

# CONCLUSION

## 1. *The «Author's Introduction» as a Conclusion*

### *Basic Literature:*

«Author's Introduction» in: Max Weber *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* transl. by T. Parsons 1930, introduced by A. Giddens. London: Routledge 2004, pp. XXIX-XLI

«Vorbemerkung» in: Max Weber *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* vol. 1 Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1920 pp.1-16

Weber's «Preceding Remark» prefaces the whole collection of the Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion. It is one of Weber's last texts, and it does appear like a conclusion to these Collected Essays. The English translation, also entitled «Author's Introduction», has often been included, albeit misleadingly, with the English text of the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber here states that he intends to explain problems of universal history and to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization cultural phenomena have appeared which, «as we would like to think», are of universal significance. He makes it clear that he, as the son of modern European civilization, necessarily and justifiably chooses a culture-related perspective which admittedly is only of a heuristic value<sup>179</sup>, although he may not have doubted that European culture was of universal significance because of the effects which it continued and continues to have on other cultures. But universal significance does not imply universal validity

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179 Certain modern authors have attributed to Weber an orientalist or «westocentric» ideology in Edward Said's sense. Sara Farris, for instance, accuses Weber of an unsympathetic and unflattering depiction of Asiatic «non-personalities» who lack the characteristics of the Western type of personality (Farris 2013: 207). Clearly, these authors are not aware of the fundamental distinction between normative eurocentrism which Weber avoided, and heuristic eurocentrism which he considered justified and even necessary from a methodological point of view. There should be no question that the conditions under which a science develops are one thing, and that the objective status of its discoveries or statements is another.

Only in the Occident, he wrote, there exists a science which we today recognize as valid; elsewhere one does not always find rational proof, the rational experiment and the rational concept.

Only in the Occident there is rational harmonic music and, in fact, the rationalization of art by the utilization of the spatial perspective, and the utilization of the Gothic vault in architecture.

Only in the Occident there is trained and specialized personnel in a sense and to a degree which approaches its present dominant place in our culture, the trained official, the pillar of both the modern State and of the economic life - the cage in which we have to live. Only here we find the State itself with a rational written constitution and an administration bound to rational rules of law, administered by trained officials.

And the same is true of the most fateful force in our modern life, capitalism. How should modern capitalism be characterized?

The impulse to acquisition, the pursuit of the greatest possible amount of money and any acquisition by force has nothing to do with capitalism, for the *auri sacra fames* (the greed for gold) is as old as the history of mankind. Capitalistic economic action is rather based on the expectation of profit by the utilization of formally peaceful means. It is found where the acquisition is rationally pursued, and where a calculation of capital in terms of money is made with an initial and final balance. But even in this sense there has been capitalism in all civilizations, in China, India, Babylon, Egypt and elsewhere in the shape of money lenders, colonial entrepreneurs and as tax-farming and adventurer capitalism. But in modern times the Occident has developed a capitalism in form and direction which has never existed elsewhere: the rational capitalistic organization of formally free labour. It is connected to the idea of the citizen. The concept of the citizen and of the bourgeois did not exist elsewhere although there have been all sorts of legal differences between town and country in other cultural areas.

One can certainly name other important developmental elements of modern capitalism: the separation of the business from the household, rational bookkeeping, the legal separation of corporate from personal property, but all these peculiarities of modern capitalism derive their significance from their association with the capitalistic organization of labour (formally free labour) or rather: the bourgeois capitalism with its rational organization of free labour, for exact calculation is possible only on the basis of free labour.

The peculiar modern Western form of capitalism has been strongly influenced by the development of technical possibilities and that means: by the peculiarities of modern science. On the other hand, the development (not: the origin) of these sciences received important stimulation from economic incentives and these, in turn, are derived from the peculiarities of the social order of the Occident: the rational structure of law and administration. For modern rational capitalism has need not only of the technical means of production, but of a calculable legal system and of an administration working on the basis of formal rules. And where did that law in its formalistic perfection come from? Capitalistic interests have no doubt helped to prepare the way for the predominance in law and administration of a class of jurists trained in rational law, but these interests did not create that law. And why did not capitalistic interests produce a similar outcome in China or India? Why did not the scientific, the political or the economic development there enter upon the path of rationalization which is peculiar to the Occident?

