Chapter One

Charismatic Authority

Given the radically opposed meanings that are attached to an aesthetic perspective, and given the controversial nature of the assertion that the aesthetic is the primary locus of authority in the human world, we need to explore several contexts where a similar notion is in play. In our own century, one of the potential analogues for the aesthetic viewpoint I am arguing for can be found in Max Weber's discussions of the three types of authority, where his definition of charismatic authority embodies some of the features of what I would characterize as an aesthetic viewpoint and which will therefore help us understand better some of the defining features of the aesthetic.

Weber, we know, delimited three basic forms of authority, legal, traditional, and charismatic, and whereas I shall be devoting most of my attention to his remarks on the charismatic form of authority, it is worth remembering what Weber had in mind in his remarks on legal and traditional authority as well. His most-quoted definition of the types of authority is as follows:

> There are three pure types of legitimate authority. The validity of their claims to legitimacy may be based on:
> 1. Rational grounds—resting on a belief in the "legality" of patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands (legal authority).
> 2. Traditional grounds—resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the

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legitimacy of the status of those exercising authority under them (traditional authority); or finally,

3. Charismatic grounds—resting on devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him (charismatic authority).[1]

In some respects it has grown increasingly difficult over the past century to distinguish between legal and traditional authority, particularly in our own era when more and more of the legal tradition is seen as another repository of traditional authority, and where traditional authority is increasingly construed in the manner of Foucault, as little more than an attempt to regulate the flows of discourse for the benefit of those who have power. The legal authority of our societies is in many respects derived from the traditional authority of the ontotheological system upon which most everything has been based, and even if the rules themselves differ both in the support they garner and in the relative respect in which they are held, still the border between the two forms of authority remains tenuous at best once one begins to consider the grounds of reason and rational patterns of normative rules.

One might also assert that the origin of most forms of authority is the charismatic variety which, as Weber demonstrates, comes to be bureaucratized through a gradual process of routinization and therefore loses its charismatic flavor and becomes traditional; over still more time it may in turn be seen as a legal form of authority. Just as many linguistic expressions begin their lives as fresh and vibrant articulations of the world and move gradually to a general way of speaking and finally turn into a cliché, so too authority can move in these directions; and given the role that language plays in all charismatic contexts, there is more than simple parallelism at work here. Just as, say, Jesus's words become profound utterances that change the fabric of the world for those who accede to their meaning, so too they become part of a general framework of life over time and even turn into

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clichéd versions of facility that are uttered like magic words to cover certain situations in the everyday world.

It is also worth remembering that even in our own highly contentious age, traditional and legal forms of authority remain paramount. The paternalistic structures of authority are still very much in evidence today, though they are also considerably discredited in the eyes of many, and most of the forms of everyday life are derived in some way from the patriarchal authorities that established the grounds of action and motive in our society. The legal authority we subscribe to has even more force today, particularly in an overly litigious society like the one to be found in the United States. Our system of rules and elections guarantees a fairly credible association with the legal codification of our structures, and most of the laws through which we construe our daily lives remain unquestioned.

There are always marginal areas within the legal form of authority in which its rules are contested in various ways, and there is more sustained activity on those fringes today than ever, particularly as they intersect those aspects of the ontotheological or patriarchal system that are found to be most objectionable by those who are most insistent on calling into question the rules of the discourse. It goes without saying that even among the most contentious of individuals, traditional and legal authority still play by far the greatest role in everyday life and form the base from which any other structure of authority is hypostatized and through which the same forms are undermined. Legal authority in particular can usually be altered in peaceful ways only by making use of the same legal authority to undermine it, and this is the operative procedure today, as it has been for some time.

If our lives are generally conducted under the aegis of traditional and legal authority, though, charismatic authority is usually the most appealing form of authority and the one to which we are most often attracted, as the writing on Weber over the years would suggest. His concept of charisma has been discussed more than any other feature of his work, except, perhaps, for his linkage of the Protestant ethic to the spirit of capitalism, and his assertions seem most compelling

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when he is dealing with the nature of charisma and the way such authority functions. As Weber himself acknowledges, "charisma" has the original sense of a gift or a manifestation of grace and is linked to the Greek *chairein*, to rejoice, so it combines both the power of authority and the exuberance of ecstasy. More specifically, Weber tells us that "The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader" (p. 358, 59). Charismatic individuals are generally clearly recognizable to others, even if not everyone sees their charisma as useful or beneficial, and most of us have little difficulty denoting such types.

