of the character of organizational virtue associated with radical management (Alvesson and Willmott 1992). If the conventional perspective results in thinking that self-interested behaviour is morally legitimate (cf. Ferraro et al. 2005; Miller 1999), then what factors enable and legitimize non-self-interested moral agents? We need more research to enhance the effectiveness of radical managers who are virtuous in ways that defy the conventional moral-point-of-view (Margolis and Walsh 2003). Just as scholars have developed conventional (i.e. high materialism, high individualism) formally rational management theory and practice, so also should we work to understand its obverse in both theory and practice. If for no other reason, we should study this simply to provide information to the increasing number of people who are questioning the materialist–individualist moral-point-of-view. For example, a recent survey (New American Dream 2004) found that 93% of Americans agree that they are too focused on working and making money and not focused

enough on family and community. Further, most report having voluntarily chosen to forgo maximizing their material well-being in favour of achieving a better balance with their social, physical, ecological, aesthetic, spiritual or intellectual well-being (see also Burch 2000; Etzioni 2001).

This brings us to the central goal of this paper: to test whether the virtues and practices associated with conventional managers (high materialism, high individualism) differ, as predicted by the Weberian typology, from the virtues and practices associated with radical managers. In so doing, we provide a first exploratory, empirical look at whether a framework defined by the dimensions of materialism and individualism provides a meaningful start at developing a Weberian typology of different moral-points-of-view of management. Our study will look at three particular kinds of virtues. First, we will examine whether the conventional management virtues of specialization, centralization, formalization and standardization are more likely to be practised by managers who place relatively high emphasis on materialism and individualism, and whether the radical management virtues of sensitization, dignification, participation and experimentation are more likely to be practised by managers who place relatively low emphasis on materialism and individualism (as posited by Dyck and Schroeder 2005). Second, beyond these specific managerial virtues, we will examine whether there are differences between conventional and radical managers among a more general set of personal virtues: peacefulness, gentleness, patience and joyfulness. Finally, exploring Weber's contention that escape from the iron cage is most likely to be supported by a religio-spiritual rationale, we examine whether there are differences among conventional and radical managers in a specific set of personal spiritual virtues and practices (prayer and spirituality-at-work).

Our paper is divided into four parts. In the first part we review the literature that (a) underpins Weber's materialist, individualist conceptual framework, and (b) suggests that conventional and radical managers will have differing managerial, personal and spiritual virtues and practices. Five hypotheses are developed as part of this review. In the second part, we describe our methods and introduce our data set. In the third part we present our analyses, and in the final part we discuss the implications of our findings.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses

Weber (1958) suggests that conventional management can be characterized by two hallmarks — individualism and materialism — both of which were initially grounded in the Protestant ethic (Dyck and Schroeder 2005; Frey 1998). First, Weber argues that an emphasis on *individualism* is a defining characteristic of the Protestant ethic, calling it 'the absolutely decisive difference' from Catholicism. For example, according to Weber, the Protestant ethic gave rise to 'a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual' (Weber 1958: 104–105; see also pages 80 and 160) because its emphasis on the calling of individuals essentially eliminated the role of the Church community and the sacraments for attaining salvation. Building on

this analysis, Solomon and Hanson (1983: 37) identify Adam Smith's theory of the 'invisible hand' as a key legitimating event in transforming individualism from being 'roundly condemned in the Bible and unheard of in most ancient societies' into a virtue of the highest order.

Second, Weber suggests that an emphasis on materialism in conventional management theory has led to life in an 'iron cage': 'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart: this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before attained' (Weber 1958: 182). For Weber, this imagery of an iron cage is clearly and directly linked to materialism:

*'the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the "saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment"'.<sup>1</sup> But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage ... material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men [sic] as at no previous period in history.'* (Weber 1958: 181; emphasis added)

Weber quotes John Wesley's description of how the Protestant ethic notion of vocation requires adherents to be both industrious and frugal, which yields riches. The observation that capital economics and divine providence serve to transform people's 'virtuous restriction of consumption' into 'involuntary affluence' (Rudman and Kilbourne 1996: 183) was also reflected in John Calvin's preaching that material wealth was a sign of a person's eventual salvation, which further legitimated materialism (Solomon and Hanson 1983).

Taken together, placing high emphasis on individualism and materialism has resulted in the conventional 'ideal-type' of management characterized by its emphasis on productivity, efficiency, profitability, competitive advantage, getting ahead and 'looking out for number one'. However, as is obvious in his descriptions of the iron cage, when Weber uses this ideal-type language, he is by no means endorsing or championing conventional management theory and practice. Rather, Weber uses the term 'ideal-type' at an abstract conceptual level to denote a prototypical managerial style or organizational form. And it is precisely the conceptual framework undergirding this ideal-type that permits the identification of its obverse, namely the radical ideal-type, which places greater emphasis on nurturing community and mutuality rather than on individualism, and on alternate forms of well-being (e.g. social, ecological, spiritual) rather than materialism and financial wealth.