In all the above-mentioned cases it is a question of the specific rationalism of Western culture. Now, by the term «rationalization» very different things may be understood. Not only the most diverse spheres of life can be rationalized - mystical contemplation as well as war or economic activity - and each of these spheres may be rationalized in terms of very different ultimate values. And what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another. To characterize the differences of the various civilizations it is then necessary to search what spheres of social life are rationalized and in what direction. Weber's concern was therefore to work out and to explain the special peculiarity of Occidental rationalism, and particularly of its modern form.

Obviously, every such attempt at explanation must take account of the economic conditions. But the opposite causal relationship must not be left out of consideration. The explanation of economic rationalism must not only take account of rational techniques and rational law, but also of the ability and disposition of humans to adopt certain types of practical rational conduct. Magical and religious forces and the ethical ideas of duty based upon them have always been among the most important formative influences of conduct. Weber is concerned with these forces.

In the *Protestant Ethic* Weber had attempted to consider only one side of the causal relationships, namely the influence of certain religious ideas on the development of an economic ethos. The later studies on «The Economic Ethics of World Religions» attempted to investigate both causal re-

relationships as far as it seemed necessary to find points of comparison with Western development. For it is Western development which in the last analysis is intended to be analysed further, and only in the described way does it seem possible to attempt a causal attribution of those elements of the Occidental economic ethic which differentiate it from others. Weber's studies of the world religions, presented and analysed here in chapter III, do not claim to be complete analyses of civilizations. On the contrary, in every case they emphasize those elements in which it differs from Western civilizational development, for, in the final analysis, Weber was concerned with the understanding of Western culture.

Specialists like sinologists, indologists or semitists will have to make a final judgement about the factual correctness of the analyses. Weber was well aware of his limitations, being obliged to work with available translations. He undertook the studies only because expert studies with his special purpose and from his particular point of view were not available.<sup>180</sup> Finally, Weber also admitted that the results of ethnographic research have hardly been used by him, but he believed that this might be excusable because he was mainly concerned with the religious ethics of the social strata which were the culture carriers of their respective regions.

## 2. Commentary

It was Weber's ultimate intention to describe and to explain the distinctive character of the whole of Occidental culture, the particular kind of rationality which pervaded all areas of life: the rational-methodical conduct of life, the rational capitalist enterprise, the rational state, the formally rational law, rational science, and the rational music based on harmonic chords. In order to achieve this goal he had compared the Occidental culture with the major other cultures and had tried to show why the above-mentioned phenomena had not occurred in those cultures.

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180 One is reminded here of Weber's remark in his «The «Objectivity» of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy» that by relating known facts to known viewpoints one can nevertheless create something new (CMW: 138).

## Science

With regard to science Weber pointed out that only the Occident's degree of scientific development is today considered as valid, although his writing on science is rather limited. In «Science as a Vocation» (FMW: 129 – 156) he traced a short history of science, starting with the rational proof and the rational concept in ancient Greece,<sup>181</sup> followed by the rational experiment in art (Leonardo and the experimenters in music who wanted to raise art to the level of science) during the Renaissance period, without which further scientific development would have been impossible. Since the School of Chartres (twelfth century)<sup>182</sup> and since Abélard it was thought that through rational knowledge of the structure of the created world and thus *by reason alone* the individual scholar could achieve or contribute to the knowledge of the creator. There was no suggestion that individual reason was to submit to the consensus of scholars, as in Islam, or to the fellowship of the sobornost' (*consensus ecclesiae*) which alone can make true understanding possible in Eastern Christianity.

