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Simon LOCKE

Charisma and the Iron Cage: Rationalization, Science and Scientology

Scientology has consistently been interpreted by sociologists in terms of rationalization. However, a review of existing studies shows that the meaning attached to this term varies around a central ambiguity summed up as the “iron cage” versus “charisma”. The author argues that this ambiguity arises from ambivalence over the public meaning of science in modernity. Through a re-examination of existing accounts of Scientology provided by Wilson, Whitehead, and Wallis, the author offers a revised interpretation that attempts to resolve the ambiguity through emphasizing the socially constructed and rhetorical nature of the public meaning of science. With this, rationalization appears no longer as an external logic dictated by science, but as resource of persuasion that social groups may construct differently on different occasions to suit different specific purposes such as legitimation of their actions and beliefs. Accordingly, NRMs may fruitfully be studied as active attempts to develop an ethics of conduct based in part on interpretations of the public meaning of science.

Key words: *charisma · New Age · rationalization · science · Scientology*

Les sociologues ont souvent parlé de la scientologie en termes de rationalisation. Pourtant, la lecture attentive des études existantes révèle que le sens attaché à ce terme varie par rapport à une ambiguïté centrale que l'on peut résumer par une opposition entre “cage de fer” et “charisme”. L'auteur défend la thèse selon laquelle cette ambiguïté procède d'une ambivalence portant sur la signification de la science dans la société moderne. Via un réexamen des études existantes de la scientologie, notamment celles de Wilson, Whitehead et Wallis, l'auteur propose une nouvelle interprétation qui tente de lever cette ambiguïté en mettant l'accent sur la nature rhétorique et socialement construite de la signification courante du concept de science. La rationalisation apparaît ainsi non plus comme une logique externe dictée par la science, mais comme un instrument de persuasion que les groupes sociaux peuvent construire différemment selon les occasions afin de servir des objectifs spécifiques tels que la légitimation de leurs actes et de leurs croyances. De même, les nouveaux mouvements religieux peuvent être vus comme de réelles tentatives de développer une éthique du comportement partiellement basée sur des interprétations de la signification courante de la science.

Mots-clés: *charisme · Eglise de Scientologie · Nouvel Age · rationalisation · science*

What Scientology claims to have done is to have rationalized the path to salvation. . . . [T]here was a standardized routinized procedure and increasing predictability of soteriological results . . . [T]here is an attempt to discipline, regulate, and routinize access to the supernatural sphere. Scientology provides technical devices by which to increase the production of salvation: to reduce mystery to formulae.

(Wilson, 1990: 273–274)

The “E-meter” . . . has become an indispensable tool of Scientology. Electro-psychometers were not a new idea. Their origins trace back to the 19th century. Jung had enthused about “psychogalvanometers” before the First World War, and they were still in use in the 1940s. Some psychologists use them to this day, and they are standardly incorporated in polygraph lie detectors. None of these devices could have the mystique created around the E-meter by Hubbard.

(Atack, 1990: 128)

Introduction

This article offers a revised interpretation of Scientology prompted by an apparent contrast in the above two quotations. The first—a description of Scientology in the way of sociological analysis—sees it as the result of rationalization in which a “scientific” approach and attitude of mind is taken towards the business of salvation such that “mystery is reduced to formulae”. The second—a description given by an ex-Scientologist of the central technical apparatus of Scientological ministration—presents it as surrounded by “mystique” such that, one might say, formulae are induced to mystery. How is this contrast to be understood?

The contrast centres around the way science is understood in relation to the wider culture of modernity—what I refer to as the public meaning of science¹—and the quotations point to broader questions about the nature of New Religious Movements (NRMs), especially those like the New Age (Hess, 1993) that draw heavily on representations of science. The need for revised interpretations of NRMs is apparent from a number of discussions (Dawson, 1998a, 1998b; Heelas, 1996; Hervieu-Léger, 1998; York, 1995). Dawson in particular argues that dominant interpretations tend to view NRMs as either “accommodations” or “rejections” of modernization understood through notions of secularization derived from Weber’s rationalization thesis as exemplified by Wilson (1966). She wants to move beyond such dualistic thinking and the present article is intended as a contribution toward this. Scientology provides a good case in point because existing sociological studies present the same contrast, as acknowledged by Wilson (1990: 271, n. 7) in reference to Wallis (1976) and Whitehead (1974, 1987). Accordingly, the discussion focuses on this literature to draw out the tensions more fully. They centre on the way science and Scientologists’ understandings of science are represented through the framework of rationalization. By way of resolution, the article offers an alternative interpretation drawn from a view of science as a cultural resource (Barnes, 1974) that treats rationalization as only one (set of) rhetorical representation(s) of science available in modern culture (Locke, 1999, 2001).

Wilson's account is covered first as he provides the most clear-cut application of the rationalization framework (the "iron cage" version). This is contrasted with Whitehead's interpretation of rationalization, emphasizing the survival of magical orientations (the "charismatic" version). However, while Whitehead's account is more encompassing, it does not do full justice to Scientologists' self-understandings. This is brought out through detailed consideration of Wallis' exemplary recording of the motivations of followers of Dianetics (hereafter "Dianeticians") and Scientology. However, in his own account, Wallis equivocates between "iron cage" and "charismatic" interpretations, the resolution of which requires recognizing that Scientology conforms comfortably to neither view of rationalization alone—it is neither simply "iron cage" nor "charisma" but *both at the same time*. Such a view stresses the *ambivalence* towards science in modernity (Irwin and Wynne, 1996) and leads to an alternative view of rationalization as a rhetorical resource (Locke, 2002).

Scientology

The history of the Church of Scientology and the biography of its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, are hotly contested (compare Church of Scientology International, 1998, with Miller, 1987). Scientology is one of the more publicly visible NRMs, having experienced difficulties with various authorities across the globe most recently in Europe (Aldridge, 2000: 15; Kent, 1999), as well as suffering often fractious relations with ex-members, "anti-cult" groups, and so on (Beckford, 1985). None of this is directly of concern here. The following outline, drawn from a range of sources, both "official" and otherwise (Atack, 1990; Bainbridge and Stark, 1980; Berger, 1989; Church of Scientology International, 1998; Hubbard, 1987, 1996; Miller, 1987; Wallis, 1976; Whitehead, 1974, 1987; Wilson, 1990) is presented not as a definitive account but only to provide the reader with sufficient information to follow the ensuing argument.