Consistent with Weber's (1958) arguments, Dyck and Schroeder (2005) argue that the constructs of materialism and individualism, when crossed with one another, form a meaningful  $2 \times 2$  framework for thinking about moral-points-of-view. However, in order for this framework to guide future research, we need to demonstrate that these two constructs — that is, materialism and individualism — can be measured and shown to be independent of one another. If the constructs cannot be measured distinctly and demonstrated to be independent of one another — if instead, they were highly correlated and essentially one construct in practice — then the  $2 \times 2$  framework would be meaningless. This brings us to our first hypothesis, which serves as a foundation for our other hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 1: Materialism and individualism are independent constructs.*

## Management Virtues

Dyck and Schroeder (2005) is the only study we are aware of that explicitly contrasts and compares management virtues and practices associated with conventional materialist–individualist management and its radical counterpoint. Their study builds on Weber’s (1958) description of how four primary virtues from the Protestant ethic — mercy, submission, obedience and non-worldliness — have found expression in conventional management theory and practice. Although Dyck and Schroeder (2005) develop theory and implicit propositions, they do not provide any empirical testing of those propositions.

### Conventional Management Virtues

According to Weber (1958), the primary virtues of mercy, submission, obedience and non-worldliness inform, and are evident in, the conventional management virtues of specialization, centralization, formalization and standardization, respectively. Weber describes how an emphasis on *mercy* or ‘brotherly love’ underpins specialization:

‘Even in Luther we found *specialized* labour in callings justified in terms of *brotherly love* ... [which] is expressed in the first place in the fulfilment of the daily tasks ... in the interest of the rational organization of our social environment.’ (1958: 108–109; emphasis added)

Weber (1958: 160) goes on to describe how ‘the division of labour and occupations in society’ was seen as ‘a direct consequence of the divine scheme of things’.

The Protestant ethic virtue of *submission* underpins the idea of centralization, in which differentiation also occurs along the vertical dimension. According to the idea of vocation in the Protestant ethic, submission serves to legitimate hierarchical social and organizational structures, in which power is centralized among the elite atop the hierarchy, sometimes even to the point of exploitation of those lower in the hierarchy.

‘Now naturally the whole ascetic literature of almost all denominations is saturated with the idea that faithful labour, even at low wages, on the part of those whom life offers no other opportunities, is highly pleasing to God. ... [Protestant asceticism] legalized the exploitation of this specific willingness to work, in that it also interpreted the employer’s business activity as a calling. It is obvious how powerfully the exclusive search for the Kingdom of God only through the fulfilment of duty in the calling, and the strict asceticism which Church discipline naturally imposed, especially on the propertyless classes, was bound to affect the productivity of labour in the capitalistic sense of the word.’ (Weber 1958: 178–179)

The idea of *obedience* underpins the conventional emphasis on formalization. The Protestant ethic view of obedience to the law, as an ‘an ideal though never quite attainable norm’, is especially attracted to ‘Old Testament rationalism’ (Weber 1958: 123), and places particular emphasis ‘on those parts of the Old Testament which *praise formal legality* as a sign of conduct pleasing to God’ (Weber 1958: 165; emphasis added).

Under the Protestant ethic, *non-worldliness* supports standardization. Weber describes how ‘the repudiation of all idolatry of the flesh’ serves as

Table 1.  
Virtues and Practices  
Associated with  
Conventional and  
Radical Management  
Based on Weber's  
Primary Virtues

Conventional		Primary virtues		Radical
specialization	←	mercy	→	sensitization
centralization	←	submission	→	dignification
formalization	←	obedience	→	participation
standardization	←	non-worldliness	→	experimentation

an 'ideal foundation' to undergird the 'powerful tendency toward uniformity of life, which to-day so immensely aids the capitalistic interest in the *standardization of production*' (Weber 1958: 169; emphasis added).

*Hypothesis 2: Conventional managers will express attitudes consistent with specialization, centralization, formalization and standardization to a greater degree than radical managers.*

In sum, for conventional management, the virtue of mercy is expressed in specialization, submission is evident in centralization, obedience gives rise to formalization, and non-worldliness yields standardization. However, it is also quite plausible that these very same primary virtues — mercy, submission, obedience and non-conformity — will be expressed differently by radical managers (see Table 1). This is precisely what Dyck and Schroeder (2005) argue in their conceptual study.

#### Radical Management Virtues

Dyck and Schroeder (2005) suggest that, from a radical moral-point-of-view, *mercy* is associated with compassion and being sensitive to the needs of others, especially people who are at a relative disadvantage in existing structures. From the radical perspective, mercy involves being 'disposed to being helpful and deliberately knowing others' needs' (Dyck and Schroeder 2005: 724). This dimension, which they call 'sensitization', describes the virtue of identifying unjust social structures, a first step toward making changes to improve the lot of people who live at a social structure's margins.

A radical understanding of *submission* focuses attention on 'dignifying' other people: 'Submission leads to mutual support and counsel as people treat one another with dignity in community' (Dyck and Schroeder 2005: 725). Submission to a community downplays individualism and the acquisitiveness of materialism. To submit to others is to recognize one's own dignity by treating others with dignity, as 'thous' rather than as faceless 'its' (Buber 1958).