Weber's summary history of science can perhaps be complemented by Berman's contention<sup>183</sup> that legal science as it developed in the eleventh and twelfth century under the impact of the Papal Revolution may be regarded as a progenitor of modern Western science, and this on the level of the value premises (objectivity, skepticism), on the organizational level (the newly emerging institution of the university as a corporation with legal personality and with free research and teaching), and on the methodological level (the law was systematized as an integrated body of knowledge so that the validity of particular legal rules could be demonstrated by their consistency with the system as a whole). To this should be added the emperor Frederick Barbarossa's *authentica habita* (1158), a legislative act which was issued for the protection of students studying Roman law in Bologna (as opposed to clerical students studying canon law), and which

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181 Elsewhere Weber also mentioned the mathematical thought which is the Greeks' everlasting contribution to modern science and which was lacking, according to him, in China and India. (RI: 161)

182 R. Klibansky «The School of Chartres» in M. Clagett et al. (ed.) *Twelfth Century Europe and the Formation of Modern Society* U. of Wisconsin Press 1966

183 H. Berman (1983) p. 151

strengthened the autonomy of the university as a corporation.<sup>184</sup> It rescued the independent study of Roman law from the threat of absorption by its rival, canon law.<sup>185</sup>

According to Berman, neither the classical period of modern science (Galileo, Kepler, Newton) nor the later advances would have been possible without the methods developed by the early jurists and without independent universities which could enact their own statutes.

With the Puritan spirit of the «man of a vocation» (*Berufsmenschentum*) specialization entered the milieu of science, and the application of science to practical goals, and with specialized personnel, is mainly a Protestant achievement (AC: 129). The needs of industry (Weber mentioned particularly the mining industry in RC: 151) assisted the intellectual forces in transferring the experiment to the natural sciences, and the relationship of science to the economy did contribute to the process of modern capitalistic development but also to the growing impersonality of the economic sphere. And although Western science was in Weber's opinion unique, his attitude with regard to it was ambivalent. He pointed to the disenchantment of the world by science<sup>186</sup> and its rejection of the religious idea that the world may have a meaning (FMW: 154). But in Weber's opinion science cannot replace religion. Quoting from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, he sarcastically criticized the «last men who invented happiness» and he turned to Tolstoi in whose opinion science is meaningless because it gives no answer to the question: «what shall we do and how shall we live?» (FMW: 143).

## Architecture, Art, and Music

In architecture, art, and music Weber was interested in the determination of the technical instruments employed for a given definite purpose although, of course, the history of art does not recognize a «progress» with

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184 Such autonomy of the university was of course non-existent elsewhere, for instance in the Islamic colleges (madrasas).

185 Walter Ullmann *Scholarship and Politics in the Middle Ages* London: Variorum Reprints 1978, p. 136

186 The disenchantment of the world had already begun with the old Jewish prophets who had repudiated all magical means of salvation (PE: 61), but the Puritans and then science then completed this process.

respect to the aesthetic evaluation of works of art. The development of the Gothic style was the result of the technically successful solution of an architectural problem in connection with the building of vaults over spaces of a particular kind (CMW: 322). The discovery of perspective in painting was made during the Renaissance (although perspective of a different kind existed in traditional China) as a path to true nature (FMW: 142).

In his sociology of music (RSM) or, as he called it himself, in his history of music Weber asked why music oriented to harmony was developed only in Europe. He mentioned briefly the technical-rational preconditions for European musical culture: the modern system of notation (since Guido of Arezzo in the eleventh century), the setting down of the notes' relative time values, and a fixed scheme of bars so that the progression of the individual parts of a polyphonic piece in relation to each other becomes clear and unambiguous - which alone makes polyphonic compositions possible. All this, as Weber wrote to his sister Lili in August 1912, (MWG II/7 vol. 2: 638), was the work of monks.