The borderline of the charismatic is somewhat fuzzy, particularly inasmuch as the word has come to be overused and overgeneralized since Weber's formulation, and we might indeed find the most compelling cases of charismatic authority at the fringes of it today, in part because so many individuals in Western societies would be chary of the more powerful manifestations of charisma. There are certainly some indications of a reemergence of religious fundamentalism both in places like the United States and in Islamic countries, and these groups quite often depend on charismatic leaders of one type or another; but the subsidiary features of these truly charismatic figures keep many people from expressing an interest, even when attracted to the general presence of charisma itself. And inasmuch as charismatic figures like Hitler have given its presence within the political context a rather horrifying cast, most of us are reluctant to embrace such powers in the sociopolitical arena, though we do often expect our leaders to have a kind of charm that approaches charisma.

In some respects today, as was perhaps always the case, charisma is most attractive to the disgruntled, to those who find their lives to be less than satisfactory. Most of those who

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adhere to the traditional values of our society, the mythologized ones in particular that emphasize the independence of the autonomous subject and its unilateral freedom, are not inclined to embrace charismatic authority, for it compels obedience of one kind or another. The power of such an authority inevitably requires submission from the disciples, just as it compels a submission of sorts on the part of the charismatic individual himself. The tight series of rules through which charismatic authority originally manifests itself is articulated by Weber in the following manner:

> It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. This is freely given and guaranteed by what is held to be a "sign" or proof, originally always a miracle, and consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader. But where charisma is genuine, it is not this which is the basis of the claim to legitimacy. This basis lies rather in the conception that it is the *duty* of those who have been called to a charismatic mission to recognize its quality and to act accordingly. Psychologically this "recognition" is a matter of complete personal devotion to the possessor of the quality, arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope.
>
> No prophet has ever regarded his quality as dependent on the attitudes of the masses toward him. No elective king or military leader has ever treated those who have resisted him or tried to ignore him otherwise than as delinquent in duty. Failure to take part in a military expedition under such leader, even though recruitment is formally voluntary, has universally been met with disdain. (p. 359, 60)

Although the recognition of charismatic authority is indeed "freely given" and would be a contradiction in terms if it were thought of as compelled by force, the demands, the *duty* to which such adherents are called, are demanding indeed. And the "recognition" upon which the duty to the charismatic individual rests is usually "a matter of complete

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personal devotion to the possessor of the quality, arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope."

In a literal way one gives oneself up to the authority of the charismatic figure and ceases to be a free agent in the world. As one serves the authority out of a sense of duty, so too one is absolved of the need to engender authority through one's own acts. If freedom and autonomy are the compelling signs of one's existence, a charismatic figure is less likely to attract one in the first place because one will be reluctant to accede to the demands of the discipline authority requires. But if one sees the freedom and autonomy of the individual as burdens to bear, anxiety-provoking manifestations of the alienation of the self from others, then charismatic authority can be compelling indeed, precisely because it relieves one of the burden of choice and valuation, precisely because one no longer has to be responsible for one's own authorization.

There are always manifestations of this richest form of charisma in play in the world, most often within religious contexts where the figure believes and compels others to believe that he or she has some divine mission to fulfill. There are people like Jim Jones who can convince others to go to the jungle with them or to drink poisoned Kool-aid, and most of us are wary of this type of charisma even if we also recognize its attractions. And one by no means has to believe in the great myth of the free and autonomous individual in order to be wary, for even one who sees life in terms of all of its contingencies and complexities is generally unwilling to offer himself up to an authority who has all the easy answers. Charisma works through the benign solution, the simple plan that lays the fabric of the world bare, and only one who remains committed to such a vision of the good life is likely to value positively the most obvious forms of charismatic authority.