From a radical perspective, *obedience* is expressed in participation, evident in community discernment and participative decision-making. Participation emphasizes developing mutual understandings of how structures and systems work, identifying shortcomings, and cooperatively developing required changes. Here the obedience is not to codified laws, but rather to the process of collective participation with the goal of mutual improvement. Of course, the improvement need not always enhance profitability or organizational competitiveness; it might often enhance social justice that has been identified via mercy.

From a radical perspective *non-worldliness* is manifest in experimentally implementing structures and practices that make the world a better place, rather than merely conforming to past practices and standards. For radical managers, this non-worldly experimentation might allow them to see organizational profits as merely a means to greater ends, whereas conventional managers would view profit-maximization as the dominant goal.

*Hypothesis 3: Radical managers will express attitudes consistent with sensitization, dignification, participation and experimentation to a greater degree than conventional managers.*

### **Personal Virtues**

In addition to the four management virtues described above, there are additional virtues that could be associated with radical and conventional moral-points-of-view, which sometimes may not be evident in a manager's formal job description. In this study, we have data to look at four such personal virtues: joyfulness, gentleness, inner peace, and patience.<sup>2</sup> Previous research led us to hypothesize that each of these four particular virtues would be more associated with radical than with conventional managers.

We expect *inner peace* to be associated with a radical perspective because previous research suggests that a materialist–individualist orientation is related to a general decrease in psychological health and an increase in mental disorders (Cohen and Cohen 1996; Kasser 2003). Gentleness is expected to be associated with a radical moral-point-of-view because, for example, previous research suggests that a materialist–individualist lifestyle contributes to poorer interpersonal relationships at work (Richins and Dawson 1992; cf. Rudman and Kilbourne 1996: 206). *Patience* is predicted to be associated with a radical moral-point-of-view, because a materialist–individualist worldview has been associated with a ‘get everything as quickly as you can’ attitude (Walsh 1994) and with greater anxiety (Kasser 2003). Finally, *joyfulness* is expected to be associated with the radical moral-point-of-view, because a growing volume of research suggests that people who hold a materialist–individualist orientation are less happy and less satisfied with their lives (e.g. Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Kasser 2003; Kasser and Ryan 2001).

*Hypothesis 4: Radical managers will espouse the personal virtues of peacefulness, gentleness, patience and joyfulness more than conventional managers.*<sup>3</sup>

### **Personal Spiritual Virtues**

There is widespread agreement with Weber's (1958) basic argument that the secular moral-point-of-view that today underpins conventional management theory and practice was initially underpinned by spiritual virtues associated with the Protestant ethic (Golembiewski 1989; Herman 1997; Jackall 1988; Nash 1994; Naughton and Bausch 1994; Novak 1982; Pattison 1997; Pfeffer 1982). However, because of a process of secularization and normalization, the

'capitalist system ... no longer needs the support of any religious forces, and [instead] feels the attempts of religion to influence economic life, in so far as they can still be felt at all, to be as much an unjustified interference as its regulation by the State.' (Weber 1958: 72)

This is not to suggest that Weber found spiritual virtues to be unimportant for understanding how to escape the iron cage. On the contrary, although he himself was an agnostic, Weber asserted that religious ideas were of particular importance for effecting social change, and concluded that escaping the iron cage would demand the development of new prophets or a rebirth of old ideas and ideals (Weber 1958: 182, 277–78; cf. Clegg 2005; Knight 1998; MacIntyre 1981). Just as the Protestant ethic had helped to usher in conventional management, so also would conventional management, in turn, be most likely to be displaced by appeals to non-conventional religio-spiritual virtues, because they offer the confidence and security of mind necessary to espouse a minority perspective in the face of overwhelming odds. Indeed, it is worth noting the central role of religious beliefs in supporting the long-term efforts of both terrorist groups and subversive elements within powerful organizations (e.g. liberation theology within Catholicism in Central America). This leads to our final hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 5: Radical managers will place greater emphasis on personal spiritual virtues than will conventional managers.*

## Methods

### Sample

Our study uses survey data from a population of managers who have indicated that their faith is important to them. These data, collected by Zigarelli (2002), were not designed to test our specific hypotheses, but his dataset is the largest of its kind and is suitable for an exploratory study like ours. Zigarelli (2002) identified potential respondents using two sources: (1) online Christian business directories, and (2) the alumni database of a major Christian university with a predominately Protestant orientation. To ensure that it was legitimate to pool these two datasets, a series of post hoc contrasts were conducted to determine if there were any significant differences between the samples on the constructs or items in question.<sup>4</sup> There were no statistically significant differences between the two sub-samples on any of the eight items used to categorize participants along the dimensions of materialism and individualism; nor were there differences on the resulting indices. Similarly, the two sub-samples were contrasted on every dependent measure reported in this paper and no statistically significant differences were found.

The response rate was 17.4%, which exceeds the norm for published research based on 'cold-call' mail surveys (i.e. 6–16%; see Harzing 1997). The subset of Zigarelli's (2002) data that we are using here consists of those respondents who reported working in a 'for profit' organization ( $n = 170$ ). We introduced this criterion because of the pre-eminent place that the

study of for-profit enterprise has played in shaping conventional management theory.

