

# Introductory Remarks on Max Weber's *The Economic Ethics of the World Religions*<sup>1</sup>

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*In Tyrell's view, too little attention has been paid by Weber scholars to Max Weber's 'Economic Ethics of the World Religions'. The principal cause is that the studies of the 'Economic Ethics' have remained a torso, where the Occidental part, above all, is missing. Regrettably the essay collections edited by W. Schluchter and the debate provoked by S.N. Eisenstadt regarding 'Kulturen der Achsenzeit' have made little difference here, but the same is also true of the volumes which have so far appeared within the Max Weber Gesamtausgabe. Tyrell's contribution is thus concerned (on the one hand) to determine the position of the 'Economic Ethics' within Weber's sociology of religion, but (on the other hand) it also seeks to show what it is that "connects" the studies of the 'Economic Ethics', so as to counteract the impression that, at any one moment, we are dealing with "isolated pieces of work" in the form of monographs regarding particular world religions.*

## I.

German post-war sociology was seen and René König agreed, emphatically as a "*Gegenwartswissenschaft*" (science of the present), originating as it did in modern society, an integral part of it and aimed at a knowledge of the present. In the same sense, Helmut Schelsky spoke of sociology's "categorical concern for the present" and saw the "diagnosis of the times" as one of its essential tasks. In view of the complexities of the modern age, this was a kind of farewell to 'historical sociology' or at least of an historically-oriented sociology, of which there had been a substantial tradition in Germany<sup>2</sup>. But a strong commitment to the present also applies – as König and Schelsky were aware – to classical sociology of 1900's. As examples let me mention Georg Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*, Émile Durkheim's study of suicide, which relied heavily

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Michael Pätzold and Dott. Mrs. Jennifer Greenleaves (Firenze) for help with the English version.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to the sociology of religion cf. Schelsky (1965); see also Kruse (1999).

on empirical research and offered a sociological diagnosis of one form of pathology of the modern age, and Max Weber's planned empirical sociological investigation of newspapers and private associations, as well as of what was to him (and before him to Werner Sombart) 'modern capitalism'. Crucial to this context was the irreversibility of the latter: in the *Preface* to the new *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* of 1904 he wrote "that capitalism is the result of a historical development which is impossible to cure and has therefore be endured".

Nevertheless, for the "son of modern European civilization" placed "under the auspices of historicism" (O.G. Oexle) this concern with the present underwent in Germany an 'inevitable change' in the direction of the historical. For nobody was this more true than for Max Weber (cf. GARS I,1; PESC, 13). Where does this modern world come from? How did something so improbable become possible? "What combination of circumstances brought this about?", at first in a particular area of the world, but with consequences on a global level. It is unlikely that these questions have been asked since then with comparable passion and with a similarly broad concern for universal history. That part of Weber's multi-layered oeuvre which is concerned on a grand scale with finding answers to the above questions, is his studies on the *Economic Ethics of the World Religions* ("Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen").

It must however be mentioned that Weber posed his questions in a very specific way. First of all, he never speaks of 'modernity' in the sweeping way that is customary today. He does not examine 'modern society', on its own and within a specific social environment. In speaking of modernity, he restricts it to Europe (and North America): in other words the West. He is always concerned with the "economic and social *peculiarities* of the West", which he considers a 'deviating case' both against a background of universal history and because of his awareness of the otherness of the conditions and social developments of other parts of the world. In this way, the 'only here', 'only in the West' becomes a decisive part of the comparative formulation of his questions. This implies of course also the question of "why *not* elsewhere?" As we can see, Weber's 'Eurocentrism' is fully aware of its implications. Furthermore, it comes with an intellectual proviso: whenever he claims "*universal* significance and validity for the way of development has occurred in Europe, he adds "at least we like to think so".

There is no element of inner necessity or inevitability in Weber's eyes in this separate development of the West; on the contrary: it is completely and utterly *improbable* (and, viewed from the European Middle Ages, it seems absolutely unforeseeable). This should already be evident from the worldwide uniqueness of its 'breakthrough' - in one place only. Besides, Europe was not 'predestined' for modernity. Drawing an inter(high)cultural comparison and

using a long-term perspective, Weber started from an assumption of ‘small initial differences’, viewing as he did the *early* high cultures as standing in a relation of socio-structural affinity with one another. As is demonstrated by the quite different religio-political structures in classical India and classical China (GARS II, 138ff.; MWG I/20, 227ff.; RI, 141), the various beginnings of the early cultures were brought about by ‘contingent’ circumstances, which continued however to have an effect in the direction of greater deviation and separate development. In taking this approach, Weber reacted explicitly (and critically) to the contemporary tendency to explain special features of mentality and behaviour in non-European cultures by “the influence of their genetic make-up”. “One has to reckon”, he says, that many “traits which are considered innate may be products of purely historical and cultural influences.”<sup>3</sup> Nothing then stands in the way of an historical sociology, and Weber’s perspective has rightly been characterized by Benjamin Nelson as “differential historical sociological” and at the same time “comparative civilizational.”<sup>4</sup>