To the rest of us, these figures remain more of a threat to the larger socius than a benign influence, and again for obvious reasons: "Charismatic authority is . . . specifically outside the realm of everyday routine and the profane sphere" (p. 361). Inasmuch as such authority works outside of every-

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day routine and the profane world, it by definition inevitably calls into question the activities within the daily sphere of life, and most of us are usually satisfied to a greater or lesser degree with the profane world in which we live, even if we might also believe in the sacred as well. "In this respect," as Weber says, charismatic authority is "sharply opposed both to rational, and particularly bureaucratic, authority, and to traditional authority, whether in its patriarchal, patrimonial, or any other form" (p. 361). The charismatic figure always calls into question the other forms of authority that dispose of the business of our lives, and the conflict between forms here is most important:

> Both rational and traditional authority are specifically forms of everyday routine control of action; while the charismatic type is the direct antithesis of this. Bureaucratic authority is specifically rational in the sense of being bound to intellectually analysable rules; while charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules. Traditional authority is bound to the precedents handed down from the past and to this extent is also oriented to rules. Within the sphere of its claims, charismatic authority repudiates the past, and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force. It recognizes no appropriation of positions of power by virtue of the possession of property, either on the part of a chief or of socially privileged groups. The only basis of legitimacy for it is personal charisma, so long as it is proved; that is, as long as it receives recognition and is able to satisfy the followers or disciples. But this lasts only so long as the belief in its charismatic inspiration remains. (p. 361, 62)

The charismatic figure is inevitably a "revolutionary force" because he denies the past and repudiates the forms of authority that exist around him. Precisely because charismatic authority is based on irrational grounds, it cannot peacefully coexist with the relatively rational grounds of either rational or traditional authority. The precedents and rules of tradition

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are that which a charismatic person must call into question, and the "intellectually analysable rules" of rational authority are even more an obstacle to the revelations of the gifted one. This explains why it is generally those who are disgruntled either with themselves or with the socius as a whole who find the appeal of the charismatic figure to be most compelling, and usually those who are disgruntled with the socius are also disgruntled with themselves and therefore willing—rather *eager*—to have all the structures of their lives overturned through the grace of an otherworldly intrusion into the secular.

Weber is careful, though, to keep the definition of charismatic authority broad enough to include more than the extreme and most obvious forms of zeal, as when he tells us that a charismatic individual "is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities." If the extreme forms of charisma bear a metaphorical relationship to that aesthetic form called the sublime, the "lesser" forms bear a similar relationship to what we characterize as beauty. If those who seem to have supernatural or superhuman powers are recognizably revolutionary in their mode of being, those who manifest exceptional powers or qualities are also touched by the revolutionary force, though perhaps the nature of their revolution is less obviously compelling. And if we broaden our sense of charisma to include at least some of its sense today, we should have to assume that a charismatic figure is any individual who by means of the force of personality is capable of compelling change within the lives of others and in prompting those others to effect changes within their world. Charisma in this sense is by no means the same thing as being "telegenic," for that is at best a minor subset of the category: one can be charismatic without being telegenic, and one can be telegenic without being charismatic, though there is no doubt that television has been a medium that has been useful to a number of charismatic—chiefly religious—figures like Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker. Given the ways in which television has changed our conceptions of things, we might indeed be in-

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creasingly likely to define the charismatic figure in terms of those individuals whose appeal comes across most compellingly on television, but for now at least one must assume that a powerful presence on television is not a sufficient characteristic of a charismatic figure.

The lesser types of charismatic figures are inevitably always more in evidence than the major types simply because the "qualifications" are lower. If there are few individuals at any given time who could compel people to leave their former existence behind and take up residence in a jungle or an isolated community in Oregon, there are considerably more whose force we notice on a regular basis, from the prominent figures in any way of life or discipline to the people who rise to the occasion when some form of grass-roots politics provides a need. These are people who, we might say, *have* charisma but who are not quite charismatic figures; their discourse is powerful or moving and prompts us to reconsider some of our ways of doing things, but their activities and dispositions are such that they don't demand fealty or radical changes in our way of life. They might prompt us to alter completely our ways of thinking about this or that thing, and they might likewise prompt us to change some aspect of our behavior, but they do not require a complete redefinition of who we are any more than they compel us to abandon the secular world. And if the more powerful manifestations of charisma are capable of a totalizing kind of authority, the lesser manifestations are equally capable of a localized form of authority.

