

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The German scholar Max Weber (1864-1920) left a wide-ranging oeuvre, including political and methodological essays as well as essays in the field of political sociology, the sociology of law, of economics, of religion and of music. Although some of his major publications remained fragments, the new German edition of his collected writings (MWG), including letters, contains more than forty volumes. Weber's work stands out by its combination of empirical research and systematic thought. What characterizes most of it is his comparative approach which includes his views of Western Antiquity and the Middle Ages as well as of the major Asian cultures. His studies of what he called the «world religions» are probably the most obvious and important example. In this introductory chapter the necessary foundations will be laid for the understanding and interpretation of Weber's comparative studies.

### The Texts

«The Economic Ethics of World Religions» is the title of a part of Max Weber's *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion), Vol. 1-3, Tübingen 1920/21, a three volume publication which also contains his revised essays on the Protestant ethic and the Protestant sects. The essays on the world religions (mainly Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism and ancient Judaism) were originally published between 1915 and 1919 in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik*, a journal of which Weber was one of the editors. A year before his death in 1920 Weber revised and extended these earlier publications and started to publish them as a whole under the title *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*.

Volume I contains a Preceding or Preliminary Remark ( *Vorbemerkung*, translated, not quite correctly, by T. Parsons as «Author's Introduction»), the extended essay on «The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism» (originally published in 1904/05), and a revised version of an article entitled «The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism». This is followed by the revised «Introduction» to the section on «The Economic Ethics of

World Religions», then the substantially extended essay on «Confucianism and Taoism» and finally an «Intermediary Reflection». Volume II contains the slightly revised essay on «Hinduism and Buddhism», and Volume III contains «Ancient Judaism» and a short text entitled «The Pharisees».

Weber's early death prevented him from doing more, but readers of his letters, now published in the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* (MWG), will come to realize that his ambitions had gone further. He had also wanted to add studies on Islam and on Christianity (MWG II/9: 69-70) and, as an announcement of his publisher Siebeck in the fall of 1919 indicated, the depiction of Christianity was to be divided into ancient Christianity, oriental Christianity and occidental Christianity.<sup>1</sup> In fact, after his tour of Asia Weber wanted to return to the Occident with a widened perspective and, as he also pointed out in the announcement, the object of all these completed and planned essays would be the question of the particular characteristics of the Occident and of the development of the European citizen. Today we can only draw some indications of what he might have written on the economic ethics of Islam and Christianity from some parts of his work which is traditionally known as *Economy and Society* (ES), particularly the sections on the sociology of religion, the sociology of domination and the sociology of law. These sections in *Economy and Society* were considered by Weber as complementary and explanatory to the collection of essays on the «Economic Ethics of World Religions». In particular the section on «The Sociology of Law» (Chapter VIII in ES) contains short paragraphs on the laws of all major world religions, including Islam.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 This announcement, prepared by Weber himself, has been quoted in Johannes Winckelmann: *Max Weber's hinterlassenes Hauptwerk*, Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1986, p. 45/46; now also in MWG I. 19, p. 28
  - 2 According to F. Tenbruck (in his article of 1980 on the thematic unity in the works of Max Weber) the continuing insights of Weber's sociology cannot be found in *Economy and Society*, but in the systematic chapters of the *Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion*, namely the «Preliminary Remark», the «Introduction», and the «Intermediate Reflection», where the realization of the inner logic of religious ideas came to him. But it should not be forgotten that Weber himself saw the relationship between *Economy and Society* and the *Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion* as complementary and explanatory, as clearly stated in the first footnote of the «Introduction» to the «Economic Ethics of World Religions» which, regrettably, has not been translated by Gerth and Mills in their volume *From Max Weber*. The editorial history of *Economy and Society* contains a number of disputes. A new controversy has flared up since its publication in five volumes in the *Max Weber*

The *Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion* have never been translated into English as a whole. Instead, separate translations which leave the reader unaware of the interrelations have been published of the various parts. The «Prefatory Note» or «Author's Introduction» which introduces the whole three-volume series and which at the same time sums up the results, has been included by Talcott Parsons with his translation of «The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism» in a separate volume. The «Introduction» and the «Intermediate Reflection» which are of major importance for the understanding of the theoretical structure of the argument, have also been published separately under partially new and misleading titles («The Social Psychology of World Religions» and «Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions» respectively) by Gerth and Mills in their *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (FMW). The essay on «Confucianism and Taoism» has been translated and published separately by H. Gerth under the misleading title *The Religion of China* and the essay on «Hinduism and Buddhism» has been translated and published separately by H. Gerth and D. Martindale under the equally misleading title *The Religion of India. The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*. No wonder, then, that the interrelations between these works which must be interpreted in each other's light, are often misunderstood in the English-speaking scholarly community.