Respondents were 86% male and 91% Caucasian. They came from 31 states in the USA, had an average age of 44 (SD = 9.9) and an average of 15 years of managerial experience (SD = 9.2). The kinds of businesses that respondents worked in were extraordinarily varied, including the professions (e.g. law, medicine, dentistry), print shops, consulting, adult education, computer software, disaster recovery, manufacturing and a host of others. Respondents were affiliated with 17 different denominations, with 'non-denominational' being the single largest group (45.6%), followed by Baptist (12.7%). No other denomination mentioned (e.g. Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic) represented more than 8% of the sample included in our analyses.

This is an appropriate sample because it follows the dictum that exploratory studies should focus on research sites where the phenomenon under examination is most 'transparently observable' (Eisenhardt 1989). We expect that religious managers are familiar with the language of virtues, and are often prompted to give conscious thought as to how they live out different virtues in their everyday lives. Because the sample is very homogeneous, the variance is likely restricted and the statistical tests for the differences of interest may be conservative. In a more heterogeneous sample, it may be easier to find results, since the variation available would be dramatically larger.

### **Categorizing Managers and the Development of Measures**

In order to contrast conventional and radical managers, it was first necessary to develop measures of materialism and individualism based on items in Zigarelli's (2002) dataset.

#### **Materialism**

Materialism is focused on material good, maximizing efficiency and productivity and improving objectively measurable conditions (e.g. Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Dyck and Schroeder 2005; Etzioni 2001; Kasser 2003; Muncy and Eastman 1998; Weber 1958). With these criteria in mind, we selected four items from Zigarelli's questionnaire. Each item required managers to indicate on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree; no neutral point) the degree to which they thought people 'at work' would ascribe a particular descriptor to respondents. The four items we selected related to efficiency, budget-focus, results-focus, and organization. Analyses indicated an acceptable level of internal reliability for our materialism index (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .70$ ).

#### **Individualism**

Our measure for individualism also included four items with the same Likert scale and structure as those used in the materialism scale. Zigarelli's survey did not ask respondents to rate how self-interested they were, but rather each of the items measured the opposite, namely, whether respondents acted in

community-minded ways rather than merely self-serving ways. Specifically, the four items we selected related to managers' perceptions of whether others would consider them to be loyal, loving, kind-hearted and/or likely to 'generously go the extra mile' for others. Analyses again indicated an acceptable level of internal reliability for our individualism index (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .70$ ). Taken together, these four items are the antithesis of individualism seen as: emotional independence (Hofstede 1980); focus on personal convenience versus self-sacrifice (McCarty and Shrum 2001); a lack of showing concern for others in a sense of community (Watson et al. 1999); an emphasis on 'autonomy' and striving to find true inner self without being sullied by socialization processes or 'unnecessary interactions and small talk' (Wolfson 1997).

## Analyses and Results

### Relationship between Materialism and Individualism (Hypothesis 1)

Our foundational hypothesis, upon which all other analyses depended, was that materialism and individualism were, in fact, independent constructs and could be used to form a  $2 \times 2$  matrix. As hypothesized, the two constructs were not significantly correlated with one another,  $r(170) = .11$ ,  $p = .16$ . Further, we categorized each respondent within the conceptual  $2 \times 2$  matrix by performing a median split on both dimensions. Statistical analyses of the resulting cross-tabs data further supported the independence of the two constructs,  $\chi^2(170) = .342$ ,  $p = .56$ .

The resulting categorization placed 37 managers in the conventional quadrant (high individualism, high materialism) and 44 managers in the radical quadrant (low individualism, low materialism). Our remaining analyses are based on comparing these two groups of managers ( $n = 81$ , a subset of the original sample of  $n = 170$  managers in for-profit firms).

### Conventional Management Virtues (Hypothesis 2)

Zigarelli's survey instrument included items that could be used to evaluate aspects of the four conventional management virtues: specialization, centralization, formalization and standardization. Recall that these are the four conventional manifestations of four primary virtues (mercy, submission, obedience and non-worldliness, respectively). To keep these primary virtues in mind, we have indicated them in parentheses behind the conventional manifestation in this section. Also, refer to Table 1 for the contrast between conventional and radical moral-points-of-view that is being tested.

First, we assessed differences in specialization (mercy) with an item that focused on prospective employees having the proper qualifications for their jobs: 'It is appropriate to hire someone who *is not* the most qualified applicant for a job if that person needs the job more than other applicants' (emphasis in original). This item reflects the two interpretations of the primary virtue of mercy: qualified specialists (conventional) versus being sensitized to applicant needs (radical). As predicted, conventional managers gave significantly

weaker endorsements of this item ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) than radical managers gave ( $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ),  $t(77) = -1.86$ ,  $p < .05$ , 1-tailed.