The charming CEO of a company, for example, may well not demand a total change of life in his workers, but if he is sufficiently compelling he will convince many of them that their work is part of a larger "mission" and will thus go some way toward shaping their attitude toward their work—and thus toward themselves—and will in so doing change their sense of the shape of their daily lives, turning perhaps what

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might have been drudgery into something of great value because it contributes to the greater cause, profits, or whatever. The major figures in the academic world, be they individuals like Derrida or John Silber, do not as a rule demand a total change of life either, though it is possible, as it is with the CEO, that their words will have that effect. The intellectual figure obviously hopes through the force of his or her words to change the ways people look at things, and thereby also to change the way individuals live their lives, but most often the visions of these figures are not comprehensive enough to include regimes of discipline that give form to the entire life. Deconstruction may be a useful form through which to measure the effects of certain texts, and in mutated form it may be a useful analogue for interpretive activities in other modes of discourse, but it is not a means through which to construe one's life and does not provide a sufficient system of values to compel complete change, perhaps because it lacks almost totally any positive formulations. So deconstruction can change the interpretive means at one's disposal, it can alter the discipline into which it intrudes itself, and it can modify one's way of thinking about one's life, but it cannot provide the necessary components for an entirely revolutionary system of the type that would be proffered by the extreme form of charismatic figure.

Inasmuch as most of us are committed in some fundamental respects to the secular world—even if we also have a belief in the sacred—these lesser forms of charisma are more compelling for us than the major manifestations that change the lives of the disgruntled. In this respect it is almost always those who have charisma without necessarily being truly charismatic figures who effect the major changes in the world, for their charisma is such that it makes them recognizable authorities—though obviously also authorities that must always be seriously questioned—and yet doesn't compel a complete change of life. Indeed, we might say that their charisma is more effective precisely *because* it doesn't require a complete change of life, for many of us would tend in the end to choose the very lives we have even if we have complaints about the ways our lives are going, and therefore

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don't want the revolutionary effects of the charismatic leader and remain most wary of any individuals who might offer such a thing. The person with charisma, by definition because he *has* charisma, prompts us to attend to his authority, to recognize him as someone with whom we must deal, but he doesn't overwhelm us with his authority in the way the charismatic figure does. If such an individual is capable of effecting more changes in the world—and I am, of course, ignoring for the moment the fact that a charismatic figure like Jesus obviously effected more change in the world than any person with charisma ever will, because Jesus marks the rarest form of charisma precisely in the magnitude of change He engendered—that may well have everything to do with his "lesser" powers, which, because they are less intimidating and yet are still compelling, provide him with authority but don't engender the kinds of insecurity or anxiety the most powerful manifestations of charisma would.

We have yet, however, to define what "specifically exceptional powers or qualities" an individual with charisma might have that would give the person the authority we all tacitly recognize in such types, and Weber is curiously unhelpful in this respect, for he fails to tie the gift of charisma to any specific qualities at all, even if he does provide examples of charismatic individuals and thereby gives an idea of the kinds of qualities he has in mind. Aside from the examples, though, Weber only states in a general fashion what the charismatic person is like. In speaking of the exceptional power or qualities of the charismatic individual, Weber asserts that they are "not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader," but he doesn't tell us *why* these qualities should have that effect, other than to point out that they are exceptional in nature and recognized as such.

Likewise, in his original definition of charismatic authority, Weber asserts that it rests "on devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns of order revealed or ordained by him," and whereas he is a bit more

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precise here, still we are left wondering just what constitutes such authority. We may simply be forced to say that we all recognize this "exceptional sanctity" when we see it, that heroism is such that we can all easily identify it too, and that an exemplary character cannot fail to be noticed. For the charismatic character is by definition one that is easily recognizable; that in itself is one of its distinguishing features. If one had to submit to the lengthy questioning of a board of authority in order to determine how much charisma one had, one would clearly not have any, for it would have to be apparent to all for it to command authority in the first place.

"Exceptional sanctity," though, is an elusive phrase, even if we may in some senses know what it is; heroism is also difficult to note, particularly the variety that compels a sense of duty in others; exemplary characters are perhaps unavailable in this era because there would be so little agreement about what should be considered exemplary. In effect, these definitions do indeed say little more than that we all recognize a charismatic presence when we see one, for even the second half of the definition only establishes linkages that would be considered irrelevant in another context. The charismatic figure may indeed assert "normative patterns of order revealed or ordained by him," but so might many another individual, and the only way to sort out those revealed orders that have authority from those that don't would be according to whether or not one considered the person charismatic, simply mad, or an incarnation of pure evil. Weber is aware that to a certain extent charisma is in the eye of the beholder, that there must also be something in the followers of the leader that prompts them to be attracted to the special force of his charisma, but he doesn't explore at any length the ways in which the special manifestations of power in the charismatic person do indeed depend on the local context, on the values that leader and followers share *outside* of any particular attitude toward the charismatic individual himself. One person's charismatic authority is indeed another person's madman, and there are no definitive steps that allow us to establish independently which is which simply because charismatic authority is *always* completely contingent on the immediate circumstances of its manifestation.