Equally important, however, for the understanding of many reactions to Weber's writings among specialists of Asian studies is the poor quality of some of the translations. Some of them are a disgrace.<sup>3</sup> Not only have most English translations been given new titles which do not reflect Weber's intentions, but passages of major importance have been subjected to major changes. One example should suffice here:

Indian scholars, especially if they were interested in modern development, have often taken exception to the following statement:

«It is quite evident that no community dominated by inner powers of this sort (caste order and karma theory - A.B.) could out of its substance arrive at the

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*Gesamtausgabe*. What was known as Weber's sociology of law is now called «Die Entwicklungsbedingungen des Rechts» in MWG I, 22-3. (The developmental conditions of the law). *Vide* H. Orihara «From a torso with a wrong head to five disjointed body parts without a head» in *Max Weber Studies* 3,2 (2003).

3 A revealing article on the subject of the English translations of Weber's studies on world religions has been Kantowsky's *Max Weber on India and Indian interpretations of Weber»* in: *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (NS) vol. 16, no. 2 (1982)

«spirit» of capitalism. It was also unable to take over the economically and technically finished form as an artifact, as occurred in Japan. There appeared here clearly and undoubtedly greater difficulties than in Japan.» (RI: 325).

If we compare this translation with the German original, we find that the statement «It was also unable to take over the economic and technically finished form as an artifact» simply does not appear in the German text. Therefore, a more correct translation would be:

«It is quite evident that no community dominated by inner powers of this sort could out of its substance arrive at the «spirit» of capitalism. Even the take-over of the economically and technically finished form as an artifact, as occurred in Japan, encountered clearly and undoubtedly greater difficulties than in Japan...» (GARS II: 359)

Clearly, this passage expresses a very different idea from what the English reader, interested in modern development, is led to believe. In fact, the breakup of the closely interrelated essays into seemingly unrelated monographs and the plethora of incorrect or misleading translations of passages in Weber's essays have produced a certain lack of interest in Weber's general intentions, and it is therefore not surprising that many misunderstandings have arisen. For the moment we may leave aside the fact that an appropriate understanding of these essays is possible only on the basis of some knowledge of Weber's methodological writings and of his sociology of domination and of law.

What were Weber's intentions?

It was not Weber's intention to provide us with a well-rounded picture of major world religions, or with a series of monographs.

«The studies do not claim to be complete analyses of cultures, however brief. On the contrary, in every culture they quite deliberately emphasize elements in which it differs from Western civilization. They are, hence, definitely oriented to the problems which seem important for the understanding of Western culture from this view-point.» (PE: XL).

Weber knew that a more balanced presentation would have to add other features, but he was interested in certain features of religions from a definite point of view, namely how they related to economic rationalism of the type which has developed in the modern Occident. In other words, he studied Asian cultures only to the extent that he deemed necessary to find points of comparison with Occidental characteristics as all his questioning

turned around the uniqueness of the West. Moreover, Weber was well aware of the sketchy character of these studies and of his inability to read the sources in their original language. If he published them nevertheless, it was because he thought that they might perhaps be useful as a supplement to the problems raised in the sociology of religion and in the sociology of economics. That studies of this kind or, in fact, of any kind, can never be «final», was obvious to him.

Before considering Weber's intentions in «The Economic Ethics of World Religions», it is necessary to remember his purpose in the essay on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. There he had analysed the economic impact and relevance of the Protestant ethic for the spirit of capitalism (as opposed to its economic determinedness), and he had not been concerned with the exact extent or degree of its cultural significance but only with a general elective affinity or perhaps with its causal adequacy (more on this in chapter IV).

But then he wrote at the end of his revised essay in 1920, that he wanted to correct the isolation of his study on Protestantism which, as has been mentioned, originally appeared in 1904/05, and to place it in relation to the whole of cultural development (PE: 262). This may have meant that

