

### Culture and crisis: making sense of the crisis of the work society

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# THE END OF THE WORKING CLASS CULTURE MAKING SENSE OF THE "CRISIS OF THE WORK SOCIETY"

Klaus Eder

## 1 Social Analysis Beyond Cultural Pessimism

Whether there is a crisis in advanced industrial societies is open to debate. But there is undeniably a **discourse** on crisis. Politically, it focuses on the crisis of the welfare state, economically on the ecological limits of growth, and culturally on the loss of meaning in modern life. Even the social sciences, whose job it is to identify and monitor such discourses, are sometimes thought to be affected. Whether the crisis exists or not, there is at least a strong cultural pessimism in intellectual and everyday life that fuels the discourse on crisis. But there is no consensus as to its extent or its character, not even a consensus as to what is meant by a crisis. This makes it difficult to transcend cultural pessimism and turn to social analysis, to an "objectifying" account of this supposed crisis.

We will try to clarify the notion of crisis using the German discussion of the "Krise der Arbeitsgesellschaft" or "crisis of the work society" (Matthes 1983). This social science discourse on crisis - we claim - is a new version of the never-ending discourse on crisis in modern society. It is a discourse that puts crisis into perspective as the result of an accumulation of either changes in the objective structural conditions of work (e.g. the labor market) and/or changes in the cultural conditions of work (e.g. the work ethic). But these changes are not sufficient in themselves to explain the supposed crisis. We need an additional argument that distinguishes between situations of crisis and non-crisis. Crisis - we suggest - ensues when social changes lead to a situation where the capacity of a society to control the course and direction of its own development is blocked. Crisis is - to put it bluntly - a block in the capacity of society to control its course and direction of change.

To analyze crisis in this way we have to take into account two elements: the cultural orientation of social actors and the objective location of social actors within a social structure that determines the social relations between them. To determine the capacity of society to reproduce its social structure and culture we have to analyze the **social usage of culture** by social groups within the system of social relations that define the place and the status of these groups (Bourdieu 1984). We have to take into account the socially stratified adoption of cultural traditions as the mediating process between culture and social structure. This allows us to analyze how culture influences the course of the social development of a concrete society within the constraints set by social structure. The mediating concept is that of social groups (or classes) defined by their capacity to act upon society. The hypothesis reads as follows: The conditions for the cultural effectiveness of social groups in a social structure change to

the degree that their place and status change.<sup>1</sup> When, however, social groups within a specific societal context develop competing and even irreconcilable cultural orientations of acting upon society we are faced with what we can call a **crisis of society**.

This emphasis upon "agency" offers a new look at the role culture plays in the reproduction of advanced industrial societies. One example is in the sphere of work. Social groups have, corresponding to their social placement and replacement in recent social developments, redefined the **modern work** ethic (once thought to be identical with the Protestant ethic) to produce competing versions of it. The outcome is what German sociologists have called the "Krise der Arbeitsgesellschaft"<sup>2</sup>, a crisis that cannot be understood adequately as either a structural or a cultural crisis (but certainly has to do with "problems" of the structural and cultural reproduction of work!). In developing our theoretical approach we will examine the two processes that are used as empirical proof of a "crisis of work society" in this discussion: in structural terms, the de-coupling of work from status and, in cultural terms, the de-coupling of work from self-realization. To understand how both processes interact we will analyze class-specific work cultures that enable or prevent social groups from acting upon the structural changes of the work they experience. The hypothesis advanced will be: The "crisis of the work society" is, in the last instance, the crisis of the working class. The explanation of the "crisis of the work society" advanced will be that the main reason that has provoked this discourse is that the work culture of the working class has lost its determining influence upon society. The working class has lost the capacity to determine how the work society will act upon itself and direct its development.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of the processes of structural and cultural change in the sphere of work and their interaction will make it clear that this is in fact the case. We are at present observing the rise of new social groups, ultimately of one

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<sup>1</sup> I have developed this theoretical approach at length in a work on the evolution of political culture in 19th century Germany. See Eder (1985). The idea of social groups that select for competing cultural ideas and images thus goes beyond the classic approach of a mere history of political ideas and beyond that of the theory of modernization.

<sup>2</sup> For a parallel account of this discussion see Stephen Kalberg in this volume. Kalberg takes the most popular lines of this discussion and accounts for them by adopting a sociology of knowledge approach. That such arguments should arise within the German discussion might be due to the specific German cultural tradition. But this tradition is, typically, less monolithic and more open to discussion than many cultural sociologists (especially the Weberian ones) assume. Maybe Kalberg's perspective in this discussion should be incorporated in a sociology-of-knowledge analysis of specifically American ways of seeing German culture. Nonetheless Kahlberg's contribution is important as an instance of self-reflection of sociological analyses and explanations. These become more important the more fields of analysis are ideologically and culturally at stake. For the German discussion of the "Krise der Arbeitsgesellschaft" see the collection of papers presented at the Meeting of the German Sociological Association 1982 in Bamberg (Matthes 1983). It should be added that one of the organizers, Claus Offe, in fact argues against this notion.

<sup>3</sup> This theoretical proposition draws on the actionalist sociology of Touraine (1977, 1985a, 1985b). The capacity for historical action is the key idea in his approach. It is used here as the starting point for reconstructing a sociological theory of crisis.

new social class that will defend a different type of work culture. The frame of reference, within which structural and cultural changes are perceived and interpreted, changes - and with it what we experience as crisis. What we have to do is not to find out whether there is "really" a crisis, but what the frames of reference are within which society interprets its own structural and cultural change as crisis. And the frame "work society" is only one among others, itself tied to a specific social class and a specific socio-cultural environment. Quod est demonstrandum.

## 2 Accounting for the "Crisis of the Work Society"

### 2.1 *The Work Society in Crisis?*

The German discussion about the "crisis of the work society" is a good example to analyze for the specific effects of culture on the constitution of a "crisis". The "crisis of the work society" has become a buzzword in the program statements of political parties, especially the Social Democrats. This can be taken as an indicator of the relevance of this concept for public communication. This way of communicating a problem has been fostered, if not generated, by the sociological discourse that invented this buzzword. It carries with it a cultural model oriented toward a specific type of collective action.

The concept, "crisis of the work society", suggests social processes that go beyond the emergence and relief of structural strains. They implicate a cultural evolution within the development of industrial society. The concept of "industry" in "industrial society" (Offe 1983) has lost the connotation of "industriousness". It has been replaced by the value-laden concept of "work" in "work society". This substitution points to the fact that not only the systemic reproduction of society, but its cultural basis are now in fact vulnerable.

Thus the theory of the "crisis of the work society" has two complementary aspects. The **first** deals with changes in the labor market and with changes in the relation between education and occupation (the system of status distribution). Different theories of post-industrial society from Bell to Touraine, research in industrial sociology and stratification research, provide arguments to describe the "crisis of the work society".<sup>4</sup> The **second** aspect of the theory subsumed under the decline of the Protestant work ethic. This description has led to a number of misleading explanations, especially within the research on

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<sup>4</sup> One of the appealing aspects of this specifically German discussion is the opportunity it provides to develop a new theoretical perspective on different strands of sociological theory and research within the fields of industrial relations and class analysis. For an overview of the broad range of discussions in this field see Pahl (1988). The German discussion also overcomes some other more nominalistic discussions about a post-industrial society and the new and fashionable discussion about post-modernity where nominalism seems to reemerge.

value change.<sup>5</sup> They have been misleading, first, because what we call Protestant ethic is itself a combination of different cultural elements that emerged at the beginning of capitalism and, second, because the Protestant ethic is only one among other cultural traditions that can generate possible orientations toward work in modern society.