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That which sets the charismatic person apart, then, is recognizable by all, even if they don't always characterize it as charisma—they might think it madness instead. But the specific qualities of charisma are always context dependent and thus contingent on the values of the individuals who recognize the person as charismatic in the first place. Nevertheless, the power of the individual with charisma must surely have some features that are more specifically identifiable than this, and at the very least I think we can assume that a person with charisma has some kind of gift of language. Often charismatic types do not come from the most educated realms of a social system, so their gift of language clearly doesn't come from their vocabulary, something that might be very limited indeed. And their rhetorical powers are usually not something that they have had to learn, for the very nature of their charisma would suggest that what moves them so powerfully must come from some internal source. But if the charismatic individual is going to move people, he will almost always have to do it with words, which means that inevitably he will have to have some kind of eloquence.

Now, we no more know specifically what constitutes eloquence than we understand the source of charisma, in spite of all our great scientific machinery, but we do know that rhetorical prowess is characterized in terms of the choice of words and their placement. The rhythms of speech of a master of discourse partake of the aesthetic and induce attitudes within an audience through their repetitions and periodicity that alter the people's orientation toward the world. The power of the words comes from their ability to transform the audience's way of thinking about its mode of being, prompts those who are listening to reconsider their place within the scheme of things; and for such reconsiderations to have the power that they do, the eloquence of the speaker must be capable of making the auditors forget their usual ways of thinking and the ordinary language through which they constitute their everyday lives. We have known for millennia that a powerful speech and a great poem have many things in common, from rhythms that are capable of altering the flow of a person's thoughts to ideas that seem so striking as

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to jar one out of one's complacency. And any charismatic person by definition must have these aesthetic gifts, must be able through his linguistic elegance to charm the audience away from its normal patterns of thought. In this way charisma is always crucially linked to the aesthetic authority of language itself and cannot be separated from it. As before, eloquence is not a sufficient condition in itself to guarantee the value of any charismatic authority, but it is a necessary condition for any possible value nevertheless.

The language of those who have charisma is an essential feature of their gift, but that gift is in turn expressed in another way when we say that it is always also connected to a specific kind of recognizable order, an order that must be transparently simple in some respects for it to have the power it has over other individuals. Most of the truly charismatic types who have had some effect on the world, after all, have been able to have that effect precisely because of the simplicity of their utterances. It is not only that someone like Jesus had the gift of parables, the ability to master a narrative in order to reveal metaphorically some spiritual condition, though that is one way that both the linguistic and the orderly method of the charismatic manifest themselves; it is also that the conceptions underlying the order are simple and straightforward in nature. The order itself may demand devilishly difficult regimes on the part of the converted, but the ideas underlying the discipline need to be clear to all. And inasmuch as such figures invariably have considerable effects on less well-educated audiences, their simplicity of order is necessary for that reason as well.

At the same time, though, a transparent order is not contingent on the needs of an ignorant audience. Simplicity itself, after all, is one of the features scientists regularly list as an essential element of powerful scientific concepts, and any aesthetic condition to be found in painting or poetry is connected in some respects to what at least appears to be a transparent and straightforward order. And it is the *feeling* of its simplicity, the "Of course!" that it engenders in the audience, that is one mark of its power. It seems an inevitable offshoot of the ways things are, so inescapable that one

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might wonder why one hadn't thought of it oneself. It may be an order contingent on magic numbers or geographical locations or a definition of the group in terms of some obviously "hostile" force or whatever, but the features must be readily identifiable and clearly focussed. That is precisely what it means for a charismatic figure to have authority.

Given these requirements for the charismatic forces inherent in an individual, we might pause a moment and ask ourselves why some of the features of order and language tend to repeat themselves, particularly in those cases where a more rational person would wonder why they tend to appear as often as they do. Many charismatic orders, for example, do indeed depend on sacred numbers of one type or another, be they numbers like seven and nine, or prime numbers or numbers said to characterize certain powerful forces in the universe. Is this an arbitrary feature of charismatic authority, or is it intrinsically related somehow to the gifts such figures have? The easy response to this linkage would be to say that charismatic types tend to pick particular numbers precisely for their simplicity and therefore the numerology helps to clarify the goals of the order. But there may well be something akin to what is found in a disease like Tourette's Syndrome—whose victims are given to involuntary outbursts of curses and repetitions that seem to come from another part of the person altogether—that is the origin of the charismatic tendency to speak in terms of magic numbers and recurrent phrases of various sorts. This is not to say that charisma is a disease, though it could be argued that its most extreme manifestations do indeed have linkages to some forms of mental illness. Rather, it is to suggest that charismatic language and the powers it manifests are connected in some mysterious ways to special regions of human discourse that lie beyond the ken of both audience and speaker.