1. he wanted to validate his PE thesis by means of comparisons or control tests (AC: 54) and thus to ascertain that only in the Occident modern rational capitalism could develop from indigenous sources. But, while this was probably one of Weber's intentions, it was not the only one;
2. while he had earlier investigated the significance of ascetic Protestantism for the development of the modern capitalistic mentality, he would now want to reverse the point of view which he had taken in the *Protestant Ethic* and to investigate how religious ethics were in turn influenced by the totality of social conditions (PE: 125), for he thought that both interpretations are equally possible. In fact, in the «Economic Ethics of World Religions» both sides of the relationship are considered.
3. But there is more: the essays on the economic ethics of world religions are not limited to an investigation of the religious influences on the economy and on the economic influences on religious ethics, but they also contain investigations about the relationship between religion, economics, political domination and law. Why was there this extension of the topic area? As Wolfgang Schluchter has suggested, Weber had begun to realize, perhaps as a result of his comparative study in the sociology of music (RSM) which also touched on Asian music, that a

particular kind of rationalism pervaded not only Western music but the whole of modern European culture.<sup>4</sup> The subject matter of capitalism or of the capitalistic spirit thus turned into the more general subject matter of the development of modern Western rationalism, and this in many areas of life: not only in economic ethics, but also in the politico-legal orders. And thus, even in his essays on Asian cultures Weber wanted to come to grips with the particular kinds of rationality which he found in all areas of occidental social life, and he realized that his essays turned out to be «contributions to a sociology and typology of rationalism» (FMW: 324). Rationalism, according to Weber, exists in all cultures, but cultures have rationalized different areas of life. Weber wanted to explain the peculiarity of Occidental rationalism as compared to the forms of rationalism elsewhere. He thought, for instance, that Protestantism had rationalized an attitude of world domination, Confucianism had rationalized world adaptation and the Indian soteriologies had rationalized world renunciation. But, as will be seen, there was not only a certain kind of rationalization of world domination in the Occident, but also a certain kind of legal rationalization. This would have become clearer, if Weber had been able to complete a study on Christianity.

There is, however, a certain tension in these essays to the extent that they permit two different interpretations of the view which Weber had of the place of Western civilization in relation to the cultures of Asia. On the one hand, it can be said that Weber produced a typological comparative universal history or that he conceived his essays on the ethics of world religions as «contributions to the sociology and typology of rationalism». Here, Western rationalism is considered as simply one among many, so that, for instance, Confucian rationalism can be opposed to Puritan rationalism. On the other hand, China and India are also viewed by Weber as impregnated by traditionalism, and this places Western civilization on a more advanced level of development. It is not easy to integrate these two views, even if it must be said that Weber looked towards the future of Western civilization with apprehension as he foresaw mechanized petrification and a lack of brotherliness. It cannot be stressed enough that We-

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4 Weber's wife Marianne wrote that according to her husband the process of rationalization in the Occident moved on several tracks; it penetrated the economy, the law, the sciences and art and combined both theoretical and practical rationality (*Max Weber. Ein Lebensbild*, 1984, p. 348). English version p. 333/4

ber's interest in rationality and in the typologies of rationalization did not imply a preference for the Western type of rationalization or a normative «ethnocentric» treatment of other cultures. Weber viewed Western civilization as diseased, a dead-end street or an iron-cage without escape which suffocates the individual and which certainly does not have anything to offer to other civilizations. To be convinced of this, one need only read the last pages of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: «For the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved» (PE: 124).<sup>5</sup>

### The Critiques

Essentially three kinds of critiques have been formulated with regard to Weber's *œuvre* in the fields of Asian studies. The first kind is related to the so-called «Protestant Ethic thesis», supposedly contained in Weber's writings. Weber himself hoped that nobody would be so simplistic as to impute to him the thesis that «confessional membership alone would conjure up a specified economic development to a degree that Baptist inhabitants of Siberia would automatically become wholesale traders and Calvinistic inhabitants of the Sahara would turn into factory owners» (AC:34). In

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5 On occasion it has been claimed that Weber's comparative sociology is a classical statement of sociological orientalism (in the sense proposed by Edward Said), implying a) the opinion of the superiority of the West over the more or less homogeneous and immobile East, and b) the importance of internal factors and a disregard for the role of colonialism. The above quotation about «specialists without spirit» should take care of the first claim, and with regard to the second claim (the influence of colonialism) it can simply be stated that there is hardly any disagreement in the scholarly community about the distinctness of the European path prior to the advent of colonialism. A more detailed analysis of these arguments can be found in Mohammad Nafissi «Reframing Orientalism: Weber and Islam' in: Ralph Schroeder (ed.) *Max Weber, Democracy and Modernization*, London: MacMillan 1998. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Said connected his concept of orientalism mainly to the practices of British colonialism whereas German orientalists (in the original sense of the term) on whom Weber mainly relied, were not tied to colonialism and were rather interested in religious ethics and world views. *Vide* Kippenberg (2005: 169) who mentions J. Wellhausen, a specialist of Judaism, I. Goldziher, an islamist, and H. Oldenberg, an indologist.