These two parts of the theory of a "crisis of the work society", the structuralist and the culturalist, are in themselves insufficient to explain the crisis. Even to attempt to do so would be an odd undertaking because the two contradict each other. The structural part claims that the labor market has become significantly more competitive (even if unevenly so), that status no longer guarantees work, and that work is being de-coupled from status. It even claims that work has become scarce and the object of intensifying struggles between status groups. The cultural part says that there is a de-coupling of work from self-realization and that people are retreating from work. Thus the "crisis of the work society" is seen to result from work's **increasing** importance on the structural level and from its **decreasing** importance on the cultural level. Such a contradictory relationship cannot be reduced to a structural and a cultural crisis. I will argue that the "crisis of the work society" consists precisely in this contradictory relationship, a relationship that could not be understood if we did not take into account the specific contribution of structure **and** culture to this crisis.

In developing the argument let us first take a brief look at the developmental processes in the social organization of work that are held to be responsible for changes in the work ethic. These explanations will be shown to be short-circuits because they assume deterministic relationships between structure and culture (mostly in the direction of culture). Second, we will see how changes in the modern work ethic open up new possibilities for social actors to invent and defend specific versions and adaptations. The emergence of antagonistic groups defined in terms of structural location and in terms of cultural orientation points to a social crisis that will have far-reaching effects upon the course and intensity of structural and cultural changes accompanying the transformation of advanced modern societies into post-industrial societies.

## 2.2 *Structural Changes of Work: The De-coupling of Work from Status*

From a structural perspective, there are some assumptions and research findings relating to changes in the sphere of work that are supposed in turn to be changing the way work is experienced and perceived. Four of the main ones are: (1) the emergence of new forms of non-manual labor ("Kopfarbeit"), (2) the reduction of working time and its biographical implications, (3) the division of the labor market into a

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<sup>5</sup> By treating the idea of a Protestant ethic as a model and distinguishing between it and the social practices that use it as a reference, I have sidestepped the discussion about the historical adequacy of Weber's theory. We can bypass any historical claim and simply start with the assumption that there is something called the Protestant ethic. To find out whether the elements attributed to it are there or not we have to look at group-specific practices in the work sphere. What aspects of this ethic are to be found among businessmen or workers is an empirical question. See also note 33.

well-alimented and a badly-alimented sector, and (4) the de-coupling of work from status and their realignment.

### 2.2.1 The emergence of non-manual labor

The hypothesis of an increase in and a structural dominance by non-manual labor lies at the base of the different theories about the course of post-industrial society.<sup>6</sup> These theories start with the assumption that organization and information technologies have led to the primacy of cognitive (non-manual) work over productive (manual) work. Cognitively skilled work ("Kopfarbeit") defines the post-industrial paradigm of work. Knowledge becomes the central means for the economic reproduction of society.

These structurally-oriented theories thus claim that a new type of work emerges, dependent less on physical capacity than on cognitive skills. The usual conclusion, from the point of view of industrial society, is that this is a liberation of labor. But one important implication is normally overlooked: namely the control of the new workers by the information technologies themselves. A more adequate conclusion then is that the substitution of non-manual for manual work implies a further increase in the social control of work. Thus, although relief from work as toil is experienced as "liberation", an increasingly instrumental relation to work is also to be expected. This leads to a loss of the significance of work as a central life interest.

The types of qualification required for entry into the job market have also changed. The expansion of non-manual work is accompanied not only by an upgrading of skills. There is also a downgrading of skills required for non-manual work. We are witnessing - after the "Taylorization" of manual work - a "Taylorization" of non-manual work. The significance of the expansion of non-manual work, due mainly to the growth of the service sector, is therefore a subject of great controversy (Mutz 1987). The theory of "polarization" (Kern & Schumann 1984) suggested that this change leads to a minority of highly qualified workers and a majority of unqualified workers. But this polarization seems to have been a transitional phenomenon of the late 60s and 70s. Recent research shows that less qualified work is either eliminated or substituted for new forms of control. For those retained, the elimination of their competitors through unemployment is the structural solution.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bell's (1973) and Touraine's (1969) earlier conception of a post-industrial society starts by assuming the increasing primacy of scientific work over industrial productive work. The changes we can observe are merely exaggerated generalizations (Bühl 1984). For a reorientation of this discussion see Braverman (1974), Brandt (1981), Gershuny (1983), Benseler et al. (1982), Gorz (1983) and Bonß & Heinze (1984).

<sup>7</sup> See Mickler (1981) and Kern & Schumann (1984). For an extensive account of the new type of dependent, but highly skilled work see Hermann & Teschner (1980), Teschner & Hermann (1981) or Baethge (1983). These studies contradict the well-known analysis of modern work by Braverman (1974) who defends the theory of a continual downgrading of qualified work.

This new social differentiation of work is thought to be changing the distribution of cultural orientations across the working population. This hypothesis assumes that occupations within the service sector generate a different cultural orientation than that which is typical for occupations in the production sector. If this is true, the service occupations will dissolve traditional class cultures and give rise to cultural cleavages that could become the nucleus for new class formations.<sup>8</sup> The discussion about the emerging post-industrial society then can be transferred to more empirical levels: those of class differences and the related level of cultural differences. Empirical data on such cultural differences can be found in a new line of research on class: the research on differences in life style. This research starts theoretically by taking a fresh look at Weber's famous distinction between status and class, with status as a cultural indicator of class (Bourdieu 1984). Within emerging differences in life style fostered by the expansion of non-manual work we may find some of the reasons that point to an end of the Protestant ethic.

This is a first step towards a sociological theory of culture beyond culturalism. There is no change in class structure without parallel cultural changes. But such cultural changes open up nothing more than an "objective possibility" for changes in the work culture. Whether the possibility has been or will be used remains to be seen.

### 2.2.2 The shortening of working hours

Since 1860 the amount of time a worker works (wage labor) has steadily diminished - by any measure. A study done by Emnid in 1981 shows an average of 39.2 hours per man per week. In the 50s the relation of one hour of work to one hour of non-work was 1 to 2.9, in 1980 it was 1 to 4.1 (Kern & Schumann 1983:355). In addition there has been a shortening of the period of life spent at work.<sup>9</sup> From this overall shrinkage some have concluded that the biographical relevance of work and the value attributed to it for a meaningful life has diminished.<sup>10</sup> Such a conclusion is unwarranted. For even if

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to notice that this type of structural differentiation alters the traditional class structure of industrial societies. But instead of proclaiming the end of class society, I prefer the research strategy of looking for the class structure that has replaced the old one. There are enough indicators of social differences on the level of culture as well as on the level of work to justify such research. Bourdieu has been the foremost theoretician to follow this line of reasoning. For a discussion of his views and its implications for class theory and class structure see my contributions to a volume on Bourdieu's theory of class (Eder 1989a, 1989b).