Second, we assessed differences in centralization (submission) with two items. The first showed how much emphasis managers put on 'meeting the needs of your boss' (versus meeting the needs of other stakeholders — shareholders, customers, supplier, creditors, community and employees). The second showed how much emphasis managers put on 'meeting the needs of shareholders' (versus the same others). We expected conventional managers to place greater relative emphasis on hierarchical relationships, such as their boss and their shareholders. This would be consistent with the idea that everyone is called into a certain vocation and social status, and that people should submit to the power of those above them in the hierarchy. Conventional managers did rank meeting the needs of their boss more highly ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ) than did radical managers ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.95$ ; lower scores = higher priorities),  $t(57) = -1.36$ ,  $p < .01$ , 2-tailed (note: unless otherwise indicated, all  $t$ -tests reported here are 2-tailed). Similarly, conventional managers ranked meeting the needs of their shareholders as more important ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ) than radical managers did ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ),  $t(69) = -2.08$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Third, we assessed differences in formalization (obedience) with an item that focused on how carefully managers formulated clear goals and plans to guide work: "Planning" — identifying and selecting goals and courses of action — is a high priority for me at work.' We expected conventional managers to place higher emphasis on setting up such plans to follow and obey, whereas radical managers would be more inclined to manage participatively and fluidly. As predicted, conventional managers were found to place higher priority on formalization ( $M = 5.49$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) than radical managers ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = .86$ ),  $t(79) = 1.79$ ,  $p < .05$ , 1-tailed.

Fourth, we tried to assess differences in standardization (non-worldliness) with an item that looked at whether managers had clear standards against which to measure performance: 'I have good measures of how well my work group, department, or organization is meeting its goals.' We expected conventional managers to have more such measures than their radical counterparts, for whom developing measures may be more difficult because their goals went beyond the relatively easy-to-quantify materialistic measures. However, although the means were in the predicted direction, the difference was non-significant.

In sum, we found broad support for Hypothesis 2.

### **Radical Management Virtues (Hypothesis 3)**

The survey instrument also included items that could be used to measure each of the four radical management virtues: sensitization, dignification, participation and experimentation.

First, we assessed differences in sensitization (mercy) with an item that focused on the emphasis that managers put on 'meeting the needs of your employees' (versus meeting the needs of other stakeholders — shareholders, customers, supplier, creditors, community and their boss). We expected radical managers to be more likely to prioritize being sensitive to the needs

of their employees, whereas conventional managers would look more at the instrumental contributions employees made to their goals and material interests. As predicted, radical managers ranked meeting employee needs as relatively more important ( $M = 2.39$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) than conventional managers ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ),  $t(79) = 1.94$ ,  $p = .056$ .<sup>5</sup>

Second, we measured dignification (submission) with an item that showed how predisposed managers were to seeing the good in other people: 'People are inherently good, but sometimes do sinful things.' We expected radical managers to be more likely to — as the Quakers put it — see that of Go(o)d in others. This would be a sign of treating others with dignity, whereas conventional managers would be more likely to evaluate the people with whom they worked in primarily instrumental terms. Radical managers did endorse the inherent goodness of people ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.96$ ) to a greater degree than conventional managers ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ),  $t(79) = -2.62$ ,  $p = .01$ .

Third, we assessed differences in participation (obedience) with an item that assessed how approachable managers thought they were: 'My employees would say that they can talk to me about anything.' Previous research (Sanchez-Burks 2002) suggests that conventional managers may be weak in some of the interpersonal skills and motives that would support participation. Despite probable social desirability dynamics, conventional managers ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) did, indeed, endorse this statement less than radical managers ( $M = 5.26$ ,  $SD = .63$ ),  $t(53.68) = -2.59$ ,  $p = .01$ .

Fourth, we assessed differences in experimentation (non-worldliness) with an item that looked at how likely managers were to think 'outside the box' of the traditional purview of their responsibilities: 'Profit is a means, not an end.' Such an attitude would give radical managers significantly more degrees of freedom to implement new structures and systems, as it would provide an opportunity to invoke non-financial criteria and standards to foster experimentation and make decisions. As predicted, radical managers were more likely to view profit as a means ( $M = 5.32$ ,  $SD = .82$ ) than conventional managers ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ),  $t(55.58) = 2.54$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Support was found for all four component parts of Hypothesis 3. Taken together with the results for Hypothesis 2 (for which three of four component parts received support), it is reasonable to argue that radical and conventional managers do, indeed, differ in the virtues and attitudes that they endorse in relation to the four Weberian primary virtues. Together, support of the first three hypotheses offers a worthwhile contribution. Not only can one map a conceptual space in terms of a materialism-by-individualism framework, but real managers can be categorized according to the framework, and their attitudes and virtues differ significantly in ways that the framework would predict (Dyck and Schroeder 2005).