spite of this, many Asian readers of Weber seem to have felt that they must either refute what they believed to be the «Protestant ethic thesis» or accept lack of development and stagnation for many years to come. Others, perhaps under the influence of functionalist interpretations of Weber's *œuvre*, have tried to point to functional equivalents of the Protestant ethic or to capitalistic «strands» in their own countries or cultures. Weber himself never considered the issues of industrializing and modernizing less developed countries, at least not directly, and he certainly knew that the thesis about a relationship between Protestantism and capitalism was not his own, but almost as old as Protestantism itself. Only the characterization of this relationship was open to debate. While many Asian and Western authors have tried to prove that there is a potential for capitalistic development in their region – in some regions proof is obviously not necessary any longer –, Weber would not have denied that possibility. Predictions of trends were abhorred by him; more than anyone else he foresaw the possibility of unexpected consequences of historical phenomena and actions and he would not have tried to predict a future of any kind.

The second kind of criticism is related to the interpretation of details which the simple advance of historical research and anthropological research would have made unavoidable. We may note, as examples for China, the too close identification of literati and gentry, or Weber's limited understanding of Neo-Confucian philosophy; and, as examples for India, some interpretations of Indian sects and of the bhakti movement. Many facts and details which have been made available by modern research, obviously were unknown in Weber's time and, as far as these new findings are concerned, Weber must be corrected. But Weber's arguments cannot be judged merely by the yardstick of what is historically true from today's point of view. His were arguments which formulated new questions and new problems. His purpose was different from that of the historian (of the historicist tradition) and of the modern ethnographer who consider all historical epochs and cultures as totally different and unique and who want to paint a picture «of life as it really was» (Ranke) or is. It is precisely here that the third kind of critique is often advanced.

The third kind of critique relates to questions of ethnocentrism and comparative sociology. The accusation of normative ethnocentrism or Eurocentrism cannot be raised against Weber because he certainly did not consider the Western world as superior to other cultures, but he had a heuristic ethnocentric perspective as he looked upon world history from a consciously Western standpoint in order to understand by constant com-



parison the distinctiveness of the West's development. Max Weber's wife Marianne<sup>6</sup> wrote in the biography of her husband that the essays on world religions were contributions to the characterization of Western man and his culture. In fact, Weber's points of comparison and his concepts have an Occidental origin because the comparisons are made to better understand certain aspects of the Occident. For instance, central to the understanding of Weber's sociology of religions is the concept of theodicy which may have to be redefined in non-monotheistic contexts like India. Weber championed comparative research because, among other reasons, he believed that without comparisons it is impossible to arrive at causal explanations (always of a probabilistic nature) in history and social science. No matter how clear an interpretation appears to be from the point of view of meaning, Weber thought that it cannot, on this account, claim to be a causally valid interpretation. Rather, it remains a hypothesis; and, in order to determine the degree of probability of such hypotheses, it is, according to him, necessary to compare a large number of historical and contemporary events by means of «mental experiments». For example, in order to test the probability of his hypothesis about the Protestant ethic, Weber studied the world religions.

In fact, the motives for studying another culture than one's own can be manifold, but they can generally be divided into two categories. There are those who proclaim the desire to understand the other culture as such, out of pure curiosity perhaps or as a result of an attitude of escapism, the longing for a «better» political system or a «truer» religion or the intention to use the knowledge gained to better dominate that culture; and, on the other hand, there is the motive pursued by some who study a different culture to better understand their own. Men like Alexis de Tocqueville or Louis Dumont in France and Max Weber in Germany belonged to this second category. In Tocqueville's *The Old Regime and the Revolution* the centre of interest is France, although we learn a lot about England and Prussia. France is the positive case, the others are negative cases used for comparative purposes. But what makes England England and Prussia Prussia obviously cannot be discovered in a theory of France. Similarly, Louis Dumont in his *Homo Hierarchicus* on the Indian caste system wrote: «We (occidental man) must convince ourselves that the castes can teach us some-

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6 Marianne Weber *Max Weber. Ein Lebensbild*. Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1984 (1926), p. 346; Engl. p.331

thing about ourselves», and he continued: «what good is there in going to India, if not in order to discover how Indian civilization... represents a form of the universal?». <sup>7</sup> To see our culture in its specificity, we must see it in perspective by contrasting it with other cultures. It is possible here to speak of heuristic ethnocentrism or eurocentrism, but not of normative eurocentrism.

This is precisely the purpose of comparative sociology as opposed to those scientific endeavours which purport to study the uniqueness of other cultures. <sup>8</sup> We are dealing here with a philosophical question which is at the very heart of the debate between comparative «Weberians» and specialists in the various fields of Asian studies. In fact, the more one rationalizes one method or scientific approach, the more there is the likelihood that a tension is created with other principles of rationalization, with other scientific approaches.