<sup>9</sup> See data comparing the 1980s with the 1950s: people start their occupational careers 2 years later (at 17); they retire three years earlier (at 58). Given the condition of scarce work (Dahrendorf 1983), the politics of working time takes on a new importance beyond the function of psychic and physical relief for the workers. See also Offe et al. (1982).

more time is spent outside work we do not necessarily put less emphasis on the value of work in our life. We only can conclude that it has become "objectively" possible to change the relative meaning of work for life.

The theory of the de-valuation of work and the corresponding theory of a rise in the valuation of non-work, defined as leisure, has been defended in different studies using opinion polls. Such an inverse relationship is assumed, for example, by Noelle-Neumann (1980, 1984) in survey-data studies that interpret the ascending valuation of leisure over work as a sign of increasing laziness and antipathy to work on behalf of the Germans.<sup>11</sup> The increasing number of people who no longer accept an eight-hour work day is taken as yet another sign. There are speculations that in the years to come an increasing portion of the working population in advanced industrial societies will have abandoned the regular full working day.

But to conclude that there is an increase in non-productive activities such as laziness, sleeping, window shopping etc. is unwarranted. Qualitative studies suggest instead that one facet of the change is not that non-work is substituted for work. What we call leisure time is being used instead for another type of work. A substitution of do-it-yourself-labor for wage labor can be observed. This other type of work, hobby work, is holistic "bricolage" in Lévi-Strauss's sense. It is no longer "ponos", but "ergon". It is non-wage labor that - contrary to much wage labor - offers tangible rewards to the worker.

If this is generally true, then the reduction in time spent for wage labor has a quite different meaning: the increasing relevance of non-wage labor. If this other form of work becomes the integrative experience of a population it will foster a new work ethic, one beyond the Protestant work ethic. In that case, we would have to conclude that it is the type of work, whether wage labor or non-wage labor, that is decisive for people's cultural orientation to work. Instead of a de-valuation, there is a re-valuation of work going on in advanced industrial societies.<sup>12</sup> Thus the direction of cultural change in the sphere of

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<sup>10</sup> The relationship between biography and time spent working has been examined by Brose (1983, 1984). The type of worker who works irregularly ("Gelegenheitsarbeiter") seems to have become a possible model, especially among adolescents (Pialoux 1979). But the conclusion that the value attributed to work will therefore diminish has so far found neither a logical nor an empirical basis.

<sup>11</sup> This survey data relates to the question of whether work is still a central life interest. For a classic statement of this type of research see Dubin (1955). Within recent research the increase in the number of people who respond negatively **and** are undecided is interpreted as a decline in work-related values, i.e., achievement orientation. Because of the semantic instability of such questions over time and because of changes in income that have also made consumption a central life interest, this proposition was attacked with fatal consequences to the scientific reputation of its authors. It did not, by the way, hinder its success in public discourse! A good critique is to be found in Vollmer (1986).

<sup>12</sup> This is not apparent as long as all work outside wage labor is ideologically interpreted as leisure ("Frei"-zeit), as non-work. But this ideology is effective, as seen in the demand for more leisure time. What really happens is a revaluation of work outside wage labor. See Rosenmayr & Kolland (1988).



work is an open question. If the data claiming a value change in the sphere of work allows for interpretations quite contrary to that of Noelle-Neumann, then we need even more data about the actors.

### 2.2.3 The new polarization between work and non-work

The new valuation of non-wage labor gains yet another meaning when non-work and leisure are involuntary, for example because of forced early retirement, forced periods in the educational system, the forced status of being officially unemployed. Such forced reductions of the wage labor pool have increased in recent years due to pressures from the labor market. Yet those who are excluded from the labor market do not escape being forced to define their life in terms of wage labor as the central means of subsistence.<sup>13</sup>

The consequence of this is a new form of polarization of work into, on the one hand, stable wage labor (most of it highly qualified) and, on the other hand, wage labor with a high risk of unemployment. Brandt (1981) has called this the "extended polarization of work". The structural implication of this polarization is a dual economy, separating a saturated formal economy from an informal economy. This structural separation will certainly change the way the world of work is perceived and experienced. Thus a polarization of the work culture is also to be expected. Qualitative research on evaluative and cognitive attitudes toward work has detected new types of orientation toward work (Giegel et al. 1988). But whether the "reflexive" or the "hedonistic" or the "traditionalistic" type will predominate in shaping the work culture remains an open question. What we can observe is a differentiation of work-related (sub)cultures.

### 2.2.4 The de-coupling of work from status and their realignment

That the relationship between work and status has never corresponded to the ideal of "everyone according to his achievement" has often been analyzed and discussed in sociological literature. One of the reasons for this is the politics of income distribution. Redistribution by the modern welfare state has led to a relative de-coupling of work from status without destroying most people's belief in a relationship between the two. On the contrary, the educational revolution, striving to guarantee an

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<sup>13</sup> Chronic unemployment disproves some of the central assumptions of the theories of post-industrial society. The service sector - which was supposed to absorb a growing and highly skilled labor force - is no longer growing. The expansion of the service sector had already reached its limits before we even entered post-industrial society. Thus unemployment is a structural feature of post-industrial society as well as of industrial society. See for this discussion Mutz (1987).

equality of opportunity, has confirmed anew (at least for some time) a positive relationship between achievement and status and thus strengthened this ideology.<sup>14</sup>

The actualization of this ideal relationship is however again being frustrated because an increasing number of highly educated young people cannot be processed into employment. Employment opportunities do not correspond to the supply of qualified would-be workers. Bourdieu speaks of a "cheated generation" (Bourdieu 1984) whose aspirations to a social status corresponding to its qualifications have to be (and have been) disappointed. An educational status no longer guarantees a corresponding social status in the labor market.<sup>15</sup>

This phenomenon is reinforced by unemployment policies. In order to decrease unemployment figures the unemployed are put into programs for further education financed by state institutions. This raises their educational status even further without expanding the labor market, although their competitive chances to get one of the scarce jobs are redistributed. These contradictory processes necessarily produce cognitive dissonances. How these dissonances are resolved (whether they lead to a distancing from the culture of work or to an even more rigid adherence to it) is an empirical question.

It has been claimed that such de-coupling undermines the desire for and the belief in achievement in such a way that this motivator, one of the basic engines of the modern work ethic, will vanish. But this is not a necessary consequence. The opposite can also sometimes occur (a phenomenon that is related to the unpleasant experience of unemployment!). Thus in regard to the achievement principle we are again forced to look more closely for the meaning and direction given by different social groups and social actors.

The de-coupling debate is interesting in itself as a description of structural strains within the system of status allocation. It shows that the relation of work and social status is mediated by social processes that leave it in a constant flux. There is no one legitimate relationship; the shape of the relationship is itself the outcome of social struggles. Such strains can potentially open up the possibility of changing the work culture on a most fundamental level. But not necessarily. Thus we are again left with the need to look at the changes on the cultural level and at the de-coupling on this level.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This hypothesis has been taken by Kalberg (in this volume) as the central discussion point within the German crisis of the "Arbeitsgesellschaft".

<sup>15</sup> This relationship has been confirmed several times. See in addition to Bourdieu (1984) the empirical research by Blossfeld (1983, 1985a, 1985b) and Windolf (1984).