#### **General Personal Virtues (Hypothesis 4)**

The survey instrument had four items that we found interesting to measure virtues that go above and beyond the duties generally expected of managers. Managers were asked to indicate the degree to which people at work would describe them as: gentle; joyful or happy; patient; or a person with an inner

peace or calmness. These items formed a reliable personal virtues scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .69$ ). Consistent with Hypothesis 4, radical managers believed these virtues would be ascribed to them ( $M = 20.89$ ,  $SD = 2.05$ ) to a greater degree than conventional managers ( $M = 18.05$ ,  $SD = 2.97$ ),  $t(62.2) = -4.90$ ,  $p < .001$ .<sup>6</sup>

#### **Personal Spiritual Virtues (Hypothesis 5)**

In keeping with Weber's analysis, we hypothesized that radical managers — that is, managers who hold a different moral-point-of-view from the one that society takes for granted — would, at least in this sample, put greater emphasis on the personal spiritual virtues that we examined than would conventional managers. We computed a personal spiritual virtues index by summing the responses to five items, two of which focus on the spiritual discipline of prayer ('I seek God's will through prayer'; 'I am making a deliberate effort to grow into a deeper relationship with God'), and three of which focus on a sense of spirituality-at-work ('At work, I consider God to be my ultimate Boss'; 'I believe that God is at work in my life today'; and 'My faith is the most important influence in my life'). These five items formed a reliable personal spiritual virtues index (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ). As predicted in Hypothesis 5, radical managers expressed a greater emphasis on these personal spiritual virtues ( $M = 29.44$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ) than did conventional managers ( $M = 28.03$ ,  $SD = 3.08$ ),  $t(45.39) = -2.63$ ,  $p = .01$ . Although this difference is statistically significant, the extraordinarily small difference in means may be a reflection of the homogeneity we have noted in the make-up of the sample.

It is important to note that the strength of the inferences drawn from our analyses do not reside in any single test presented here. Indeed, since the data used for our analyses were not collected specifically for our purposes, each individual test has its flaws and imperfections (as almost all tests always do, even when the data are collected for the ultimate purpose of the reporting researchers). The strength of these findings lies in the pattern of results and their consistency with theoretically derived predictions. Of more than a dozen individual tests, only one failed to yield the predicted significant result, and in that case the means were in the predicted direction.

## **Discussion**

The arguments and findings presented in this study have important implications for our understanding of organizational virtue and moral agents. In particular, our findings support Weber's analysis that materialism and individualism are meaningful dimensions along which moral-points-of-view of management vary (Hypothesis 1). As predicted, compared to radical managers, conventional managers were: more likely to express attitudes consistent with specialization, centralization, formalization and standardization (Hypothesis 2); less likely to express attitudes consistent with sensitization, dignification, participation and experimentation (Hypothesis 3); less likely to describe themselves as

exhibiting the personal virtues of peacefulness, gentleness, patience and joyfulness (Hypothesis 4); and less likely to emphasize personal spiritual virtues of prayer and spirituality-at-work (Hypothesis 5). Our remaining discussion highlights implications of our findings related to our hypotheses for future research, discusses our study in its larger political-economical and institutional context, and reviews some of the limitations of our study.

#### **Weber's Framework (Hypothesis 1)**

Our study provides empirical support for the  $2 \times 2$  materialism–individualism Weberian moral-point-of-view framework. Following Dyck and Schroeder (2005), we have focused on the conventional and radical quadrants, but future research might examine the moral-points-of-view that have high individualism/low materialism (dubbed ‘voluntary simplicity management’ in Dyck and Schroeder 2005; cf. Rudman and Kilbourne 1996,) and high materialism/low individualism (‘participative management’), respectively. Such articulation of alternative moral-points-of-view of management — and the development of the management theory and practice associated with each — provides additional alternatives to the status quo and a deeper understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses associated with any particular moral-point-of-view (MacIntyre 1981; Roberts 2002).

#### **Differing Management Virtues (Hypotheses 2 and 3)**

Our study suggests that foundational concepts for conventional organization theorizing — specialization, centralization, formalization and standardization — are not value-neutral, nor should they be taken for granted. Thus, if we are to develop organizational theories and practices that are differently virtuous than the conventional materialist–individualist approach, we must reconsider the very basic conceptual building blocks that have shaped our discipline. It is not simply a matter of adding a ‘corporate credo’ here, or an ‘environmental audit department’ there.

Moreover, looking at conventional managerial practices from a radical moral-point-of-view also gives them different meaning. For example, in our presentation of the results, we were surprised to find a lack of difference between radical and conventional managers in terms of them having ‘good measures’ of how well their workgroup, department or organization was meeting its goals (Hypothesis 2). In retrospect, we may have been guilty of basing our original speculation on the conventional mantra that ‘good measures’ will invariably be *quantifiable* in material terms. Upon further reflection, we recognize that ‘good measures’ need not be quantifiable that way. Indeed, given that radical managers may have access to a richer array of ‘non-quantifiable’ information due to the nature of their relationships with others — largely because they do not limit their interest to only quantifiable materialist information — it becomes plausible that they will have ‘good measures’ of non-materialist goals. Although transcendent goals like ‘belongingness, sense of community, social equity, and quality of life’ (Giacalone 2004: 417) defy easy materialist measurement, radical managers may develop meaningful measures for them.

**General Personal and Spiritual Virtues (Hypotheses 4 and 5)**

Our results suggest that radical managers are more likely than conventional managers to view themselves as exhibiting a specific set of general personal virtues (peacefulness, gentleness, patience and joyfulness) and personal spiritual virtues (prayerfulness, spirituality-at-work). Note that we can think of other virtues (e.g. assertiveness, competitiveness) where we might expect conventional managers to have higher scores than radical managers. Our data set did not include such items, but they may be of interest for future researchers, who may wish to study differences among managerial ideal-types across a whole battery of virtues such as those identified by Solomon (1999). This would help to show how a moral-point-of-view informs which virtues are particularly valued and which may even be seen as vices.