But one can legitimately ask what Weber's approach can mean or give to a scholar from Asia who is not, in the last analysis, interested in the characterization of Western man and culture, but rather in the tradition or in the more recent developments and styles of modernization of his or her own culture and conduct of life. It has been suggested that a scholar from Asia should look at the history of his country and should then ask the basic questions which Weber asked when he attempted to understand the European situation: Who are we? How did we get here? Where should we go? Weber's essays on India and China and his views on Islam and Ortho-

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7 Louis Dumont *Homo Hierarchicus. Essai sur le système des castes*. Paris: Gallimard 1966, p. 14 & p. 16.

8 There is a humorous Hassidic parable which was recounted by Heinrich Zimmer in *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (Princeton U. Press 1972) and which describes well the way of comparative sociology: A rabbi of the name of Eisik lived in the ghetto of Cracow in Poland. He had several dreams which enjoined him to go to Prague where he should discover a hidden treasure beneath a bridge. Finally, he went to Prague and discovered that sentries guarded the bridge day and night. Therefore he did not venture to dig, but loitered around until a captain of the guards inquired whether he had lost anything. The rabbi recounted the dream that he had had and the officer stood back and laughed: «Poor fellow», he said, «what sensible person would trust a dream? Look, if I had been one to go trusting dreams, I should be doing just the opposite now.» And he recounted of a voice which had commanded him to search for a great treasure in the house of a rabbi in Cracow whose name was Eisik. The rabbi listened eagerly and then hurried straightway back to his home, dug in a neglected corner of his house and discovered the treasure which put an end to all his misery.

dox Russia would then be no more than a quarry from which fruitful hypotheses can be extracted, although his method might still be useful. Because of the undoubted impact of Western culture in Asia, Indian or Chinese or Muslim scholars may also ask themselves whether they agree with Weber's analysis of the West. Is Western civilization, which is in the process of penetrating the East, such as Weber sees it? If the answer is in the affirmative, then Weber's essays may also be of some value to Asians who are interested in precisely those aspects of their own culture which present the greatest contrast and the greatest challenge to the West, because these are aspects which Weber intended to stress. To be sure, this approach will not grasp the «essence» of any culture. At best, it will help to comprehend those aspects of it which are meaningful and important to the scholar at the given time and under the given circumstances. Science cannot do more.

### Scientific Concepts and Points of View

It has been mentioned earlier that, according to Weber, whatever approach one chooses, one will not grasp the essence of any culture. In fact, there is no «objective» scientific analysis of cultural life (CMW: 113), independent of one-sided points of view. The scientist or scholar starts from an interest which may come from his cultural environment or his personal views and which directs his questions. This is unavoidable, but it is important to realize it. In his address «Science as a Vocation» Weber explained that science can lead the scholar to clarity about himself, his own stand and the subsidiary consequences of his choices which will likely occur (FMW: 151), but it cannot prescribe the values according to which one should live nor the point of view which directs one's scientific endeavours.

Reality is a multiple chaos or a «heterogeneous continuum» of an infinite number of facts or appearances which the scholar approaches from a precise perspective provided by certain values. As human beings are endowed with culture, they have the capacity to take a position, to evaluate the events and to consider certain aspects of reality as significant, Weber wrote (CMW: 119). In contrast to the situation in the natural sciences which reduce the empirical reality to laws, no law can inform the cultural scientist in what sense reality is significant as this is determined by the values or the meaning context in the light of which we look at any culture. Moreover, not only the questions which the scholar asks are tied to the

values of his culture, but also the concepts which he formulates. In fact, Weber accepted the distinction of his philosopher-friend H. Rickert between generalizing (in the natural sciences) and individualizing concept formation (in the humanities). Concepts may be simply classificatory (as in Linné's classification of plants, formed according to the schema *genus proximum, differentia specifica*) and are then applicable to many cultural environments. They describe what is common to empirical phenomena. In this case they are likely to have fluid boundaries (such as «capitalism» which, according to Weber, has existed everywhere in the world and can be subdivided into adventure capitalism, political capitalism, tax farming etc.). But there are concepts like for instance «romantic» or «entrepreneur» or «modern capitalism» which it would be difficult to use in a classificatory way. In fact, the more we are dealing with the conceptual shaping of complex historical relationships which are culturally significant and are related to a particular culture and epoch, the more the concepts will have the character of ideal types of an individual character, although some classificatory characteristics are also assumed to exist. They will be used for heuristic purposes which accentuate unilaterally a point of view in order to understand a section of reality in its significance for modern culture. They will not be intended to grasp any «substance» or «true» reality (CMW: 127); rather, they will diverge from empirical reality which can only be compared or related to them. If for example the scholar takes the concept of sect, he can try to understand the meaning context of the religious dogma which predominates in sects and form it into a homogeneous thought-out structure towards which all sects or sect members must strive if they take the logical consequences of their confession seriously.<sup>9</sup> The aim of this ideal-typical concept formation is always, according to Weber, to bring out the individualising aspects and not what is general in cultural phenomena. Weber's «Protestant ethic» also is such an ideal type, a «historical individual», as it accentuates those aspects which were significant for modern culture. Many other concepts which Weber used are also ideal types, and their use implies several things:

1. They never describe the substance or the essence of reality which rather is characterized by the infinity of its aspects.

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9 Dieter Henrich *Die Einheit der Wissenschaftslehre Max Webers* Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1952, p 93

2. They are the result of a utopian construction which can never be found as such in empirical reality.
3. This utopian construction should not be confused with an ideal. It is simply the result of a unilateral choice of certain factors in reality which seem to be significant to the researcher from his point of view.

The one-sidedness and also intensification of certain aspects of reality gives coherence to the ideal type while reality itself is much more unstructured and confuse. The scientific task is then to estimate to what extent the empirical data approach the ideal type.

As for the rest, Weber's theory of science implies that it is impossible to construct a complete and definitive synthesis of reality. We are necessarily limited to partial views, and other ideal types regarding the «same» relity are always possible and will in fact be constructed as soon as «the light shed by the great problems of (our) culture moves on» (CMW: 138).<sup>10</sup>

## Rationality and Rationalisation

Among the ideal-types which Weber used in order to project a mental order unto the «chaos» of reality of Western society were, of cause, capitalism, and then the process of rationalisation which, according to him, had penetrated all the spheres of Western social life: not only economics, but also religion, law, and even music. When Weber published his essay on the Protestant ethic in 1904/05, he tried to establish an elective affinity between the ethics of certain Protestant groups and the «spirit» of capitalism. But, as has been mentioned earlier, when he published the augmented essay in 1920, his interests and preoccupations had become wider and, as he explained in the «Preliminary Remark» of the *Collected Essays*, capitalism had become for him only an aspect of a more general process of rationalisation. Rational scientific research practiced by specialists, rational bureaucracy, the corner stone of the modern state, rational harmonic music, a rational juridic doctrine, a rational organization of business with rational accounting and based on the existence of formally free labour - all of these are examples of the specific rationalism of Western civilization.

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10 Weber's reflections on the ideal type can be found in his «The «objectivity» of knowledge in social science and social policy» (CMW: 100-138).

One must remind oneself that Weber repeatedly insisted that the term rationalism or rationalisation may refer to extremely diverse things and that the areas of social life as well as whole civilizations may be rationalized in regard to very different ends and values. What is rational from one point of view may become irrational from another standpoint so that, for instance, for the unbeliever every religious way of life is irrational. It is possible to talk of the rationalisation of mystical life in India although this kind of life may be considered irrational from our economic point of view. Even magic can be rationalised and systematised, for the first therapeutics which may be considered rational implied the refusal to treat empirical symptoms by potions and rather tried to get rid of the presumed «true causes» of an illness by exorcism. Nevertheless, Weber tried to find the distinctive characteristics of Western rationalism and then to analyse the different forms of modern rationalism

The rationalisation of life in the Occident does not imply a collective or individual progress; it is not an ideal but rather an ideal-type which Weber used to structure reality. Living in modern rationalised society human beings have not become less aggressive, and they have not always become more free. On the contrary, rational modern bureaucracy encloses us, according to Weber, in an «iron cage» which drove him to despair. Similarly, there has perhaps been rational progress in the technique of painting since the discovery of the perspective, but this does not imply that primitive art was less beautiful. But rationalisation implies an increase, a specialization and a systematization of knowledge on the societal level. Although it may be true that the passengers of an air plane or the users of a computer do not normally know the principles of their functioning, they know that they could learn them if they wanted, and that there are no mysterious magical forces in this machinery which cannot be mastered. To the extent that modern man has ceased to believe in magical forces, the world has become «disenchanted», in Weber's terminology, and there is the belief in the calculability of all events.