<sup>16</sup> For a general discussion of the de-coupling debate see Kalberg in this volume. It is important to distinguish between its structural and cultural aspects: the de-coupling of work from status and the de-coupling of work from self-realization. It is only the latter process that seems to be specifically German. For self-realization in work is something that is constitutive for the Lutheran work ethic. See chapter 4 below for a discussion of the role of Lutheranism in the de-coupling on the level of work culture.

### 2.3 *Cultural Changes of Work: The De-coupling of Work from Self-Realization*

The socio-structural changes described so far have already altered work as a collective experience for nearly all groups engaged in wage labor. This is connected with a value change social scientists believe to have occurred since World War II in advanced industrial societies. The empirically based discussion concerning the relevance of competing interpretations of the crisis of the work culture has revolved around the decline of the work ethic in Germany (Noelle-Neumann & Strümpel 1984; Pawlowsky & Strümpel 1986; Reuband 1985, 1987) and of the decline of the German virtues of achievement and diligence. This cultural explanation of the crisis of the "Arbeitsgesellschaft" is ultimately based on a deep feeling that the morality implicitly expected of even a modern work ethic is beyond recall.<sup>17</sup>

The message of this discourse on the decline of the work ethic is: In comparison to the Japanese (a comparison made repeatedly, for example, in the influential liberal weekly journal "Die Zeit") the Germans have become lazy people. This explanation is short-sighted. It overlooks the following: (1) the emergence of new and more demanding types of orientation toward work, (2) changing relationships between work and leisure, (3) a new polarization of work-related life-styles due to the experience of a continuous or discontinuous biography, and (4) a de-coupling of work from self-realization.

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<sup>17</sup> In my discussion of cultural changes in the sphere of work I refer to some of the research in the area of value change insofar as it is work related. I also rely upon unpublished qualitative research (including some of my own) concerning the cultural orientations of workers whose occupational careers have been interrupted by phases of unemployment. For the latter see also Brose (1986). For a more general discussion of work-related culture see Habermas (1968), Honneth (1982), Bahrtdt (1983), Clausen (1981), Jahoda (1983), Garfinkel (1986). For the empirical discussion see Cherns (1980), Hostede (1980), Hoffmann-Nowotny & Gehrman (1984), Klipstein & Strümpel (1985), Strümpel & Scholz-Ligma (1988), Pawlowsky (1986). For critical accounts see Reuband (1985, 1987), Gehrman (1986). The research upon which Noelle-Neuman relies and which has fueled the German discussion is the comparative research on "Jobs in the 1980s and 1990s" (Yankelovich et al. 1985). See also, as a reference point for interpreting changes in the work ethic, the more recent research comparing value orientations with respect to work in Europe (Harding & Philips & Fogarty 1986, pp. 150ff).

### 2.3.1 New demands upon work

Research shows that the Protestant ethic is not dead yet. But new values for and demands on work seem to be gaining importance. Beyond the classic Puritan virtues, and secondary ones as codified, for example, by Benjamin Franklin (Maccoby & Terzi 1981:22f.), new virtues have emerged. Flexibility, communicative competence, open-mindedness, humor, and related qualities are treated as "communicative virtues" as opposed to the classic Prussian virtues (Schmidtchen 1984). Some researchers perceive the new virtues to be most widespread among the young and those of higher status, whereas others point to the service sector as the principal locus.

These new virtues are tied to new expectations of what work should be like. Work should above all contribute more to self-realization. But these new expectations are - as Strümpel argues - frustrated by a lag in structural changes in the workplace (Noelle-Neumann & Strümpel 1984). Since there is actually no chance for their realization in the workplace, a new type of work dissatisfaction emerges. Survey data show that satisfaction with work has declined. But this is not because work has been devaluated. On the contrary, aspirations associated with work have increased; the decline in satisfaction is related to the fact that rising aspirations cannot be met, given the social organization of work. Thus the rise in work dissatisfaction does not necessarily imply a decline in the relevance of work, but can be due to the contrary.<sup>18</sup>

### 2.3.2 Work, leisure and achievement orientation

Another change in the work ethic is the supposed decline of the centrality of work. Work has become a secondary life interest. Survey research does show a change in the centrality of work but its meaning is quite controversial. Against the claim that leisure has been substituted for work, some argue that investments in work, family and leisure have all become stronger (Hondrich et al. 1988). Thus there is no substitution effect.

For many people, though, the meaning of work has changed in comparison to other life interests. We know of the "instrumentalism" of the workers in the Goldthorpe/Lockwood studies on the affluent worker and of the rise of leisure as a central life interest. But this instrumentalism seems to be part of a more complex attitude toward work. Work is seen less a means to an income as a means for being able

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<sup>18</sup> For understanding the specific German tradition of old and new virtues some historical studies are pertinent. See, as an example of classic secondary virtues (secondary to the principles of an abstract morality or ethic), the work of Münch (1984). See also the section on Lutheranism in Kalberg (in this volume). Also relevant in this context is the discussion about the new "reflexive" identity formations that foster a kind of rational planning of the meaning of one's life by permanent rational reflection of one's biography. This new "habitus" is widespread among the new middle classes, as Bourdieu argues using French data. Qualitative analyses of such identity formations in Germany point in the same direction. See among others Oevermann (1985, 1988).

to invest in leisure. The Protestant work ethic seems to have spread from wage labor to other areas of modern life, to those areas we describe as part of a life-world, i.e. public and private life. Applying hard work to organizing and spending leisure time has become a virtue, as has applying hard work to a political engagement.<sup>19</sup>

Thus we cannot accept the proposition, offered in the literature on value change in the sphere of work, that hedonism is growing.<sup>20</sup> An achievement orientation still seems to exist, but it is becoming generalized and is no longer restricted to the sphere of work.

### 2.3.3 The new polarization of work-related life styles

Within the general cultural background generally associated with the Protestant ethic several changes must be distinguished. One can be described as moving toward a ethicization of work and the other toward a de-ethicization of work. The tendency toward ethicization is not uniform. It can lead toward a traditionalist emphasis upon material values deriving from work or toward a post-materialistic emphasis upon values of self-realization either in or outside work. The tendency towards de-ethicization can also follow contradictory paths. It can lead either toward a cynical distancing from work or to an instrumental attitude toward work (work conceived as mere "ponos"). These contradictory and cross-cutting developments force us to give up the idea of a monolithic culture of work (assumed in much reasoning and research that uses the Protestant ethic as a theoretical reference point). Instead we have to deal with many different and even contradictory cultures. On the empirical level we are confronted with different work ethics at variance or even struggling with each other.<sup>21</sup> The commonly lamented end of the Protestant work ethic thus is not empirically justified on the aggregate level of survey data.

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<sup>19</sup> This discussion has received renewed attention in recent research. See above all Rosenmayr & Kolland (1988). For a critical discussion of supposed instrumentalism see Knapp (1981) and for the famous hypothesis of the dual relationship of workers to work, that there is simultaneously an instrumental and a substantive relation to wage labor, see Kern & Schumann (1980).

<sup>20</sup> Hedonism applied to the work culture is one of the favorite targets of cultural pessimists. Hedonism is an instrumentalist work ethic that has spread from the proletariat to the middle classes. At least this is the interpretation offered by Noelle-Neumann (1980).