The Church was founded in 1954, growing out of Dianetics, a therapeutic movement Hubbard had started in 1948. Prior to this, Hubbard wrote science fiction for such leading magazines as *Astounding Science Fiction*, edited by John Campbell Jr, who published Hubbard's first essay outlining the therapy. A book on Dianetics (Hubbard, 1987) was published in 1950 and became something of an overnight sensation. Central to the therapy was "auditing", which has been likened to psychoanalysis although Hubbard strongly resists such parallels.² Even so, accounts of auditing suggest it involves close questioning about past experiences particularly involving traumatic events (Hubbard, 1987; Whitehead, 1987). These produce "engrams" that auditing aims to remove to produce a state of "clear". A "clear" is a person in full control of their actions and possessed of an "analytic mind" described through a computational metaphor involving thorough storage and access of "data", perfect computation, swift, precise learning, and so on (Hubbard, 1987). The analytic mind contrasts with the "reactive mind"

where engrams are found. The reactive mind works through stimulus-response, keyed automatically when stimulated by events similar to those that produced trauma. Thus auditing replaces the behaviouristic reactive mind with the fully self-aware analytic mind. Hubbard continuously stresses the “workability” of the therapy and its empirical basis, a point to which we return below.

Despite or, according to Wallis (1976), because of, its popular success Dianetics began to fragment and Hubbard broke away to found Scientology. Although said to have developed out of Dianetics, Scientology is presented as a religion rather than a therapy. Auditing remains the central activity but is given different significance through the notion of the *thetan*. Humans are thetans, also called souls or spirits (Hubbard, 1996). We are defined as such against the material level of existence, which includes both our bodies and our minds. Thetans are immortal, all-powerful beings, who have lived numerous lives over trillions of years and throughout space. This record of past lives is known as the “Time Track” and is said to have become apparent from memories arising during auditing, some of which did not conform obviously to the known record of human history, while others were more overtly extraterrestrial. Hubbard viewed this as evidence of inherited engrams from traumas experienced during such previous existences. Auditing was then extended until even the state of “clear” became relatively low-level compared to that of Operating Thetan (OT). OTs are “at cause” meaning they can create MEST—matter, energy, space, and time. They can also “exteriorize” (leave their bodies) and may experience other kinds of “paranormal” abilities and phenomena.

Regarding the “E-meter”, this is described by the Church as “a religious artifact” that “measures the spiritual state of a person”. Its use is described as follows:

[when] a person holds the meter’s electrodes, a very tiny flow of electrical energy (about 1.5 volts—less than a flashlight battery) passes down the wires of the E-meter leads, through the person’s body and back into the E-meter . . . When the person holding the E-meter electrodes thinks a thought, looks at a picture, reexperiences an incident or shifts some part of the reactive mind, he [*sic*] is moving and changing actual mental mass and energy. These changes in the mind influence the tiny flow of electrical energy generated by the E-meter, causing the needle on its dial to move. The needle reactions on the E-meter tell the auditor where the charge lies, and that it should be addressed through auditing. (Church of Scientology, 1998: 165–167)

The use of this technology and the terminology describing its religious function are significant as this is taken to lend support to the “iron cage” interpretation of Scientology.

Rationalization I: Scientology as the “Iron Cage”

For Wilson (1990), Scientology is a religious system developed in the context of a surrounding social environment characterized by rationalization and secularization. This environment has a number of more specific features,

the most important of which are: a pragmatic, utilitarian and instrumental emphasis on “religion as an agency of progress and self-improvement” (1990: 269), especially in therapeutic forms; a widening knowledge of other religions and forms of belief that relativize religious truth; and the rise of natural science associated with technical specification, standardization, and routinization of procedures with the aim of achieving replicability of outcome.

One result of these developments is a new moral context, in which the soteriological function of religion is displaced by its use as a resource for the articulation and achievement of human potential. Thus, Scientology caters to such a “this-worldly” concern; its appeal resides not in its “elaborate metaphysical system”, but in “the promise of personal therapy” (1990: 273). Similarly, its basic “ethic” is directed at individual therapy and the achievement of self-determination and self-responsibility, befitting the individualized ethos of modernity. This is entirely to be expected, as secularization means in part that religious expression will “employ new language” drawn from a therapeutic context and directed at providing “capability-enhancement techniques” (1990: 275).

In keeping with an essentially scientific orientation, religions are also likely to express an impersonal idea of God. In respect of Scientology, the key feature here is the manner in which it claims “to have rationalized the path to salvation” (1990: 273). Thus, although Hubbard locates Scientology in continuity with past traditions of wisdom and religion (cf. Kent, 1996), it is distinctive in claiming to provide “precise specification” of the procedures required to attain salvation in a manner that is “replicable” via “standardized routinized procedure and increasing predictability of soteriological results” (Wilson, 1990: 273)—hence the reduction of “mystery to formulae”.

Additionally, Wilson argues that Scientology has sought clinically to “divest its terminology of all non-neutral connotations” (1990: 274). For example, auditors do not rely on their own “spiritual apprehensions or . . . personal appraisal” but follow “prescribed procedures” that displace “purely . . . idiosyncratic elements” with standard “tech”—Hubbard’s term for Scientology statements of procedure. Thus, “there is a conjunction of technical means and spiritual goals”. Accordingly, Wilson concludes:

Scientology bears the imprint of the technological age in which it came into existence. It is explicitly committed to the ideal of rational thought and self-examination, and to the elimination of untoward and incidental emotion. In this sense, Scientology takes its place in the evolution of religious ideologies as a rationalized . . . system of belief. (1990: 274)

Apparent in this is a clear application of the idea of rationalization as a process of advancing technical logic of an essentially instrumental and “this-worldly” oriented form, a logic that increasingly displaces other ways of thinking or forms of mental outlook, especially those of magical, moral, and emotional character. Crucially, the driving momentum of this process comes from science which stamps society in its mould and provides the model on which the religious system is based. The religion appeals to a set of logics taken to be characteristic of science, not only in its emphasis on

instrumental goals, but also in the specific methodology for achieving those goals through replicable and technologically specifiable techniques of an emotionally neutral form. The upshot of this is the displacement of “mystery by formulae”—in a word, disenchantment. Scientology is but one more bar in the “iron cage”.