Most of us are not likely to be swayed by the magic in a number like nine, for example, yet I have known people who have built up entire political systems on the basis of the number nine. Every order was based on some factor of nine, every contingency that would threaten the system was

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somehow contained by the number nine, and the entire legitimacy of the system was dependent in the end on one's belief in the "rightness" of nine as a cornerstone for a political vision. The gift of magic numbers is connected in turn to the capacity for facile phraseology as well, for the lucid phrase or epigram that encapsulates in a memorable way an idea with charm and simplicity. Indeed, it is precisely the charm and simplicity of the phrases and magic numbers that make "outsiders" so skeptical of the authority of charismatic figures of this type, for the simplicity of numbers and phrases also suggests the incredible unreality of the entire apparatus.

In the case of the individual I knew who based his political system on the number nine, he was convinced that the number itself legitimized the system, and the euphonious phrases through which he articulated the basic political program of action reflected in their own way the same kinds of legitimacy: they simply *sounded* right to him, and even to a skeptical individual they had their own recognizable force. Yet the marvelous system in the end seemed totally absurd to a skeptic precisely because the numerology and facile encapsulations covered over an incredible naiveté about the nature of human systems. In the politics of nine, for example, the individual involved assumed that humans within a socius as large as ours could in effect come to some consensus every week on the nation's most compelling problem, and once that consensus was arrived at through a series of meetings that were based on nines and that all took place on Saturday, the leader could spend the next week dealing with the agreed-upon problem. It would then be eliminated, and the following week the groups of nine could arrive at a consensus about the next most-compelling problem, and so forth on into utopia. If the world were constituted in such a way that leaders could indeed focus on one problem a week and then forever eliminate it, or if it were constituted in such a way that citizens could so easily agree on that which most needed to be addressed at any given moment, the planet's problems would have been reduced greatly over the millennia. But the very implausibility of such a scheme was part of

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its attraction as well. To hear the inventor of this system talk about it, one would think that everything in the world would be fine within a year if only he were given a chance to let everyone know about his new political system. And it was, naturally enough, a given that when people listened to his description of this amazingly simple system, they would all immediately be convinced of its veracity (or so the inventor thought).

It is also not an accident that most such charismatic types have what we might characterize as a somewhat paranoid attitude toward the prevailing systems of authority. Inasmuch as their benignly simple orders compel total assent—there cannot be a partial implementation of the politics of nines, for the entire package must be in place for it to work—their structures must inevitably be at odds with the givens of the socius. This is why charismatic authority is "sharply opposed both to rational, and particularly bureaucratic, authority and to traditional authority" as well. The charismatic person's plan of action is inevitably revolutionary in that it unequivocally denies the authority of the prevailing systems and asserts a radically different version of order and authority. As Weber phrases it: "Within the sphere of its claims, charismatic authority repudiates the past, and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force. It recognizes no appropriation of positions of power by virtue of the possession of property, either on the part of a chief or of socially privileged groups" (p. 362). The simplicity of the order, the perfection of its system, depends totally on a denial of the givens, so the charismatic individual will be inclined to promise great changes in the world and in the lives of those who follow him, but *only* if the vision and the order are universally applied, which means *only* if all the prevailing human orders are overturned.

Part of the authority of the charismatic person thus stems from the language he or she uses so eloquently, and part of it

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derives from the transparency of the order, but these in turn are related to the greater vision underlying both of these features: the order can institute *great* change, revolutionary change, and it can forever eliminate those features—or at least some of them—that we find most in conflict with our ideas of the good life. The promise of the charismatic figure must be of this magnitude because his demands are also great: as Jesus explained, one would be forced to put off the clothes of one's old life, leave behind the comfortable, if also anxiety-provoking, ways that one had employed for years, and become washed in the blood of the lamb, take on a new form that would repudiate not only the abstract past of the social and political systems of which one was a part but also the *personal* past. The virtue of the charismatic leader is that he promises a *totally new* order; the limitation is the same, and therefore the appeal of the leader is always contingent on those who most desire a totally other world in which to live. In that case, the magic numbers and mysterious phrases with their incantatory logic help to convince the individual that there is indeed a different order of things that one simply had not noticed sufficiently before, that one can truly live in a constant state of magic and bliss.