<sup>21</sup> The literature taking up this discussion is increasing. Most interesting is the redirection from mere quantitative reasoning to qualitative analyses of the work ethic. Researchers are apparently trying to escape from the sterility and futility of those quantitatively oriented discussions where the data ends up not being adequate to the questions. An important alternative or complement has become the "biographical" approach to the culture of work. See, among many others, the volume edited by Brose (1986) that contains empirical as well as methodical and theoretical contributions to this critical turn in the analysis of work culture.

The weakness in this conclusion will become more apparent as soon as we start to disaggregate the data, a task still to come. For analysis on the aggregate level is not thwarted by findings of contradictory processes of change in the work ethic. Initial sampling has been taken to differentiate among generations (Meulemann 1987). One of the surprising results of a long and controversial discussion among German social scientists is that the assumed secular value change toward a decline of the Protestant ethic is bound to one specific generation. In younger generations the achievement orientation is again on the rise!<sup>22</sup>

But the most important differentiating factor is social class. We still lack studies that disaggregate in regard to class differences. This is not surprising. For social differentiations presuppose theoretical ideas about new class lines between groups of social actors. And such differentiations force us to retreat from the idea of an autonomous cultural change (as analyzed in the sequence of generational differences) to a structural change: to the idea of changes in the class structures that provoke the differentiating usage of this culture and its elements. This implies connections between culture and structure within the social space, not outside it. And it opens up alternatives to the prevalent developmental views on changes in the work ethic.<sup>23</sup>

#### 2.3.4 The de-coupling of work from self-realization

The de-coupling of work from self-realization seems to be the most radical hypothesis within the discussion of changes in the modern work ethic (Illich 1978, 1979). If it occurs, meaning will increasingly be found outside the sphere of work and work will become a sphere of life empty of any ethical content. This outcome could even be interpreted as confirming Max Weber's speculation that work in formally rationalized context would no longer need any ethical motivation.

The possibility of de-coupling work from self-realization engages a hypothesis advanced by Weber and radicalized by Habermas: that work is becoming something that will be done beyond any motivational demand. Weber (1956) is clear about this: To be a "Berufsmensch" means to act according to the constraints of the formal rationality of the economy, and ultimately leads one into an "iron cage". Habermas, distinguishing between work and interaction, claims that the economy (taken as the social field of work) has become part of the systemic world. Work is instrumental action and as such opposed

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<sup>22</sup> The relation between youth and changes in the work culture is one of the most interesting contemporary research areas. Recent studies show that differences correlate strongly with gender. Another important variable is the development of a youth culture with value orientations not related to work. Whether a delayed socialization into a work culture hinders the adoption of a work ethic is not clear, although research shows it probably does not. For a recent critical discussion of the available longitudinal data see Brock & Otto-Brock (1988).

<sup>23</sup> Such an alternative is, for example, the "cyclical theory of value change". For this new approach in the interpretation of value change see Namenwirth & Weber (1987) and further research by Bürklin (1988).

to communicative action constitutive for the life-world (Habermas 1984, 1987). For both the idea of a morally grounded work culture must appear as a transitory problem or even as a regression.

But we could also - contrary to Weber and Habermas - conclude that this discussion over de-coupling is evidence of a return of the life-world into work. The sphere of work turns out to be much more part of the life-world than the post-industrial utopians thought. Even Marx can be seen as a contributor to such an idea. By reintroducing culture into the world of work we gain a more adequate understanding of what is going on in modern society. It helps us to narrow down what the "crisis of the work society" is all about. We have seen that the crisis of the work society is simultaneously the result of changes in the objective structures that organize work in different dimensions. We have seen that this crisis is also a result of new cultural patterns changing the motivations of those engaged in wage labor. But the two perspectives cannot be related to each other in a satisfactory way. We can state some plausible relationships between structural and cultural processes (Furnham 1982, Prescott-Clarke 1982, Krappmann 1983). We lack however the data on how these cultural processes affect in turn the sphere of work and thus lend a meaning to structural changes that engages social groups and social actors.

To gain an understanding of these effects we will start with the assumption that the structural changes in the sphere of work have produced a cultural evolution in this sphere. To analyze it the interpretative scheme of the Protestant ethic will be reconstructed and extended so we can discuss social groups setting the "Protestant ethic in action". This will allow us to specify the carriers of the "crisis of the work society". Ultimately we will see that this crisis is the crisis of the traditional working class.

### **3 The Protestant Ethic in Action**

#### *3.1 The Cultural Model of the Protestant Work Ethic*

##### 3.1.1 The three sources of the modern work ethic

To re-interpret the supposed decline of the work ethic as a change of the Protestant ethic the first thing we have to do is reconstruct the basic assumptions of this model tailoring them to our analysis of the "crisis of the work society". The standard model of the Protestant ethic consists of a series of values and the motivational forces that compel adherence to these values. This standard model has been called the Calvinist model and contains values such as achievement for its own sake, the virtue of work over non-work, and the quest for excellence. Its motivational forces are even more important. The belief in the culture of possessive individualism (the secular version of not knowing about one's own election by God), and the related permanent proof of one's own competitiveness in the market (the secular version of finding evidence of one's own election by God) are the motivational forces that have together so furthered the capitalist spirit that it has become (at least ideologically) the dominant (and dominating) model of the modern work ethic.

Within the German tradition another work ethic model can be identified, namely "Lutheranism".<sup>24</sup> This ethic can be seen as the innerworldly variant of the Protestant ethic. It is an ethic that radicalizes the permanent self-observation necessary to decipher God's will. An individual has to examine his day-to-day conduct to see whether he has really established a personal relation to God. The dread of failure becomes the motivational engine of his life. Such a person is no longer part of a collectivity that gives security and warmth but a highly individualized self-observing and self-controlling social being. In family life a system emerges in which the persons living together observe themselves and each other. The family becomes a community of disciplined persons, a disciplinizing institution. In concentrating upon the self work becomes secondary. Work is devaluated. The primary concern is one's inner life, one's motives and intentions. This predominance of the inner-worldly forced Luther to distinguish sharply between the sphere of work and the sphere of inner conviction. Self-realization through struggling with one's own self is life's main activity. The outer world is nothing but a necessary background to this drama.

This clarifies the difference between Calvinism and Lutheranism. A Calvinist cultivates success in the outside world as a symptom of his being elected by God. A Lutheran looks within himself into his faith to discover God's will and intentions. The Calvinists therefore have become virtuosi of outer-worldly activity; the Lutherans have become virtuosi of self-observation and self-interpretation. Both cultural orientation patterns have contributed to the modern work ethic. The first produced the work ethic based on rational motivation. The second produced a mere instrumentalist work ethic, one treating work as a sphere of mere necessity to which we are subject. Work is beyond the world of morality. This demoralized work ethic resting upon the acceptance of social necessities is not an adequate means for self-realization. As soon as the religious foundations of inner-worldly orientation are eroded any motivation can enter. Such a substitution took place in the rise of the Prussian work ethic. The Prussian functionary works as hard as the world demands, and seeks self-realization by identifying not with God, but with the State. Historically this substitution allowed for the rationalization of the state. Thus within the German tradition we find both traditions constitutive for the rationalization of modern society. The work ethic of the capitalist entrepreneurs is no different from that of their Calvinist counterparts. And the work ethic of the state officials representing the "Prussian virtues" is characteristic of modern German work culture as such.