But despite this seemingly “scientized” character and basis of appeal, Wilson adds:

Scientology is not science. It deals in certainties . . . in dogma, not in doubts. It is concerned with absolutes. Its definitive goals transcend empirical proof. Its ultimate belief-system is essentially metaphysical. It constitutes a religious system set forth in the terms of scientific discourse. (1990: 274–275)

Such an orthodox empiricist characterization of science might readily be questioned by reference to contemporary science studies (Campbell, 2001; Jasanoff et al., 1995), but this is not my intention. Rather, it is to show that, although Wilson’s account of Scientology does find support in statements made by Scientologists, other statements they make do not fit so easily. Wilson’s account relies on a partial and selective reading that treats some statements transparently—as in effect true descriptions of Scientology—while other statements are either ignored or treated as false. Thus, his reading is asymmetrical.³

Support for Wilson can readily be found in Hubbard’s writings—for example, the recurring stress on the “workable”, and thus, we might say “pragmatic” or “instrumental” character of Scientology (Hubbard, 1987, 1996). Similarly, Hubbard (1996: 71–73) states:

along with science, Scientology can achieve positive invariable results. Given the same conditions, one always gets the same results. And anyone given the same conditions can obtain the same results. What has happened is the *superstition* has been subtracted from spiritual studies.

However, other statements fit less straightforwardly. For example, where Hubbard (1996: 43) describes Scientology as “a precise and exact science, designed for an age of exact sciences”, such a description might be taken to trouble Wilson’s interpretation. Still, perhaps this is no more than use of the “language” or “discourse” of science. Again, however, there are frequent references in Hubbard’s writings to the *empirical* grounding of Scientology through recurring descriptions of its “factual” status, based on “discoveries”, “observation” and “testing”, including significantly the “discovery” (or “rediscovery”) of the “human soul”, given additional empiricist thrust when described as “a scientific, demonstrable fact” (1996: 29). Similarly, Hubbard speaks of “the train of intuition, observation and experiment which finally rediscovered, as a scientific fact, the soul, and gained methods of doing things to it, for it and with it with scientific certainty” (1996: 32).

Indeed, there is a theme in Scientology texts that presents Hubbard as what might be called the *ideal-typical empiricist*. Thus, in the shift from Dianetics to Scientology, Hubbard is presented as solely concerned with going where the “data” led him. Auditing, it is said, had produced “entirely too many unknowns”:

In particular, [Hubbard] cited “strange yearnings” for faraway lands, curious memories of distant times, and those with no observable training, suddenly, and quite inexplicably, speaking foreign tongues. Then, too, and herein lay the crux, there were cases soon on record, dozens actually, wherein those receiving Dianetics had not shown expected improvement until traumatic experience from what appeared to have been several lifetimes had been alleviated. (Hubbard, 1996: 52)

Thus, it appears Hubbard was led solely through empirical findings much in the manner of idealized images of scientific research—an image sharpened by contrast with the way others involved are presented. Hubbard’s role was said to be confined to “further research, lectures and the training of students”, with administration left to others; and while he is said to have insisted that past lives “clearly warranted further investigation”, he “found himself facing a board resolution to prohibit any and all further discussion” (1996: 52). Thus, Hubbard appears as the harassed researcher positioned in opposition to administrators whose motivations are apparently less “scientific” and rather more “bureaucratic”.

Much more could be said on this, but enough has been done to indicate that Wilson’s description of Scientology, although not without support, is nonetheless selective—as is even more clear from Atack’s description of the “mystique” surrounding the E-meter. To make sense of this we need to escape the confines of the “iron cage”, and here Whitehead holds the key.

Rationalization II: Charismatic Scientology

Whitehead⁴ disputes the “iron cage” version of rationalization with its insistence on the displacement of magical world-views by science. She (1974: 552) identifies a “critical ambiguity” in Weber’s account of rationalization: although he takes it to lead to disenchantment, he also refers to a more general and fundamental process of “the transformation wrought upon concepts of the charismatic as man [*sic*] seeks to fashion from them an overarching and universal system of meaning” (1974: 553). This involves increasing abstraction and universalization of knowledge and understanding, so that, for Whitehead, disenchantment is not the directing logic of modernity but only *one* outcome of the “translat[ion] into the remote distance” (1974: 554) of the magical-charismatic. This casts the tendency to develop impersonal conceptions of God in a different light; whereas Wilson associates this with a scientific orientation, Whitehead sees it rather as a consequence of a process of abstraction of which science itself is *only one* aspect. Science, then, becomes not a displacement but a distillation *out of* the charismatic.

This can be seen, Whitehead argues, in the ostensibly opposing developments of positivism and occultism. Positivism, she says:

bears witness to the fact that science served as a medium for the rechanneling of religious energies, for in it we recognize both an attitude of adulation toward technologic possibilities and an attempt at a comprehensive understanding of the human situation rather than the only partial understanding that science is legitimately able to provide. (Whitehead, 1974: 555)

Occultism shares this attitude, only it is unsatisfied with the non-charismatic inhibitions of the materialist world-view. So, while occultists may pursue the practical knowledge and control that science promises, they also desire the “supra-sensible powers and states of mind to which the mystic alludes” (1974: 564), envisaging an encompassing comprehension in which different knowledges meet in a fundamental unity: “The ‘contentless comprehension’ of the mystic is on some level the same as the cognitive control of the intellect which is again on some level related to the orderliness and regularity of nature’s most solid and material processes” (1974: 565). This vision is one we now readily recognize in much “New Age” belief (Hanegraaff, 1999; Heelas, 1996), but it is also apparent, Whitehead (1974: 569) argues, in science fiction:

The unarticulated charisma with which the Positivist endowed science and technological achievement was but a hair’s breadth away from the more expressly magical fantasies which the science fiction writer wove into it. In science fiction creations, the Positivist could entertain himself [*sic*] by hovering on the brink of the fantastic while the Occultist could find in the same creations the possibility of bringing the super-sensible realm down onto the plane of hard, commonsense factuality.