Our analyses suggest that radical managers are more likely to practise personal spiritual virtues than their conventional counterparts (Hypothesis 5). Future researchers may examine the causal direction of the relationship between radical management and the personal spiritual virtues. This has potentially important implications for our understanding of what facilitates radical moral agency. Weber had a clear prediction about the direction of causality: spirituality would facilitate radical departures from conventional normative assumptions. Even so, we do not wish to overstate the significance of our findings. Future researchers may find that in some settings – for example, where they represent a minority – non-religious and non-spiritual managers may have the more radical moral-point-of-view.

**Institutional Dimensions of the Iron Cage**

Our study highlights the fact that individuals have moral agency, and that managers' underlying moral-points-of-view are related to the specific virtues that they practise. While managers' virtues will inform the character of the organization where they manage, the opposite is also true: namely, that managers' individual moral-points-of-view may be overwhelmed by the institutions and norms in their larger political-economic environment (Giddens 1984; Gioia 1992; MacIntyre 1981; Weber 1958; Zucker 1977). It is often difficult to think, let alone act, radically because conventional practices and assumptions have become so pervasive that they are accepted as 'natural facts of life', when they are really 'through and through moral facts of life' (Garfinkel 1964: 225; see also MacIntyre 1981: 30). Indeed, as the literature in historical institutionalism suggests, although the specific form and content of political-economic and social institutions (and also of management theory) have changed since the time of Weber, they remain generally consistent with the undergirding materialist-individualist view that was evident well over a century ago: once established, the trajectory of institutions is path-dependent with few deviations (Thelan 2004).

Concern over the self-fulfilling nature of conventional management theory and practice is becoming increasingly evident among leading management scholars (e.g. Ferraro et al. 2005; Ghoshal 2005; Mintzberg 2005). If our institutions and theories assume that people are primarily motivated to increase their self-interested financial wealth, then people will act that way and the

meaning of work will match accordingly (cf. Ferraro et al. 2005; Kasser 2003; Miller 1999). For example, given that 'the curricula of business schools and the thinking of future managers' have come to be dominated by the assumption that maximizing wealth for shareholders is 'the primary, if not the sole, purpose of the firm' (Margolis and Walsh 2003: 271, citing a recent study by the Aspen Institute), little wonder that research suggests that students enrolled in business schools tend to become more materialistic and individualistic over time (Krishnan 2003). Ferraro et al. (2005) cite studies showing that economics graduate students are more likely to free ride than other students, that economists are more likely to defect in a prisoner's dilemma situation and that economics professors are less likely to give to charity than professors in other disciplines.

Practitioners draw particular attention to how the stock market suppresses radical management. For example, Ricardo Semler (2004: 24), the CEO of Semco — a Brazilian firm that employs about 3,000 people and generates about US \$200 million in sales — is a radical manager who tries to manage in a way that helps employees 'find equilibrium in their professional, personal and spiritual lives'.

'I can honestly say that our growth, profit, and the number of people we employ are secondary concerns. Outsiders clamor to know these things because they want to quantify our business. These are the yardsticks they turn to first. That's one reason we're still privately held. I don't want Semco to be burdened with the ninety-day mind-set of most stock market analysts. It would undermine our solidity and force us to dance to the tune we don't really want to hear — a Wall Street waltz that starts each day with an opening bell and ends with the thump of the closing gavel.' (Semler 2004: 12)

Whereas Semco remains privately held, AES co-founder and former CEO, Dennis Bakke, describes what happened in the 1990s when AES — now one of the largest electrical companies in the world, with 40,000 employees in 31 countries and almost US \$10 billion in revenues — included radical ideals in the documentation submitted to the Securities and Exchange Commission for it to become publicly traded: 'the US government thought it was very risky to attempt to operate a business with integrity, fairness, social responsibility, and a sense of fun'. In that documentation it was clear that AES was not a typical mainstream profit-maximizing corporation:

'An important element of AES is its commitment to four major "shared" values: to act with integrity, to be fair, to have fun, and to be socially responsible. See 'Business — Values and Practice.' AES believes that earning a fair profit is an important result of providing a quality product for its customers. However, if the Company perceives a conflict between these values and profits, the company will try to adhere to its values — even though doing so might result in diminished profits or forgone opportunities. Moreover, the Company seeks to adhere to these values not as a means to achieve economic success, but because adherence is a worthwhile goal in and of itself. The Company intends to continue these policies after this offering.' (Bakke 2005: 39, 40)

In short, conventional institutions may make it difficult to practise radical virtues, but it is not impossible, as is demonstrated by managers like Ricardo Semmler, Dennis Bakke and many others who practise radical virtues daily.

