

Andreas E. Buss

The Economic Ethics of World Religions and their Laws

An Introduction to Max Weber's Comparative Sociology

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To my grandsons Jona and Mika

PREFACE

Max Weber is today perhaps the classic author in the cultural and social sciences, recognized by scientists in many subject areas and on all continents. But his widely felt intellectual presence has not eliminated wide-ranging discussions about his intentions and the foundations of his work. Many use his œuvre only as a quarry for concepts and ideas, unaware that only a coherent and systematic reading will penetrate to the foundations of his thought, open up its possibilities, but also its inner tensions.

This is particularly true with regard to his essays on «The Economic Ethics of World Religions» and to his much shorter writings on the laws of these religions, for they appear to be based on an inner contradiction. On the one hand, Weber insisted that only by specialization, by putting on blinders, so to speak, the scientist can achieve something that will endure. But, on the other hand, he wrote about religions and cultures and their legal systems – in India, China, Buddhism, ancient Judaism –, and he commented on other cultures - Islam, Orthodox Christianity, and occidental Christianity - about which he certainly could not claim much specialized knowledge. What characterizes his œuvre, however, is his approach: he proposed a refined and coherent method of comparative social study with a largely historical dimension which was intended to contribute to the understanding of the characteristics of Western culture even when he wrote about Asian cultures. At the same time he asked which attitude towards the world remains for Western man, and what kind of conduct and which price and sacrifices it requires.

Weber's questions are not self-evident for sinologists, indologists, semi-tists or historians of Christianity, and they are also new for scholars and students of comparative religions and of the comparative history of law. For Westerners they provide a wider than usual perspective. At the same time, Weber did not want to teach the people of Asia anything about how their cultures should develop. His approach allows people of all cultures to turn the mirror around and, while adapting Weber's approach to their perspective, to look at their own roots. May this book contribute to the dissemination of Weber's comparative macrosociological analysis and of his understanding of the peculiarities of Occidental rationalism.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AC *The Protestant Ethic Debate. Max Weber's Replies to his Critics 1907-1910.* Edited and translated by D. Chalcraft, A. Harrington & M. Shields. Liverpool University Press 2001
- AJ Max Weber *Ancient Judaism* New York : The Free Press 1967
- ASS Max Weber *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik* Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1924 (1988)
- ASW Max Weber *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1924 (1988)
- CMW *Max Weber. Collected Methodological Writings.* Edited by H. H. Bruun & S. Whimster, translated by H. H. Bruun, London : Routledge 2012
- ES Max Weber *Economy and Society* New York : Bedminster Press 1968
- FMW *From Max Weber : Essays in Sociology* Translated and edited by H.H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills New York : Oxford University Press 1958
- GARS Max Weber *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* vol. 1 (1920); vol. 2 (Hinduismus und Buddhismus) 1921; vol. 3 (Das antike Judentum) 1920 Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck)
- GEH Max Weber *General Economic History* New Brunswick : Transaction 1981
- HCP Max Weber *The History of Commercial Partnerships in the Middle Ages* Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2003
- MWG *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) since 1984
- PE Max Weber *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* Translated by T. Parsons; London & New York : Routledge 2001
- PE 1 Max Weber *The Protestant Ethic and the «Spirit» of Capitalism and Other Writings.* Edited and translated by P. Baehr & G. Wells. London : Penguin 2002
- PE 2 Max Weber *Kritiken und Antikritiken. Die protestantische Ethik II* Gütersloh: Mohn 1978
- PW Max Weber *Political Writings* (ed. By P. Lassman & R. Speirs) Cambridge U. Press 1994
- RC Max Weber *The Religion of China* New York/London : MacMillan 1951
- RI Max Weber *The Religion of India* New York : The Free Press 1958
- RSM Max Weber *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, Southern Illinois U. Press 1958
- SAC Max Weber *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations* (transl. by R. I. Frank) London : New Left Books 1976
- WG Max Weber *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1972