Accordingly, the boundary remains permeable, as is apparent in the incorporation of various “imponderables and improbables” (1974: 569) into science fiction, such as Ufology, “pseudo-science”, and various paranormal abilities and phenomena. Here then is the link to Hubbard, forged through John Campbell Jr. To Whitehead, Campbell is characteristic of science fiction writers who became more committed to the occult, moving from a “technological fantasist” to a humanist-charismatic in which science remained “the magic that works” (Whitehead, 1974: 572; cf. Berger, 1989) but needed humanizing. This was expressed in a turn inwards, seeking the source of greater power promised by science in the human mind—hence Campbell’s support for Dianetics.

Thus, for Whitehead the appeal of Scientology is rooted in the vision of comprehensive understanding desired by the occultist;⁵ where Wilson stresses “this-worldliness”, she sees this as the least interesting and important feature. Referring to the Dianetics stage as the “materialist version” (1974: 578) of Hubbard’s beliefs she argues that his “commitment to a sober non-charismatic science, if it existed at all, was never very deep” (1974: 580). With Scientology, he scrapped it becoming, she says, “a more honest man” with a set of ideas able to “account not only for past lives and the wild assortment of incidents which people found in their earlier lifetimes, but also for the whole range of uncanny phenomena which have hitherto been relegated to the realm of the supernatural” (1974: 580–581). Thus Scientology incorporates the practical (the concern with human relations and managing mundane problems), the mystical (“exteriorization and . . . the experience of expanded awareness or heightened consciousness” [1974: 582]), and the science fictional (the “Time Track”) in one. For the Scientologist, there is no division between these: in the mundane resides the magical, partly through the mastery of a range of techniques that facilitate everyday

affairs, and partly through the cultivation of internal states that qualitatively connect them.

This account has some advantages over Wilson's. It is more encompassing, incorporating the "iron cage" but also able to account for the "charismatic" experience of Atack. It also finds support within Hubbard's writings, where for example, he presents Scientology as the culmination not only of the world's religions, but also of the Western pursuit for knowledge through science. This is particularly prominent in an essay entitled "Philosophy Wins after 2000 Years" (Hubbard, 1996: 68–73), in which Hubbard depicts Scientology as the end-point of the intellectual ambitions of the Ancient Greeks. From their "natural philosophy", he asserts, come the modern "wonders" of cars, planes, atomic weapons, and satellites (1996: 68), only such "material things" were not what the Greeks had sought so much as "understanding of the spirit of man [*sic*] and his relationship to the universe", an ambition that "drowned in the avalanche of superstition" of the "Dark Ages". Now, however, the "higher mathematics and electronics" required have been developed, except they are used to "build . . . bombs to wipe out the mankind no one had ever understood" (1996: 68). And so, he says, the Ancients "failed":

Until today . . . Until Scientology. And in it the goals of Greek philosophy live again. Using modern developments in the sciences, it became possible to approach again the basic problems: What is man? What is his relationship to the universe? What is the universe? Scientology, after a third of a century of careful research and investigation can answer, with scientific truth those questions and prove the answers. (1996: 68–69)

It is difficult to see how this passage might be interpreted from the "iron cage" viewpoint—except, presumably, as an example of the "language" of science. But the type of appeal seems to be rather different from statements where empirical or pragmatic matters are stressed and Whitehead's conception of comprehensive understanding seems more fitting. Nonetheless, insightful and persuasive though her interpretation is, she does not push far enough the question of why—and how—rationalization is ambiguous. Her account is in danger of replacing a monolithic disenchanted logic with an equally monolithic enchanted one. For example, she (1974: 581) claims that with the move to Scientology, Hubbard lost the "science-minded" among his followers. As discussed below, however, Wallis' data suggests the motivations of Dianeticians and Scientologists were much the same.

What is needed is to break with the idea of rationalization as an unfolding logic to begin to think of it instead as an outcome of active interpretative work by members of society. Doing so provides a means of explaining Weber's ambiguity. If we treat rationalization as a logic, it inevitably appears as something that determines human action; that this "logic" is ambiguous, however, provides the clue as to why this is inadequate—because the meaning of "rationalization" is a matter of the interpretative understanding of action. Accordingly, whether or not action is said to be "rational" or "rationalized", and in what sense it may be so, are matters always open to interpretation and argument. Ambiguity arises from this. If "rationalization" is

thought of as a way of reading action, as a cultural resource that members may use to characterize action, it becomes something that people are continuously involved in actively working out and engaging with. This becomes clearer from consideration of Wallis' data.