Rationalisation can appear in several forms: There is, of course, the scientific and technical rationality, but in his essays on the world religions Max Weber was mainly concerned with practical rationality, referring to orientations in the conduct of life and to the ensuing kinds of personality; he was also concerned with metaphysical rationality which is the consequence of the need of man to understand the world as a coherently structured cosmos which has a meaning. In his sociology of law Weber was concerned with the institutional orders of life, and there he distinguished

between formal and substantive rationality. Weber thought, though, that there is an inevitable tension between certain kinds of rationalism and that if, for instance, one produces more rationality in the scientific or technical sphere, the rationality on the metaphysical level - the meaning structures of the cosmos as a whole - will diminish. Moreover, Weber was also aware of the limits of rationalism and that the rational in the sense of inner consequence, although it may have power of man, is always limited and unstable (FMW:324) and he pointed to the fact that the rationally most coherent solutions often collide with the «injustices of the world» (FMW: 275/6).

### The Method of Analysis

All social phenomena have, according to Weber, an exterior and an interior side. To the exterior side belong the economic, political, and legal circumstances which can affect peoples' situation in a positive or negative way. The inner side refers to the disposition of humans to lead a certain rational conduct of life. With regard to capitalism Weber distinguished between the capitalist system or form (the exterior side) and the capitalist spirit (*Geist*, the inner side).<sup>11</sup> By system or form he meant the capitalist organization within a formally rational and predictable legal system, the technically rational means of production, double entry accounting, the separation of household and enterprise, and free labour; by spirit of capitalism he meant a methodical-ethical conduct of life in one's profession and a rational tempering of the irrational impulse of gain. The form of capitalism had totally different origins than the spirit, but both may exist in close affinity (*Wahlverwandschaft*) with each other even if the form would have been unable to produce the spirit out of itself. In the answers to his critics (AC) Weber pointed out that a capitalist spirit has sometimes existed without a capitalist system, and a capitalist system without a capitalist spirit - in the same way as we might find an army organized according to the German model of an army but without a militaristic spirit. A historically given form of capitalism, Weber wrote, can be filled with very different kinds of «spirits» which may have varying degrees of affinity with the

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11 The opposition of spirit and form had already been used by Nietzsche in the first part of his *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* where he wrote about the defeat if not the extirpation of the German spirit for the sake of the German *Reich* after 1871.

form (favorable, indifferent, or even obstructive). But when the form or system and the spirit have a particularly high degree of affinity, a development of unbroken homogeneity is likely to commence. If, however, the degree of affinity is low, there will be tension between the economic system and the spirit, the ethical life-style, as was the case in Florence (AC: 49, fn.2)

Western man lives today, according to Weber, in an iron cage (Talcott Parson's translation of *stahlhartes Gehäuse*), namely the shell or form of capitalism from which the spirit has escaped long ago (PE: 123). With regard to India, Weber talked of the «spirit» of the whole system (RI: 112), and he also mentioned the shell (*Gehäuse*), namely the caste system (RI: 121); with regard to China, Weber wrote of the firm shell (*festes Gehäuse*) of patrimonial bureaucracy (RC: 61) which was the seat of the «spirit» of the literati and of Confucianism (RC: 129; 203). There can be little doubt then that any study of the development or the diffusion of capitalism, modernization, or industrialization in Asia, if it claims Weberian roots or a Weberian frame of reference, must specify whether it refers to the inner «spirit» of these phenomena or simply to the outer form or structure. The diffusion of and the adaptation to the outer form of capitalism or modernization or of a Western legal system is one thing, the development of the «spirit» from within is quite another. This is particularly so because Weber saw affinities not only between the capitalist system and the capitalist spirit, but also between the occidental politico-legal system and its world-dominating spirit.

As already mentioned, Weber distinguished between the exterior system and the inner spirit in all world religions. With regard to the spirit, a further comment is necessary, for it is not simply a shorthand term for religious foundations or dogmas, constructed in a coherent way by intellectuals or theologians. Besides the constructed dogmas there are always also the salvational interests and psychic reactions of the faithful. Religious ideas have an influence on the course of historical development only through the interaction between them and the salvational interests of the believers or the psychological premia which they hope to attain. It is this interaction which produces the spirit. Weber repeatedly pointed to the fact that while the doctrines of the theologians may well require a certain kind of conduct, for instance frugality and hard work, these doctrines do not necessarily create in the people the psychological motives which will produce the required type of conduct. Nor do worldly wisdom or the doctrines of the literati create such motives. Catholic doctrine, for instance, insists



on hard work, but the highest premia which the Catholic can attain are the result of other kinds of conduct, and there is, moreover, in the confession a means to relieve one's conscience. Protestantism, on the other hand, sets a very high psychological premium on the methodical conduct of life in providing the idea that only by proving oneself in one's life and vocation can one attain the inner reassurance of salvation (*certitudo salutis*).