I have been discussing charismatic authority in extreme situations, not to discredit charismatic authority per se, for I have also asserted that authority is aesthetic in nature, and clearly Weber's charismatic type derives his or her power from an aesthetic conception of things and linguistic eloquence. Rather, by discussing certain aspects of extreme forms of charisma, those kinds we might call paranoid, for example, I hope to locate some of the features that are to be found within all charismatic individuals, even those who are only individuals with charisma rather than the charismatic types to which Weber devotes his remarks. A more ordinarily charismatic individual would also have the gift of language, for example, and the phrases through which the vision of the person was articulated would doubtless be couched in memorable rhythms and images, but they wouldn't necessarily be of the variety of totally implausible visions of the kind of which I have made use. It is true that

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Jesus's message was contingent on memorable images, compelling anecdotes, and magic numbers, but to say so is not necessarily to discredit the entire vision, and there are obviously many forms of charisma that aren't dependent on magic numbers and simplistic visions. Jesus's vision, after all, might have been simple, but it was not simplistic. And it might have appealed exclusively to the disgruntled or the politically astute, but that is not to say that it didn't have its own great value.

At the same time, it is not enough to establish that the distinguishing feature of a charismatic authority like Jesus, that which would separate him from a cracked and paranoid figure who would have us all drink poison to get to heaven more quickly, is his sincerity any more than it would be his ethical commitment. There are, to be sure, charismatic types who are charlatans from the beginning, whose self-interest is so evident in their appeal that we cannot mistake it even from a distance. Whatever self-interest a figure like Jesus must have had, though, it was clearly not the main reason for the program of action; rather, Jesus was sincere, truly wished to help others, and had an ethical plan of action that would transform the lives of those who were willing to listen to Him. Still, the authority of a figure like Jesus cannot be based on this sincerity, for we know that that is not a sufficient criterion for authority—many people are sincere in what they believe and in what they promulgate, but many of these are also indeed truly mad, and many are simply misled by the magic of their own words.

Sincerity is a condition of charisma, but not a sufficient one. It is necessary—at least the appearance of it is necessary—because the charismatic individual's *complete* conviction in the rightness of what he is doing would not be possible without it. One must at least appear to be willing to lay down one's life for one's ideas if one is going to have any hope of compelling others to do equivalent things, and that cannot occur without sincerity. Likewise, at least in most cases, the sincerity must be connected not just to a plan of action but to a *virtuous* plan of action. The system has to be an *ethical* order because only a structure based upon the *right*

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could compel unequivocal assent, only a system that made one feel that one would truly be completely virtuous in taking up the values of it could create the necessary fervor to gain zealous adherents.

A charismatic figure, then, must not only be eloquent, and must not only have a transparent order of great simplicity to offer, but he must also provide a sincere and clear vision of the good and convince others that they too will be good and virtuous if only they adhere to the proffered order. And this, I would argue, is true of the entire range of charismatic possibilities, whether in the extreme form of a madman, or in the guise of a leader who changes the world, or in the pattern of a writer whose work compels assent, or in the context of any other aesthetic manifestation in the world. Given that, and given the fact that sincerity can always be faked and isn't always necessarily good in and of itself, the virtue itself, like the authority inherent in any context, is not to be taken as a given. The difficult assessments only *begin* once such an authority has been located. They don't end there, and if they have too often stopped there, this is because the seemingly magical powers of charismatic types induce individuals to assume that the greater powers are a reflection of greater probity and higher truth. For too many, the manifestation of charisma is in itself a demonstration of virtue and authority when in fact it should rather be the point at which one seriously begins to question whether or not virtue and authority are truly associated with the individual and the plan of action that comes with the charismatic person. The mere *difference,* the mere presence of a seemingly exemplary life, should no more compel our assent than an individual's seeming ability to bend spoons should convince us of his godhead. "Charisma" in this sense, in whatever form, is the beginning point of our individual and cultural investigations into authority, not the end point, as we have thought; it is that which we all recognize as a *possible* location for assertions of authority, but always only a possible location.

Given the ways in which past eras have construed both charisma and authority, it is important to point out that what-

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