The values that today lie at the heart of an emerging new work culture point simultaneously to the possible end and the possible revival of the Protestant ethic. They signal the end of the Calvinist heritage and the renaissance of the Lutheran heritage. The new values emphasizing self-realization

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<sup>24</sup> For an excellent discussion of the genesis of an inner-worldly work ethic within Protestantism, see Soeffner (1988). He makes it clear that the Lutheran (as well as the Calvinist) ethic is intended to control the work force rather than intrinsically to motivate workers. A possible conclusion is that the Lutheran and the Calvinist variants point to national differences that have influenced the social usage of the "Protestant ethic". This conclusion allows us to address the question of the specificity of the German debate of the "Arbeitsgesellschaft" within the modern work culture, and relates to Kalberg's argument (in this volume) that tries to relativize its relevance.



outside work can be traced back to the corresponding Lutheran conception of work. This historical conjuncture might explain the German bias and intensity of the discussion about the change in modern work culture.

But there remains a problem generally overlooked in the discussion on the Protestant ethic. For neither variant of the Protestant work ethic has ever become part of the work culture of plebeian and rural groups. Where then does their work ethic come from? What distinguishes it from the Protestant ethic which led highly motivated individuals to practice rational economic conduct? To find an answer we have to go back to the general "Catholic" tradition oriented toward the collectivity as opposed to the individualizing tendency of the Protestant tradition. This "Catholic" tradition, first embodied in the discipline of monastic life, is an important tradition in the development of a modern work ethic. Its specificity is to be found in a collectivistic ethic applied from the outset to productive manual labor. It has helped to "civilize" and "rationalize" the traditional "moral economy" of the lower classes. The collectivist model of disciplined labor characteristic of the monastery allowed for the inculcation of a disciplined work ethic into those groups forced into wage labor (Treiber & Steinert 1980). The rational timing of the working day and the rational control of bodily movements in modern industrial work emulates the model established in the monastery and then generalized in institutions like hospitals, jails and asylums.

Thus we have identified at least three different traditions that have influenced and shaped the modern work ethic. Now we have to differentiate between the contradictory elements contained in the model of the Protestant ethic and take the Catholic element into account. Then we have to identify the groups that are carriers of these elements. While some groups may be acting out a disaffection from their Calvinist roots, there are other occupational groups that might even be acting out an intensification of the Calvinist element of the Protestant ethic. The same duality holds for the Lutheran version of the Protestant ethic.

We are still unable to interpret the aggregate data of survey research analyzing changes in attitudes toward work. We are aware that survey data research shows only the net result of contradictory changes of the work ethic in different social groups. We have to take into account that the average net result may mask a trend toward wide social and cultural differentiation and even stratification. Without a precise idea of the differentiation and stratification of the work conditions and the work ethic we run the danger of producing nothing but fantasies.

### 3.1.2 From the model work ethic to its practical use

Weber himself is ambivalent with respect to the general validity of the Protestant ethic.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand he thinks that this ethic will be generalized throughout modern society. The Puritan, he says, wanted to be "Berufsmensch" (somebody who realizes himself primarily by work), and we have to be "Berufsmenschen" (Weber 1965:188). On the other hand Weber states that the Protestant ethic has become part of the bourgeois life-style. This implies a different social interpretation of the modern work ethic. It assumes that this ethic can be seen as an exclusive work ethic, typical only for some strata or classes in modern society. One can even go further and claim that this work ethic establishes a cultural distinction between the ascetic elites and the joyous masses. From this perspective the work ethic symbolizes the cultural authority of one class over other classes. "We" who have to be "Berufsmenschen" according to Weber are not the people. "We" in fact refers to a specific social group contrary to the supposed universalism of the "Berufsmenschen".

On the theoretical level the difference between the two interpretations can be resolved by distinguishing between a model and its social usage. The Calvinist variant of the Protestant ethic is a model of a modern work ethic that has been adapted by specific social groups. But we have to go further. For the Calvinist tradition can also be blended with other traditions. The blend of the Catholic ethic with Lutheranism, of a collectivist ethos of discipline with the Lutheran ethos of self-realization in and by work, the work ethic is sometimes said to constitute a specifically German work ethic. But this supposed ethic is - as we shall see - the work ethic of the skilled worker (the "Facharbeiterethos"), developed by a very specific group of workers in 19th century Germany. Because the practices using and reproducing these different models are ongoing, the work culture of a society is necessarily in flux. Thus our theoretical application of the model of the Protestant ethic has to take into account changes in its usage in order to keep the model theoretically useful.

On the empirical level I would like to suggest that there is a close relationship between the pure model of Calvinism and the social usage made of it by the dominant class in modern societies. The class of capitalist entrepreneurs and managers is a social group that uses the Calvinist model of the Protestant ethic to reproduce its symbolic power over other social classes. The symbolic power built into this ethic is based on the fact that it serves as a touchstone to higher positions. It becomes cultural capital in the hands of these social groups inasmuch as it becomes the selective mechanism in all those social institutions that regulate access to social status and power. Research analyzing the "informal" criteria of access to higher educational institutions and to employment in the better jobs shows that this work ethic is the touchstone conferring better chances (Windolf 1984; Windolf & Hohn 1984). But this selective

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<sup>25</sup> I will not go into the validity of Weber's theory that the spirit of capitalism has something to do with Calvinism. For a recent discussion of the historical relevance of Weber's hypothesis see Pellicani (1988), who concludes that the historical origins of what we call the Protestant ethic have nothing to do with Calvinism. But I do accept Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethic as the reconstruction of the model of a work ethic that has been constitutive for the development of capitalism. The model is based on the assumption of a highly internalized ascetic attitude toward work, upon the acceptance of work without external force. There may have been social groups that were close to this model - but this is already socially specific and has to be explained by specifying the social position of the group in question.

mechanism works differentially in the economy. It makes quite a difference whether we look at banking, at the steel industry or even at different levels of the hierarchy in these branches! Beyond a formal status gained in educational institutions, informal qualifications that indicate a "Protestant" life-style (e.g. early employment, dress, choice of discipline etc.) have become a more and more instrumental in the selection for higher social status in the sphere of work.

There have been some attempts at classifying class-specific adaptations of the Protestant ethic. Hinrichs & Wiesenthal (1982) distinguish among (a) workers with a traditional consciousness based upon an unquestioned achievement orientation, (b) overall maximizers (those in privileged positions who push the achievement principle), (c) opportunistic hedonists who work only as much as necessary to live a joyous life, and (d) those who abandon totally or partially the normal working day in order to organize their life-world in another form. Another classification by Kern & Schumann (1984:157) distinguishes among (a) winners of rationalization, (b) losers of rationalization, (c) workers in unstable branches, and (d) the unemployed. These classifications differ in the perspective they adopt to grasp the increasing differentiation of work culture. The former takes the perspective of the middle classes, the latter that of the working classes. They do have one element in common: They point to a differentiation of work cultures that cuts across traditional class differences.