Rationalization III: Charisma and the Iron Cage

Wallis' study, justly famous though it is for its insightful analysis, is nonetheless fraught with pervasive tensions that undermine his attempt to construct theoretical understanding. On close analysis, these tensions turn out to arise from the ambiguity of rationalization. They become apparent in his attempt to understand Scientology in relation to more general characteristics of modern society, especially where science is discussed. I will first review his account to bring out these points of equivocation before moving toward an alternative position that stresses ambivalence over the meaning of science in modern society. This involves a detailed critique of Wallis' interpretation of the motivations of Dianetics and Scientologists and a re-interpretation of his data.⁶

Wallis' account is something of a hybrid, bearing features of both Wilson's and Whitehead's views in an uncomfortable, unreconciled form. His debt to Wilson is explicit in categorizing Scientology as a "manipulationist movement" that "offers a set of theories and techniques which explain the situation of the individual in this life, and provide means of improving that situation" (Wallis, 1976: 245). Similarly, salvation is seen as a matter of solving "this-worldly" problems and, in accord with this, Scientology is interpreted as a religion arising out of a process of rationalization associated with secularization. It arises in a wider social context marked by spreading bureaucratization associated with a competitive market economy that encourages efficiency of production in the meeting of consumer demands. These demands arise from the pluralistic and socially differentiated marketplace in which there is less felt need for a cosmology than "a solution to anxiety and other sources of psychological concern" (1976: 247). Scientology caters to this market through its manipulationist appeal employing highly developed "techniques of salesmanship and public relations" (1976: 248), albeit "packaged in a rhetoric of science" (1976: 247). Thus,

[it] represents a logical outcome of the incorporation of the Protestant Ethic into Western culture. Rationalization of life in the world has led to the rationalization of the institution through which salvation is secured. Rational calculation has led to the provision of salvation as a standardized and differentiated commodity available at a set rate per unit. (1976: 248)

It is, we might say, the Fordism—or even the McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2000)—of religion.

So far so iron cage; but other points made by Wallis trouble this account. There are, for example, the descriptions of Hubbard as a man of "powerful personality" (Wallis, 1976: 248), a charismatic figure who, from his initial status as a "thaumaturge" or "magical healer" (1976: 248), developed into

a “mystagogue” (1976: 249), and finally an “exemplary prophet” (1976: 250). This occurred in the shift from Dianetics to Scientology, which provided Hubbard with a “transcendental legitimation for his authority” (1976: 249). Hubbard’s self-presentation became as one who had “penetrated the realm of the supernatural and there secured knowledge which would restore to men [*sic*] their long lost spiritual abilities” (1976: 249). Accordingly, Scientology came to lay “increasing stress upon its ethical content” (1976: 250) and its character as “a *philosophy of life* rather than merely a set of techniques for therapeutic or self-improvement” (1976: 250).⁷

Significantly, Wallis interprets this development as rationalization, only now in its charismatic sense arising from difficulties within Dianetics, including its failure to explain why individuals experience suffering, the “empirical phenomena” (1976: 252) of “past-lives”, and the failure to produce “clears”. In offering explanations, Scientology rationalized in the sense of accounting for failures and absences by reference to “more ultimate realms” (1976: 252). It also rationalized organizationally and in its means of ministrations, which, with the introduction of the E-meter, became “calculated and measurable” (1976: 253), while training became standardized and impersonal.

Here, then, the ambiguity of rationalization is apparent. In one—“iron cage”—sense, rationalization is associated with bureaucratization resting on a logic of instrumental reasoning directed at efficiency maximization through the standardization of production administered impersonally through specified rules and procedures. Thus, Scientology is “pragmatic”, “manipulationist”, “therapeutic”, oriented to “concrete” problem-solving, grounded “empirically”, and in a variety of other organizational and administrative ways, “rationalized”. But in a second—“charismatic”—sense, rationalization refers to a generalized process of universalization that arises out of the attempt to resolve perceived internal inconsistencies or lacunae within a framework of belief. Critically, this involves the introduction of an explanation referring to “more ultimate realms” of a more “spiritual” nature. Now Scientology becomes a “philosophy of life”, with emphasis on its “moral” and “ethical” character. This “charismatic” sense of rationalization as conceptual elaboration is not necessarily in conjunction with its “iron cage” sense as disenchantment. The case of Scientology might be taken to suggest that, insofar as there is or was any such conjunction, this may have been no more than a relatively short-term historical coincidence that should not be taken as the end-point of a singular or unified logic of development. To treat it otherwise is to ignore the active work of human interpretative understanding, in which rationalization is historically located in specific attempts to develop and elaborate ethics of conduct by specific social groups and individuals in relation to their self-perceived interests and understandings, and their modes of self-expression—in a word, their rhetorics.

Here, Wallis’ data on the motivations of Dianeticists and Scientologists are helpful, especially regarding their perceptions of science. However, his own analysis, captivated as it is by the “iron cage”, is less helpful and needs first to be dismantled. Wallis devotes more attention to Dianeticists than Scientologists in respect of these matters, but suggests the two have

much in common. Thus, I treat his discussion of the former as applying also to the latter.

Crucial to Wallis' analysis are two asymmetries: one concerning Dianeticians' views of science; the other their motivational accounts. The first asymmetry arises in a theory of the "unstable self" he uses to explain Dianetics. The "unstable self" is an anomic individual living in a social milieu marked by the loss of traditional forms of interaction and bases of identity-formation, undermined by the rationalization of production. The resulting social mobility and associated achievement orientation add to a pervasive sense of anomie as individuals face a continuously moving "horizon of expectations" (1976: 64). Moreover, as the structure of social opportunities fails to match demand for achievement, there is a persistent sense of dissatisfaction and frustrated expectations perceived as individual personal failure—people blame themselves rather than society. This produces two "patterns of adaptation": withdrawal, and "mobility Machiavellianism". The latter is marked by the use of any available means to attain the desired goal, including a strategy of "seeking esoteric means of securing mobility through the acquisition of hidden knowledge" (1976: 65).