Rather than discovering these radical practitioners *despite* our conventional research designs, scholars who are interested in promoting radical virtues would do well to develop research designs that explicitly examine radical best practices (Margolis and Walsh 2003). This way, when the crises that Weber foresaw render conventional institutions vulnerable to change (Thelan 2004), there will be well-developed radical options to replace them. We believe that our study makes a helpful contribution in this direction, and recognize that there is much more work for future researchers to do in this regard.

### Limitations

Our data set may be the largest of its kind but, as is the case for all research, our study still has some weaknesses that need to be addressed in future research. Our analysis yielded support for our hypotheses, even though the survey instrument and sampling frame were not designed with this particular study in mind. Future research should include multiple items designed specifically to measure the key concepts looked at here, and should target a larger and a more diverse group of respondents. This would help to identify a broader range of responses along each dimension, and allow for a richer understanding of the different ideal-types. Furthermore, it would be desirable to rely not only on self-report data, but also on responses from managers' co-workers, superiors and subordinates. Of course, developing a new survey instrument would also permit adding many different items including, for example, ecologically sustainable practices, work–life balance, and educational background. It would also be beneficial to have qualitative studies to contrast and compare the practices and roles of different ideal-types of managers.

The present study hinges on the categorization of a sample of managers according to two median splits (i.e. high/low materialism, and high/low individualism). The sample used was highly homogeneous (primarily, evangelical Christian managers from the USA), and so the median splits employed to categorize along the dimensions of individualism and materialism can speak only to relative position along continua in this sample. Making definitive statements about the broader population would require different data. However, remember, definitive statements regarding what constitutes 'high' or 'low' on these dimensions were not the purpose of this study; it was not a norming exercise. Instead, our goal was simply to support the meaningfulness of a Weberian  $2 \times 2$  framework by demonstrating that people categorized by such a framework would actually differ in theoretically predictable and meaningful ways. That we were able to demonstrate this in a sample with such a restricted range may, in fact, bolster, not limit, confidence in the inferences made in our exploratory investigation.

Future studies may also explicitly examine the interplay between managers as individual moral agents and the larger iron-cage-like organizational and societal political–economic institutions in which actions take place. What are the dialectical, causal or feedback loops among organizations, individual managers and their background? Surely the development of a 'plausible other'

way of managing (Roberts 2002: 20), such as is described here, is important for the growing number of scholars and managers who are becoming increasingly troubled by the shortcomings of the conventional status quo. This lies at the heart of Weber's challenge, for scholars to study and describe radical management and institutions (MacIntyre 1981; Margolis and Walsh 2003).

## Conclusion

Our study points to the importance of recognizing that moral-points-of-view underpin management theory and practice. The framework discussed here provides readers with an opportunity to reflect upon what moral-point-of-view sustains their own management theory and practice. Some may feel at home within the dominant materialist-individualist view, others may wish to explore a more radical view, and still others may wish to develop an alternative conceptual framework — distinguished by dimensions other than materialism and individualism — that describes moral-points-of-view more consistent with their own or those they observe in practice. In any case, consistent with Weber's conclusion a century ago, a first step to enhancing and understanding organizational virtue is to specify the moral-points-of-view that we are promoting and critiquing. This will help to identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of differing approaches to management, and enhance the overall integrity of our efforts. Heightened awareness (and acceptance) of a conceptual framework, like the one defined and tested here, might help people in organizations to develop and use clearer language about moral-points-of-view, and consequently to become more deliberate, purposeful and effective in selecting actions that support or undermine the definitions of virtue in their workplaces. True moral agency must rely on the capacity of agents to perceive options — to see past that which is taken-for-granted. An inability to perceive moral alternatives is an iron cage; creating contrast at least allows us to see the bars that confine us.

## Notes

We thank the following for their helpful input and suggestions for this paper: Stephane Cote, John Godard, Chris Huebner, Geoffrey Leonardelli and Fred Starke. Thanks also to Michael Zigarelli for sharing his data with us.

- 1 Here Weber is citing Baxter, *Saints: Everlasting Rest*, Ch. xii.
- 2 Each of these are identified as 'fruits of the spirit' in the biblical record (see Galatians 5: 22 and 23).
- 3 Of course, our list of virtues is by no means exhaustive. Some other virtues (e.g. assertiveness, competitiveness) might be more associated with conventional than with radical managers. Moreover, some may argue whether the four items that we examine are truly virtues. For example, is joyfulness a virtue per se, or the outcome of virtuous living? From some perspectives, gentleness may be seen as a vice, unless it is appropriately tempered by assertiveness.
- 4 These analyses were t-tests and, when applicable, the appropriate adjustment for unequal variances was applied.
- 5 Some readers may consider this finding to be marginally significant since it does not conform to the widely accepted convention that tests are significant when  $p < .05$ . We have generally adhered to convention throughout the paper.

- 6 Note that we report the results here in terms of the scale, for ease of discussion; radical managers also endorsed each component item to a significantly greater degree than did conventional managers. Also, as a sign that this was not simply a measure that suggests that radical managers are more likely than conventional managers to put themselves in a positive light, we found no difference between the two managerial types among items such as: 'At work, people consider me to be an *intelligent* person.' Such non-differences are also significant in that they suggest that the findings reported are not merely attributable to socially desirable response biases.

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