Weber's insistence that he is concerned with the psychological sanctions created by the religious and institutional context, and not simply with the theories of theologians and literati, must be kept in mind by anyone who wishes to find equivalents of the Protestant ethic in Asia. The analyst needs sources of the respective religious foundations as well as of the salvational interests of religious communities. It must be conceded, though, that Weber used both types of sources in the *Protestant Ethic*, but that in the essays on the world religions he often contented himself with an analysis of the dogmatic foundations.

### A Short Outline of the Material

Chapter II is concerned with Weber's *Protestant Ethic* studies. It provides a summary of the original version of 1904/05, followed by a summary of Weber's article on the Protestant sects. Furthermore, there is a section on Weber's replies to his critics in the years following the original publication, and, finally, a short analysis of the main additions which Weber introduced in the 1920 version of the *Protestant Ethic*.

Chapter III provides summaries and commentaries of Weber's published essays on the economic ethics of world religions (China, India/Buddhism and ancient Judaism) as well as Weber's views of the economic ethics of those world religions on which he was unable to publish complete essays (Islam, ancient Christianity, Orthodox Christianity and Occidental Christianity). In some cases, when Weber's analysis seems too sparse from today's point of view and knowledge, short additions have been inserted in accordance with Weber's general trend of thought. All of this is, of course, preceded by Weber's «Introduction» and augmented by his «Intermediate Reflection». The analysis of each world religion is divided into parts: 1. the sociological foundations (the political and administrative system), 2. the religiously motivated orientation of life of the religious carrier groups, 3. the distinction between orthodox and heterodox movements, and 4. the distinction between elite and mass religiosity in the

respective religious tradition. With regard to each religion the major critiques which have been addressed to Weber's essays and views are pointed out and commented upon in extended footnotes.

Chapter IV intends to show how Weber's comparative studies of world religions serve as «indirect causal validation» of Weber's Protestant ethic thesis. It starts with an analysis of the concept of «elective affinity» and shows that it can be divided into two aspects: adequacy on the level of meaning and causal adequacy. Whereas Weber's *Protestant Ethic* shows mainly an adequacy on the level of meaning between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, his essays and views of the economic ethics of world religions try to establish a causal adequacy. They verify and validate the PE-thesis, they also suggest an adequate causal relationship between certain kinds of sects in other cultures and a generalized concept of capitalism, they exclude other theories related to technical advances, precious metals, population increases etc., and they finally underline the power and efficacy of religion in the formation of cultural and social phenomena.

Chapter V is to a certain extent the counterpart of chapter II. Whereas in chapter II the Protestant ethic, the inner side or the spirit of Western development, is analyzed, chapter V analyzes the exterior side and particularly its main aspect, the law.

The first section is merely an introduction to Weber's sociology of law. It shows the distinction which Weber makes between the sociology of law and jurisprudence; and it then disusses four kinds of law, based on Weber's distinctions between rational and irrational as well as between substantive and formal law. There are, moreover, two kinds of formally rational law: English common law and continental European law, based on codes. The developmental conditions of the rationalisation of law can largely be derived from its inner logic and from its carrier groups.

The second section provides a short outline of the legal ideas and systems within all the cultures which were considered in chapter III. Weber's own observations are left intact but are often complemented and, as in the case of Buddhist and Russian-Orthodox law, completely new observations have been added with Weber in mind. Again, the critiques addressed to Weber and recent advances in scholarship have received some comments in the footnotes. The center of this section, however, is the development of European secular law. In the comparison with Confucian, Indian, Buddhist and Islamic legal concepts and ideas, the particular characteristics of the

modern Occidental legal structures, their unique formal rationality, becomes visible.

Although Weber had integrated some considerations of the respective laws in his essays on India and China, it has seemed preferable here to reconsider these laws in a separate chapter, based mainly on his «sociology of law» in *Economy and Society*, in order to clearly establish the difference between Western and Asian laws and also to clearly characterize Western law as an exterior counterpart of the interior spirit of capitalism.

In the Conclusion, Weber's Preliminary Remark («Author's Introduction») is examined and interpreted. After viewing the panorama of the other world religions and their laws, Weber's focus, saturated with comparative information, returns to his original question about the distinguishing features of the West (of his time), he describes briefly the rationalisation which took place in Western science and music, and then points to the particular kind of rationalisation which took place in Western law and in the Western «spirit», as well as to the elective affinity which combined and strengthened them. It becomes apparent, though, that Weber had an ambivalent attitude to all these kinds of rationalisation.