Wallis applies this to the most common type of motivation he found among Dianeticians, the "problem-solver" concerned with "self-improvement" (1976: 62); two other types, "truth-seeker" and "career-oriented" are said to be less common. Importantly, the same types of motivation mark Scientologists, with the "problem-solver" again being "dominant" (1976: 167). Wallis points out, however, that this theory alone cannot account for why Dianetics (or Scientology) in particular should be seen by individuals as an "acceptable and legitimate solution" (1976: 66) for their problems. Among the reasons given here are ones that show ambivalence towards science: science appeared to Dianeticians as holding the promise of fulfilment, but was perceived as having failed to deliver in certain key respects regarding social, psychological, and physical well-being. Wallis makes three points about Dianeticians' views of science that are especially important:

1. Their "conception of science was . . . a *lay conception* . . . technologic and instrumental in form" (1976: 67, emphasis added), i.e. they viewed science as essentially a means of practical intervention and their "test of standing of any body of knowledge was: does it work?" (1976: 67).
2. They held "a belief in the *élitism of science*" (1976: 67), seeing the scientific community as "an élitist group with vested interests in the promotion of particular theories and practices, unwilling to accommodate new ideas or even to give them a fair hearing" (1976: 67). Accordingly, they expected innovators to use "marginal" means—including "metaphysical or occult groups, marginal healing, philosophical or psychological movements, or science fiction" (1976: 67)—as forums in which to expound their ideas.
3. Relatedly, they "held a belief in the *immanence of knowledge*—that it was freely available and anyone who applied himself [*sic*] might expect to secure radically new or deeper insights into the nature of the world" (1976: 67), something that seemed to be offered by science fiction, "filling

in the lacunae of scientific knowledge or competence with fictional or speculative detail, and blurring the distinction between the empirical and the desirable" (1976: 67).

This description points to the kind of contrast already encountered between Wilson and Whitehead: Wilson's account stressing the first characteristic; Whitehead's the second and especially the third. With this conjunction of attitudes, Dianeticians turned away from orthodox science and medicine to unorthodox, "fringe" science.

However, while Wallis brings this ambivalence to the fore, his interpretation does not deal with it adequately. In the first place, his notion of the "unstable self" presents an oddly dualistic image of people as, on the one hand, systemic puppets and, on the other, self-conscious system-manipulators. People are puppets in that they seem to be victims of the processes of rationalized bureaucratization that produces their sense of endemic anomic failure. As such, they appear as falsely conscious cultural dopes, living in a permanently frustrated state with no insight into the true source of their confusion, which they wrongly attribute to themselves rather than the real culprit, society. But, at apparently the same time, some of them strangely transmogrify into manipulative Machiavellians, shiftily hunting out an esoteric opiate in a vain attempt to satisfy their addiction to "mobility".

The difficulty deepens, however, because neither of these characterizations is entirely adequate to capture the kinds of people Dianeticians appear to be. Based on Wallis' description, they seem far from either anomic failures or deviant Machiavellians; on the contrary, they might well be taken as astute, informed critics of the institutional apparatus of belief embodied in orthodox science. Although Wallis labels their view of science a "lay conception", there are three problems with this: first, many Dianeticians were relatively highly educated with academic, scientific, technical, and professional backgrounds (Wallis, 1976: 55ff.); second, as Wallis himself notes, this "lay conception" "has from time to time been offered as an academic account" (1976: 67) and so is not without professional validation; third, their critique of the institutionalized social structure of science in terms of its "elitism" and "conservatism" is also far from unsupported in professional academic literature (e.g. Feyerabend, 1979). In what sense then is this conception "lay"? Not only could many Dianeticians claim professional status, but their conception of science has much in common with professional characterizations, whether those of professional supporters (as "something that works") or professional critics (as a hidebound elitist community).

Why, then, does Wallis label their views "lay"? Perhaps because this is required by the theory of the "unstable self", essentially a theory of social pathology and deviance. In labelling them "lay", Wallis makes Dianeticians' views of science implicitly deviant—an ill-informed, non-professional misunderstanding that therefore requires further explanation. In effect, Wallis equates uncritical acceptance of science with normality requiring no further explanation, but a critical conception of science is treated as deviant and in need of special explanation—an example of asymmetrical "sociology of error" (Bloor, 1976) that can be corrected simply by abandoning the idea

that the views in question are “lay”. However, this also undermines the explanatory edifice Wallis builds as becomes more apparent from his treatment of Dianeticians’ motivations.

Unlike their conception of science, Wallis treats Dianeticians’ motivational accounts transparently as direct, authentic descriptions of their mental states. Even so, an asymmetry emerges as he assigns some accounts higher significance than others. Thus, the “truth-seeker” is assigned a second-order status—indeed, what amounts to a self-misunderstanding—in contrast to the “problem-solver”. The “problem-solver” is given priority because it is more common; it also fits the theory of the “unstable self”. It is true that the theory also explains the “truth-seeker” motivation, but this is treated as a second-level response to the first-level motivation produced by the sense of anomic failure. Thus, although Wallis treats all the motivational statements as authentic self-accounts, he assigns them different statuses, in effect making some *more* authentic than others. Here, then, we see the second asymmetry.

The difficulty here, however, is that Wallis (1976: 63) also tells us Dianeticians’ motivations were “multi-determined”; significantly, this also applies to Scientologists (1976: 169). Thus, any given individual might refer to more than one type of motivation. This might then imply that Dianeticians (or Scientologists) themselves did not necessarily assign different types of motivation the same unequal statuses as Wallis. What needs to be considered here is a different way of treating motivational accounts, less as transparent descriptions of authentic mental states and more as responses to requests for motivational accounts (or what are taken to be such requests) that are considered to count as acceptable, i.e. as constituting credible and legitimate responses. Thus, Wallis’ data can be reinterpreted as a record of the kinds of things that are considered by Dianeticians and Scientologists as constituting credible and legitimate accounts of motivation in response to requests for such from an interviewer. Looked at in this way, the grounds for assigning some accounts a different order of significance—in effect, a higher truth value—on the basis of their relative quantity are undermined. The greater quantity of certain kinds of accounts may simply mean that respondents considered these more acceptable in the context of the interview. They should not then be treated any differently to others. Rather, an adequate sociological understanding must be able to account for the full range of motivational statements without assigning in what amounts to an arbitrary fashion greater significance to only some. All the accounts should be treated equivalently—symmetrically—as things that are regarded by followers as qualifying as “motivations”.