### *3.2 The Model in Action I: The Working Class*

This type of analysis can be applied, for example, to fractions of the working class in advanced modern societies. To begin with, we can contrast two distinct types of the social usage of culture in the working class using their specific work ethic as the central parameter. The empirical references will be taken from survey research on value orientations toward work and from qualitative research on work culture.

#### *3.2.1 The skilled worker*

Sociological research on work culture has shown that industrial workers - in spite of their spending substantially more time outside of work - are not impressed or influenced by what we call value change toward post-materialism. They continue to see the work place as the central life experience and still adhere to the traditional industrial culture. They are proud of their skills and invest their social energy in work. Deriving their self-image from traditional craftsmanship, these skilled workers thus manifest a specific version of the Protestant ethic. Although they accept the inner-wordly (Lutheran!) principle of achievement through hard work, they do not follow the ascetic practice, characteristic of the capitalist entrepreneur, of saving the money they get. Members of this social class combine an ethic of hard work with a consumer attitude, they do not wait for remuneration in days to come, they spend immediately. In this respect they maintain, alongside their Lutheranism, the strong Catholic tradition of identifying with the collectivity of the consumer.

The more the present developments in the sphere of work foster cognitive skills the more the traditional ethic of the skilled worker is revitalized. The so-called "Arbeiterstolz" (being proud of being a "worker") is extended to a "Technikerstolz" (being proud of manipulating new work technologies). Both are based on special experiences and qualifications accumulated in daily practice at the work place (Rammert & Wehrsig 1988). But this type of the social usage of the Lutheran ethic is characteristic only for those who, thanks to their social location, can afford to defend this classical form of worker pride characteristic of the German model of "Facharbeit" (skilled work) (Härtel, Matthiesen & Neuendorff 1985, 1986). They can be called the beneficiaries of rationalization in the sphere of work. They have never de-coupled work from self-realization.

### 3.2.2 The unskilled worker

Unskilled or semi-skilled workers on the contrary adapt to the work situation without referring either to the Calvinist or the Lutheran aspect of the Protestant ethic. Their socio-structural location makes them the losers of the game. They know that they have to work where others can choose not to. They are forced into a type of work without motivation as such. The social groups making up this class of workers include marginal industrial workers as well as holders of the low service jobs typically held by women. Even housework can be subsumed under this heading. What these "bad jobs" have in common is that they produce fatigue (Clausen 1981:27f.). This experience of work produces a work ethic that tries to avoid any moral significance. The Protestant ethic is not rejected as such but simply not accepted for the type of work that has to be done. The social usage of the Protestant ethic here turns out to be an attempt to neutralize its implications in the workplace.

These social groups are forced to instrumentalize work. Work becomes the means to another end, to a culture of consumption that emulates the principles of the Catholic ethic. Consumption becomes a collective activity in substitution for the experience of a religious community. Work is seen as means to consumption, this heaven on earth. Inasmuch as low income forces these groups to engage in intensive consumption work (looking for the cheapest goods, intensifying the "do-it-yourself" orientation) they are part of the "achieving society". But the achievement-oriented activities in the sphere of consumption remain separate from the sphere of work. These groups have succeeded not only in separating work from self-realization, but also in ignoring the aspect of self-realization. The Protestant ethic has no relevance whatsoever. But this situation is not culture-free, as the instrumentalism hypothesis would imply. It is simply another culture used to give meaning to work. It is the culture derived from the Catholic tradition. There is no need within this tradition for individual motivation like the achievement motivation in the sphere of work. Being part of a collectivity of workers suffices to produce the minimum of motivation. The strength of control but not the internalized motivation can change the investment in work.

An especially revealing group to observe within this subclass is the unemployed. In order to get state subsidies these workers, excluded from work, are classified as "seeking work". This definition produces the image of somebody who upholds a normal work ethic. Such classification practices underscore the

problem connected with living up to the Protestant ethic. The "Protestantism" of the unemployed is reduced to the proper bureaucratic behavior of showing up at administrative institutions that register those without work. The Protestant ethic is converted into rigid adherence to the requirements of state institutions. Here enforced Protestantism loses all meaning. It becomes a borrowed ethic that acts against all the life experiences of this group. The problems produced by this situation of having to simulate an occupational career and having to construct a consistent occupational biography are enormous.<sup>26</sup>

These examples show again that the effects of the Protestant ethic do not necessarily conform rigidly to the pure model. The specific adaptations have to be explained sociologically. And only these practical adaptations can explain what cultural effects a given system of social classes is mediating.

### 3.3 *The Model in Action II: The Middle Class*

The different fractions of the middle class have generally been considered as the best representatives of the Protestant work ethic. This is only partially true. The reasons for this are to be found both in the historical roots of the middle class work ethic and in internal differences within the middle class. I would like to advance the idea that the changes in the class structure of advanced modern societies will make the middle class and the cultural struggles within it the keys to an explanation of the crisis of modern work society and to an understanding of possible solutions.

#### 3.3.1 The old middle class

The old middle class comprising small craftsmen and small shopkeepers (Haupt 1985) has become the symbol of a rigid and ascetic work ethic. The groups making up this culture are seen to represent the virtues of industry and parsimony par excellence. Their work ethic is labeled as an expression of a petit-bourgeois mentality.

This mentality can be seen as a specific adaptation of the Protestant ethic, sharing its emphasis on ascetic virtues. It differs with respect to the substantive values tied to this ethic. For it lacks the specific

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<sup>26</sup> In qualitative interviews (conducted in a research project by the Münchner Projektgruppe) these problems manifest themselves as the dominant ones. This is contrary to the evidence of those who look for the psychic stress of unemployment. This psychological approach blocks recognition of the implicit cultural codes that demand and structure the formulation of a consistent work biography even under stress. Unemployment creates an ambivalent experience for those who still rely upon the Catholic ethic. For it destroys access to the collectivist alternative characteristic of the Catholic work ethic; or rather, it individualizes it. Unemployment therefore can more easily be coped with by those who still adhere to some Calvinist element in their work ethic. This alternative is structurally open to the skilled workers, less so to the unskilled and semi-skilled.

rationalization that distances these virtues from their religious background and remains instead bound to a substantive religious feeling. The old petit bourgeois still works because he believes in God whereas in the modern work ethic the Protestant ethic motivates work without recourse to God. The petit bourgeois still needs God, is conservative and retains the old virtues. This gives to his work ethic the social rigidity typical of traditional life forms and life styles. The traditionalistic petit bourgeois leads an ambivalent life; his outlook is materialistic and moralistic at the same time. Not having really internalized the Protestant ethic he is prone to a moral crusade; he thinks that others should behave like him. His work ethic thus constitutes a culture that adapts the model of the Protestant ethic to the life experiences of petit-bourgeois existence (Münch 1984).

The central social experience of this old middle class was being threatened by industrialization and capitalist development. Unable to compete with big industry, yet dependent upon big money, craftsmen and shopkeepers were permanently in danger of slipping into the proletariat. Fear might explain why they preferred to defend the old world, for it guaranteed their social (and emotional) security. They were for the state as long as it acted to defend them against big industry and big money. (This was again promised by the fascists after a decade of turmoil experienced by these classes in the early 20th century!)