But this was not enough. Weber's central concern was to characterize the peculiarity of the modern European tonal system in comparison with the tonal systems of other cultures and times (e.g. Indian ragas or the pentatonic system in China or ancient Greece). He found this peculiarity in chordal harmony and in the equal tempering of the pitch of the intervals between the twelve tones of the European scale. The Pythagorean «comma», a small, scarcely audible interval, symbol of the unrationalized pure tones of nature, was «eliminated» through a rational solution, the equally tempered pitch of the intervals (FMW: 281) since A. Werckmeister around the year seventeen hundred, so that greater rationality of the whole tonal system was now achieved and, for instance, the transposition of a melody from one key to another became possible. J.S. Bach explored the potentials of this newly established tuning method in his «The Well-Tempered Clavier». Our until recently exclusive education toward modern harmonic music is quite essentially supported by the piano.

But of course, Weber was well aware that the aesthetic sphere, including music, is a «life force» whose being is emotional and arational and often a means of ecstasy, in inner tension with all attempts of rationalisation.<sup>187</sup> Music, wrote Weber, offers the power of this-worldly salvation

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187 Christoph Braun «The Science of Reality of Music History: on the Historical Background of Max Weber's Study of Music» in: Sam Whimster (ed.), *Max Weber and the Culture of Anarchy* London: MacMillan 1999, 177-195

from the routines of everyday life and from theoretical and practical rationalism (FMW: 342). There is indeed an inner tension, an irreconcilable conflict between Weber's music study which traces the rational solutions in Western music and his «Intermediate Reflection» where he writes about music in a very different way. Weber was not only a theoretician of rationality.<sup>188</sup>

### Formally Rational Law and the Puritan Conduct of Life

Not the explanation of modern science as such nor the rationalization of music was Weber's primary concern, but rather what he considered the most fateful force in our life, modern capitalism, today's economic order with its rational organization of free labour. on the basis of rational science and technology, invested capital and machine production, and rational calculable law. What was his answer?

Harold Berman has praised Weber for confirming that the Investiture Struggle of the late eleventh and early twelfth century laid the foundations for the separation of church and state, that the new canon law was the first modern legal system, that the reciprocity of rights and duties of lord and vassal distinguished Western feudalism from that of eastern societies, and that the western city of the twelfth century was unique in conferring constitutional rights upon its citizens. Yet, Berman wrote, Weber was prevented from drawing the right conclusions from these facts by his historiography which postulates a sharp break in the sixteenth century between the Middle Ages and modern times.<sup>189</sup> Berman did not spell out precisely what the right conclusions might be, but he clearly did not envision the possibility that there might be several great transformations in the history of a culture and even in different spheres of that culture, and that, moreover, there might be a meaningful adequacy between the results of these transformations. In fact, Weber saw two major transformations in the Occident as mutually reinforcing preconditions of the development of mod-

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188 The philosopher Karl Jaspers who had been strongly influenced by Weber even during Weber's life time, seems to have come to the conclusion (after new revelations about Weber's personal life) that Weber's personal rationality revealed a complete openness to experience and its struggles, and not an essential oneness. *Vide:* Henrich's article in Mommsen & Osterhammel (eds.) 1987, p.542

189 Berman 1983, p. 550



ern capitalism. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Papal Revolution created the exterior preconditions, and between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries the «Puritan Revolution» created the inner preconditions. Between the thesis of a mainly institutional transformation in the Middle Ages and the thesis of a transformation of the mentality after the Reformation Weber saw no contradiction. Each of these conditions developed independently and at different moments in history, but Weber saw an elective affinity (*Wahlverwandtschaft*) between them, creating a situation in which both favoured each other and a development of high inner homogeneity could set in.

In Asian religions there was customary law, qadi justice, formally irrational and substantively irrational law, even substantively rational law, but not formally rational and calculable law without which there may be adventurer or speculative trading capitalism, but no rational enterprise with fixed capital. And Asian religions offered magical, ritualistic and contemplative methods of salvation, there was the Indian bhakti and the institutional grace of Catholicism, but nowhere, with the possible exception of some sects (the Jainas in India and the Skoptsy in Russia) the methodical innerworldly ascetic work ethic can be found. (A schematic table can be found in the appendix).