Given this, the “truth-seeker” motivation should not be treated as any less significant than the “problem-solver”; but the theory of the “unstable self” relies on doing this. Moreover, the type of motivation it downplays is precisely that which is in closest accord with Dianeticians’ conception of science. The upshot is that Wallis’ account systematically excludes the possibility that Dianeticians may have been genuinely motivated by a search for some alternative kind of understanding which they had been unable to find in science, not through misconception but through an informed critique of the ideo-

logical self-representation and institutionalized limitations of science—an awareness that science is not all it is cracked up to be. To be clear, it is not that such an account of Dianetics does *not* appear in Wallis' study; it is rather that when he turns to sociological explanation it disappears behind the bizarre puppet-Machiavellians of the "unstable self". What is needed then is a way of understanding Dianeticists' motivations that does not assign them different statuses but treats them as equivalent *possible* motivations. This can be done by treating them as constructs drawn from available cultural resources for the purposes of presenting meaningful self-understandings. They are in other words, *discursive or rhetorical resources* potentially available to members of modern society to be used in the construction of self-understandings and characterizations of action. This points to a quite different way of thinking about rationalization and thus of understanding Scientology.

Rationalization IV: Toward a Rhetorical Resolution

What needs to be recognized is that to try to understand Scientology in terms of a singular logic of rationalization is actually to misunderstand it. This is clear from certain features of Wallis' own account. It is not just that charisma and the iron cage do not necessarily coincide, but that they may run in what seem to be opposing directions. For example, Wallis (1976: 232; cf. 229–230), echoing Atask, repeatedly refers to the "mystery" and "undoubted mystification" with which Hubbard's writings were perceived; and as seen above, Hubbard himself was often presented and perceived as a charismatic figure. This shows that "rationalization" is a matter of human interpretation and representation. As such, it cannot be understood as an external logic that imposes itself upon people, but is a cultural resource over which groups and individuals struggle to achieve and accomplish legitimacy.

Support for this comes from Wallis' discussion of "nihilation" and "legitimation", i.e. the discursive strategies employed by Scientology to undermine opposing beliefs and justify supporting beliefs. Nihilation involves endowing external challenges "with a negative cognitive status, and accounting for [them] in terms of concepts drawn from the accepted ideology" (Wallis, 1976: 234); while "legitimation" is defined as "the means by which the prevailing social order and institutional practices of the movement are symbolically represented as historically necessary and morally right" (1976: 237). Scientology's nihilation strategy centred on applying a "general conspiracy theory" (1976: 234) to critics, notably the medical and psychiatric professions (see note 2). These groups are presented as part of a broad plot to dominate the world against which Scientology stands as a lone opponent—a characterization that works both to provide effective proof of the claim and to account for why these groups attack the Church. Moreover, their opposition is interpreted in terms of Scientology's own concepts, so that in the final step of nihilation critical opposition is presented as a confirmation of Scientology's beliefs.⁸ Legitimation, on the other hand, involves public presentations using "the rhetoric of the wider society" (1976: 237),

such as the use of both “science” and “religion” to define Scientology. Wallis states that a rhetoric of science was more prominent in Scientology up to the early 1960s, after which “religious” rhetoric became more common. Nonetheless, as seen above, “scientific” rhetoric runs throughout the language and organization of the Church and it continues to employ an extensive technical vocabulary that may contribute to the sense of mystification Wallis detects.

However, such rhetoric is not transparent in its implications for public responses and it is especially significant that representations of science are central to *both* the nihilation and legitimation strategies the Church adopts. Thus, although Scientologists adopt the “language of science” and some at least still see it as “scientific” in character, what this “scientific” representation means shows some variation. In particular, it varies between a “this-worldly” pragmatic empiricism—Scientology “works”—and a means of access to some “other-worldly” realm identifiable only through the charismatic qualities attributed to Hubbard himself, his mysterious “technical” vocabulary, and the equally mysterious machinery of auditing. So, in one version Scientology is completely plain and clear, but in another altogether mysterious; in one the test of Scientology is its ordinary practical application, in the other its capacity to provide extraordinary knowledge and abilities. The point to stress is that these two images of Scientology are precisely *contrasting images of science* in modern culture. Science is *both* entirely immediate and practical *and* entirely other; it is both “commonsense” and “not commonsense” (Gregory and Miller, 1998: 93); both simple application and impenetrable gibberish; both “this-worldly” and “other-worldly”. It is both of these things because it is *made to be both through rhetorical representation*. Thus, in making use of the rhetoric of science, Scientology articulates this dilemmatical (Locke, 1999) character—and thereby demonstrates the inadequacy of a monolithic logic of rationalization to comprehend it.

This same point emerges from consideration of the use of science for legitimation. Although science plays a central role in Scientologists’ means of legitimation, it is also the target of nihilation—or, at least, certain specific groups who claim scientific authority are. This resonates with the critique of science Wallis found in motivations, which include a critique of the elitism of institutional science but also a desire for a type of knowledge or understanding that transcends the orthodox limits. Here, the interest in science fiction is indicative—science fiction encapsulates the sense of “something other” and the promise of a merger between practicality and aspiration. Here also is the significance of the fact that motivations are found in combination: motivations may include appeals both to practical efficacy and to spiritual transcendence. These should not be understood as separate “types”, but as formulations of different aspects of the *same complex of science* and its associated *ambivalence* in modern society. They are refractions of a greater crystalline structure, an order of discourse that in total constitutes the modern understanding of science. Rationalization does not capture this order, because it is itself a refraction of it; to change the metaphor, it is one set of threads within the total warp and woof of science in modernity. As such, rationalization is a rhetoric, or set of rhetorics, as is sug-

gested by the ambiguity in characterizations derivable from Weber and employed uncritically by Wallis to account for Scientology.

Conclusion

As shown in this discussion, the common feature of sociological accounts of Scientology is their grounding in an idea of rationalization; however, this varies between the “iron cage” and “charisma”. In Wilson’s conception, rationalization refers to a process of advancing instrumentalism that has reconstructed religious sensibility and organization in essentially material and “scientific” terms. Here, science is understood as the dominating expression of such disenchanting logic. Whitehead, however, conceives of rationalization as a process of universalization in understanding within which science stands as only one expression of the desire for a form of comprehensive knowledge. As such, religion, while it may attempt to accommodate science, does so only with the aim of transcendence. In Wallis’ account, meanwhile, while both conceptions are recognized in the motivations of Scientologists, they are left in unresolved tension and ambiguity.