The petite bourgeoisie is not dying out. On the contrary, it is coming to life in those economies that have run into problems with big industry and large labor forces. Recourse to the old virtues increases the more such problems pervade advanced industrial societies. To be independent has become fashionable. New craftsmen and new shopkeepers have emerged to join the ranks of the old ones. To what extent these new groups will change the outlook of the classic groups making up the old middle class is an open question. It seems that these new groups combine the idea of independence with a rigid ideology concerning the type of work that can satisfy strong moral standards. The "alternative" entrepreneurs (Vonderach 1980) - most of them small shopkeepers or craftsmen - seem unable to escape the structural constraints typical of this social location. They tend to become a new petite bourgeoisie living at the edge of the formal economy (Schlegelmilch 1983). Some even say that they are the constitutive part of an informal economy. This is a claim that can be misunderstood because the new small entrepreneur has to behave as a member, though a minor one, of the formal economy if he wants to survive (Tacke 1988). What distinguishes him from the traditional petit bourgeois, the old small entrepreneur, is his moral style. He is a post-materialist looking for psychological well-being. But this may be a minor difference, compared to the similarities in structural location and moral rigidity. Both invest in use-value as against exchange-value, and this common interest is the decisive marker of their work culture (Eder 1989a, 1989c).

### 3.3.2 The new middle class

Since the beginning of the century a new type of middle class has also emerged (Kocka 1981a, 1981b). This class comprises the new white collar workers required by the expansion of the service sector. Their increase during the 60s, especially in social service occupations (teachers, journalists, medical

professionals etc.) was fostered by an expansion of the public sector (Gershuny 1983). The members of the new middle class are not independent. On the contrary, they are often state functionaries ("Staatsbeamter").

This class embodies the Lutheran version of the Protestant ethic par excellence. The social usage of this ethic emphasizes an individual's concern with the world and translates it into a social concern. For those belonging to this class no problem exists that cannot be psychologized. Psychological work even becomes the organizational principle of the work ethic. "Working on myself" is the key to their work ethic - and this seems very close to the logic of the Lutheran variant of the Protestant work ethic. The concern with self constitutes a new form of the social usage of this Lutheran tradition. The concern with self is transformed - contrary to the logic of the Calvinist model ethic - into the duty to work upon oneself. At the same time this new class integrates into its work ethic an element formerly alien to it. Alongside an internalized duty to work is also, as a complement, an internalized duty to enjoy it (Bourdieu 1984). The upshot is a hedonistic attitude toward work.

The members of this class become therefore prone to conspicuous consumption as a means of realizing their individuality - i.e. becoming socially distinct from their fellows - and this is precisely what the psycho-industry needs to expand and boom. Instability of the occupational biography in these groups reinforces this self-tinkering. It generates a work ethic of "contingency" that could produce the strongest obstacles in further accommodating the Lutheran (although less the Calvinist!) element of the Protestant ethic to its existence as a class. Whether the model itself will be queried is open to doubt.

The new middle class seems increasingly to dominate the cultural mood of advanced industrial societies. Its relative distance from the Protestant ethic, as it is customarily understood, makes it a possible carrier for changes in the work ethic, an agent for the construction of a new work culture. The structural changes favoring the emergence of new groups (the extension of the service sector) has probably come to an end. But the continuing effect of this change will be to act as a starting point for cultural struggles. It is the new middle class that is probably at the center of the cultural struggles that we are facing today. Its evolution will shape the outcome of the "crisis of the work society" to a decisive extent.

## **4 Conclusions**

### *4.1 Culture in Action: A Bridge to Social Structure*

The distinction between model and practice allows for a fuller answer to the question: What are the effects of the modern work ethic modeled on the "Protestant ethic" upon structural change in the work society? The answer is: It depends on the social usage social groups, or classes of social groups, make of this model.

This leads us to a genuinely **sociological conception of culture**. The analysis of the effects of culture on structure in modern work society takes into account the cultural practices of social groups that are explained by the model they refer to. But to analyze the social effects of culture we must also analyze the socio-structural location of a social group and the way in which this location structures the social usage of culture. The analysis of the Protestant ethic in action helps us to abandon the reification of Weber's model of a Protestant ethic as applied to the crisis of work society (a reification Weber himself provoked). It helps us to understand better the possible cultural effects upon those people whose life world extends beyond the private and public spheres, i.e. family or political life, into the sphere of work. And these people seem increasingly to be reintroducing the idea of self-realization into the sphere of work. The Protestant ethic whose Calvinist element was dissolved in the process of formal rationalization (as Weber rightly saw it) still contains the Lutheran element. What we need to determine is how the distance between work and self-realization will be bridged, how Lutheranism will be acted out. There is no a priori reason to believe that it will be either all good or all bad.

A preliminary theoretical conclusion can be drawn. The Protestant ethic is a theoretical construction. It describes a model culture, not a real one. What is real is the social usage of this model - and the usages have changed and increasingly produced conflicting (and even confusing) versions of this model culture. To show this **culture in action** we have analyzed its social usages. Such social usages are themselves an effect of structural developments that shape and reshape the perception and experience of social groups, thus producing cultural effects beyond changes in social structure. Thus, we have prepared the ground for a constructivist notion of the "crisis of the work society".

#### *4.2 The Crisis of Work Society as a Social Construct*

We started with the intention of taking the phenomenon of structural and cultural change seriously. Research on changes in the work ethic - we argued - needs to be tied more closely to research on structural developments in society, above all to changes in the class structure. The effects of culture are always mediated by social groups and therefore by a given social structure. But we should not reduce the explanation of change to that of socio-structural effects. For these changes take effect only because they have found some carrier in society. To really measure the effects of cultural change we have to analyze the symbolic struggles between social groups from which the new cultural orientation of society will be generated. The German example of cultural change in the sphere of work, discussed above, was thought to provide a general pattern of how this could be done.

But we have seen that the objectivist idea of a structural or cultural crisis is misleading. Both the structural strains and the restrictive cultural heritage can be and have been overcome by adaptation and differentiation. The crisis of modern work society is due neither to the iron laws of a structural crisis endemic to capitalism or welfarism nor to an exhaustion of symbolic resources. There is, we know, an "ecological crisis" that provokes political, social and even cultural conflicts. But its intensity is dependent upon the capacity of social actors to work upon ecological problems. There is a "cultural crisis" in the sense that a fashionable ideological system, "post-modernism", has questioned the very



basis of modernity. But this phenomenon is itself merely proof of the capacity of culture to produce fashions that solve the crises these fashionable ideas claim to have discovered and thematized. It is structural flexibility and cultural diversification that allow the processes of modernization to continue.

But where is the real crisis? It is ultimately the **crisis of the working class**, that class that defines the dominant model of the work culture and that is located at the center of the present processes of structural adaptation. The crisis of the work society is the crisis of the working class. Work has been reorganized to such an extent that the type of work represented by the working class has lost its critical place. To withhold this type of work no longer shatters modern society. The strikes that really matter today are organized by middle class groups, by those regulating the administration of social life, its traffic, its financial processes, its educational reproduction. The work ethic that has started to predominate in modern life is also shaped to an increasing extent by middle class groups. The decline of the Protestant ethic as embodied in the biography of the traditional skilled worker is part of the decline of this class and its work culture. Thus the crisis of the working society is the crisis of a class that has lost its function and role as a historical actor. And it is with the crisis of the working class that the crisis of its opponent, the bourgeois class, is inextricably connected.

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