Why did only the Occident develop a specifically «rational» culture with a particular formal orientation which in Weber's opinion has been of universal-historical significance? At the root of this development was the inner adequacy and even the mutual intensification of the kind and orientation of two rationalizations: the formal rationality of the exterior circumstances of life (the politico-legal circumstances) and the innerworldly practical rationality of the inner motivations of the Protestants. Having developed independently of each other, they created together the structure and the spirit of modern Western capitalism, supported, moreover, by rational science and technology. But this is not all, for the Protestant ethic in its secularized form was congenial and well suited not only for the modern capitalistic enterprise, but also for the officials of the bureaucratic state, based in turn on formally rational law, and for modern institutionalized and specialized science and technology. The specialized man of a vocation (*Berufsmensch*) has a cultural significance well beyond the economic sphere.

This double rationalization (the practical rationality of the Protestant ethic and the formal rationality of occidental law), supported by the goal-oriented rational technology, is the fate of our age, and it implies bureau-

cratization and specialization on the exterior level, and disenchantment and dehumanization/unbrotherliness on the interior level even as routinization has set, the religious roots have to a large extent died out and a secularized ethos, the spirit of capitalism, of the *Beruf*, is now left in the «iron cage» in which we are condemned to live. More than other times and circumstances, perhaps, Weber's statement that what is rational, or logically consistent, has some degree of power over humans (FMW: 324), characterizes the modern occidental situation. Weber showed no blind enthusiasm for this outcome, and he disdainfully wrote about today's «specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart» (PE: 124). His fundamental question remained: how can we live within modern «rational» culture and under modern capitalism which gives priority to the law of the market over ethical values? He wrote that «if one wishes to evaluate any ordering of societal relationships, one must in the last resort ... examine it with respect to the type of human being that it gives the best chances of becoming dominant, by way of external selection or inner selection of motives» (CMW: 321)<sup>190</sup>. Not the well-being of the people of future generations, but what kind of people they will be, what type of personality is encouraged by social development, was the question which moved Weber's thinking. He hoped that those characteristics which we think of as constituting the human greatness and nobility of our nature may survive in the future (PW: 15). The stagnation and ossification which characterized the decline of the Roman Empire and the imposition of a strict *pax Romana* were for him a discouraging example.

### The Contemporary Relevance of Weber's Comparative Sociology

Weber's comparative studies can even today be more than a quarry of interesting concepts or a series of fragmented studies; they are also more than an array of hidden interlocking strategies and procedures which provide causal explanations of unique cases and developments, as Kalberg suggests.<sup>191</sup> Their subjects are the major religious cultures of the world seen from the viewpoint of universal history, in which various complexes

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190 Quoted from «The Meaning of «Value Freedom» in the Sociological and Economic Sciences» in CMW.

191 Kalberg 1994: 193

of ideas and processes of rationalisation performed the role of switchmen which guided the respective interests.

Certainly, as Weber wrote in his essay on «Science as a Vocation» (CMW: 349 / 350), the (cultural) sciences can provide knowledge of techniques for controlling life (the concepts found in Weber's collected writings, used as a quarry), they can also provide methods of reasoning (strategies, procedures, as for instance Kalberg suggests), but, last not least, they can provide clarity and compel the individual to give an account to himself of the ultimate meaning of his conduct within his own cultural *Weltanschauung* as compared to all others, they make us realize that the inner consequences of our cultural choices in terms of meaning lead us, figuratively speaking, to serve this god and to offend that other god. Weber claimed that this is of value in our personal life. The historical and comparative sciences of culture are based on the assumption that it is interesting and responsible to participate in this awareness of ourselves as cultured beings or *Kulturmenschen* (CMW: 345), and that this is possible not by recourse to general laws, but only by reference to historical constellations, seen in the context of universal history. The Western *Kultur-mensch* might then realize that different rationalities are deployed within the distinct spheres and orders of modern society (science, economy, law, bureaucracy etc.), but that rationality in the meaning structures of our life has diminished.