It has been argued here that in order to resolve this we need to see that the ambiguity arises precisely because attitudes toward science are themselves ambiguous. More correctly, science is found in alternative contrasting representations in both public and professional characterizations, which is to say that science may be constructed differently in different social contexts to accomplish different ends. Thus, as is shown above, science is put to the service of Scientology both as a means of legitimation and as a focus of nihilation. This is possible because science is open to a contrasting characterization as a positivistically inspired vision of the grand unity of knowledge and as a materially grounded socially-restrictive community of practitioners; science, thus, both transcends the confines of immediate social interests and yet is also enclosed and restricted by those interests. It may then be constructed differently to suit different specific purposes.

The ambiguity of rationalization is an outcome of this ambivalence about science. Science is open to different construction in accord with different social contexts, purposes, and interests—including those of sociologists themselves. Traditionally, sociologists have tended to draw on an image of science that is monolithic; equally, they have tended to view its public meaning monolithically (Locke, 1999, 2001). The “classic” rationalization scenario—the disenchanting “iron cage”—is precisely an example of such a monolithic construction. However, the “charismatic” version of rationalization, while it construes the specific character of science differently is nonetheless equally monolithic in its conception of the public meaning of science. Science here is understood as a manifestation of the urge to transcendence and thus is assumed to have only this single meaning for Scientologists. As Wallis shows, however, science means many things to Scientologists and hence monolithic notions of rationalization—whether as a “logic” of disenchantment or, to the contrary, a “logic” of enchantment—are equally flawed.

If anything is clear from this it is that rationalization is not a “logic”; at the very least, it is more than one “logic”. How is it then to be understood? First, we need to recognize the dependence of notions of rationalization on particular constructions of science. But if science itself is open to different characterizations, then the idea of rationalization as an analytical description of modernity must be cast into doubt; rather, rationalization appears as a construction derived from overly narrow conceptions of science—a construction that is then employed as an explanatory resource to account for the assumed public meaning of science that is itself an artefact of the concept! Put another way, rationalization should be understood as only *one* version of science and its public meaning (and an ambiguous one at that) that is drawn from the full range of publicly available resources to characterize science and its meaning. Accordingly, rationalization cannot provide an adequate understanding of this range of public meanings; hence, for one thing, it appears ambiguous, and for another, it does not do full justice to the diversity of actual meanings attached to and drawn from science by Scientists.

If we think of science as a cultural resource—that is, as something that may be drawn on for a range of different social purposes and accordingly have attached to it a range of different possible meanings—we can then recognize that ideas of rationalization are simply part of those resources. Among the things those resources may be used for are legitimation and nihilation, or what might be thought of as persuasive work to encourage members of society to take up particular types of belief. Equally, as part of this persuasive work, resources of rationalization itself may be used, whether to characterize and justify actions and beliefs as of “therapeutic” value, or to characterize and justify them as producing transcendent states of being. Or, of course, they may be drawn on as instruments of analytical explanation, but to do so is in effect to treat only some types of characterization as “correct” and others, implicitly or explicitly, as “error”. A full sociological understanding of the public meaning of science needs to step back from such partial characterizations and take stock of the full range of usages of science by contemporary social groups and movements, not least those who make religious appeals. Such appeals should not be dismissed as simply wrong, or misleading, or misunderstandings of science, or anything else of the kind. To do so is to impose a preferred notion of science—often, as seen here, linked to a conception of rationalization—when what we should be attempting to do is to understand the full range of ways in which science is used and the social purposes it is used for. That science may be turned to religious ends is not an outcome of rationalization, whether of the “iron cage” or “charisma”. It is rather a consequence of the socially constructed nature of science that it may be turned to support ends that other constructions of science see as quite at odds with its nature. A greater understanding of this process promises to provide clearer insight into NRMs that draw on science by viewing them less as a consequence of a supposed external “logic” dictated from without by science and more as actively created human constructions arising within a world where, while science may reign, precisely what that reign means for ethics of conduct remains open to interpretation.

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NOTES

¹. In this article, the term "science" should be taken to encompass technology as well.

². Wallis (1976: 31–38) examines the parallels between Dianetics and other psychotherapies. Scientology has long-standing disagreements with established psychotherapeutic professions—see Aldridge (2000: 53); Citizens Commission on Human Rights (2000); Kent (1999).

³. The principle of symmetry has been most fully developed in the sociology of scientific knowledge—see Bloor (1976), Potter (1996: Chapter 1).

⁴. This discussion focuses on Whitehead (1974). A broadly similar argument is also found in Whitehead (1987).

⁵. Hubbard is said to have had direct involvement with occultism through his relationship with Jack Parsons (Miller, 1987: Chapter 7). Parsons, a rocket scientist and disciple of Aleister Crowley, was a prime example of a "scientist-occultist".

⁶. In addition to engaging in (covert) participant observation of Scientology, Wallis held interviews with participants providing detailed and thorough documentation of their beliefs on which the present article is deeply reliant.

⁷. A recent Danish study (Sundby-Sørensen, 1998) presents some counter evidence to the effect that Danish Scientologists see Hubbard more as a "researcher" than a "philosopher" (1998: 169). This is taken to indicate a greater interest in therapy or self-improvement. It is notable however that Sundby-Sørensen says she was corrected when she referred to Hubbard's "death": "Hubbard was not dead, he had merely decided to drop his body and could pick up another one whenever he wanted" (1998: 167)—hardly a "this-worldly" orientation! The crucial point, however, is that for Scientologists the categories of "researcher" and "philosopher" should not necessarily be taken to mean the same thing as they do for social researchers; indeed, if we follow Whitehead, their meaning is likely to be conflated. In what follows, I outline an alternative way of thinking about responses given to social researchers' enquiries that may help to account for why "this-worldly" orientations appear to be more common.

⁸. These techniques, as would be expected, have their parallels in other contemporary movements such as creation science (Locke, 1999).

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