Nowhere has Max Weber expounded the main focus of his categorical research more clearly than in the famous *Vorbemerkung* (‘Author’s Introduction’) to his *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (GARS I, 1ff.; PESC, 13ff.; also EW, 101ff.). Having asked the question on universal history, this preface, much praised by Nelson, then turns to those peculiar features of the West to which Weber attributes a (qualified) “*universal* importance and validity”. These features comprehend ‘rational phenomena taken from modern natural science to ‘modern capitalism’. This text, which focuses with specific intensity on the definition of the concept of capitalism, has been seen above all in connection with the text which was written later, that is Weber’s second version of his essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (GARS, I, 17ff; PESC, 35ff.; PE in the following). This is however only a small part of the truth because what the ‘Author’s Introduction’ announces above all is the series of essays on the *Economic Ethics of the World Religions*. And, as I have said, it is this monumental and multi-volume project which is wholly devoted to the answer

<sup>3</sup> “For us (...) there is an important observation which can easily be made and is confirmed by eminent sinologists. In the traits relevant for us, the further back one goes in history the more *similar* the Chinese and Chinese culture appear to what is found in the West (“bei uns”). The old popular beliefs, the old anachorets, the oldest songs of the *Shih Ching*, the old warrior kings, the antagonisms of philosophical schools, feudalism, the beginnings of capitalist developments in the Period of the Warring States – all of which are considered characteristic – are more closely related to Western phenomena than are the traits of Confucian China. Hence, one has to reckon with the possibility that many of the Chinese traits which are considered innate may be products of purely historical and cultural influences” (GARS I, 517; MWG I/19, 455; RC, 231).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Nelson (1974); on the western peculiarities cf. the forceful statement, following the ‘Author’s Introduction’, in Marianne Weber (1926), 348ff.

that Weber wanted to give to the question: where does Western modernity come from? If we accept that this ‘universal historical’ question, raised at the beginning of the ‘Introduction’, expresses the main focus of the author’s categorical research, then it is hard not to accept the studies on the *Economic Ethics of the World Religions* (EEWR in the following)<sup>5</sup> as the central area of Weberian sociology.

Looking at the history of the reception of Weber’s work, this view cannot really be confirmed. As will be shown in the next section (II.), studies on EEWR have hardly taken this into account while their main emphasis has been on other aspects. There is in addition one feature that has been noticed far too seldom and which will be discussed in greater detail in section III.: the essays that make up EEWR are a “*torso*”, an *uncompleted* work. Texts that only needed to be written down and which were especially dear to their author have been kept from us. The somewhat ‘skewed’ reception of EEWR, it is true, is not directly connected to their truncated nature but EEWR studies would surely look quite different if their western part had been completed in the way Weber had in mind.

## II.

Max Weber’s scholarly work is complex and fragmented. As his publications show, Weber was the author of articles and series of articles which repeatedly were not finished. He had, as he put it, “no great inclination” to the writing of “heavy tomes” (GARS I, 205f., note 2; PESC, 284, note 118). And he did not take the time to ‘collect’ the flotsam and jetsam of his publications, to recast it all in book form in order to create something like a ‘tangible’ and manageable body of work. In many cases he did not have time because he was concerned with other more urgent matters. It was not until the end of his life that he made a determined effort to collect at least his articles on the sociology of religion, to revise them and bring them out in book form: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (GARS I, II, III) – such was the title of his planned, multi-volume project of which Weber was able to finish himself only the first volume. But at least this contained the second version of the ‘Protestant Ethic’ and a substantial beginning to the series on *The Economic Ethics of the World Religions*, including the Study on China (“Konfuzianismus und Taoismus”, GARS I, 276ff.; RC). To both of these articles can be applied what Weber

<sup>5</sup> Their subtitle is: Comparative Attempts in the Sociology of Religion (“Vergleichende religionssoziologische Versuche”, GARS I, 237ff.).

promises in his publisher's advertisement of October 1919: "Almost all of the articles collected here have appeared in the 'Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik'. They have however not only been revised but expanded through substantial inserts and references" (cf. MWG I/19, 28).

After her husband's death, Marianne Weber took it upon herself not only to complete the publication of the essays on the sociology of religion. She also gathered together the *disiecta membra* of his other essays, put them into systematic order and had them published in a considerable number of volumes of collected essays. There was, in addition, her very laborious editorial work on *Economy and Society*.<sup>6</sup> It was in this way, that "heavy tomes" came into being after all. Thus it was not until the 1920s that a great part of Weber's writings were available in book form and became a more or less coherent body of work. Marianne Weber has herself spoken of this work as "a torso or perhaps better a monumental building, the different parts of which have been finished in different degrees."<sup>7</sup>

The fragmentary character of Weber's work, it may be added, was not increased by its reception. Even after Marianne Weber's editorial work, it did not exactly lend itself, to being read and evaluated in context, and thanks to the 'interdisciplinary' character of Weber's work, its individual parts fell, inevitably, into the hands of different scholars of different disciplinary areas, if one may put it thus. Furthermore, different parts of Weber's work have aroused different degrees of interest. *Economy and Society* (E&S in the following) came to be accepted as Weber's 'chef d'oeuvre', and at least some of its parts managed to attract considerable attention. Indeed, the *Protestant Ethic* became a worldwide success in sociological-historical studies. Other writings, by contrast remained rather unknown. It was therefore something of a sensation when in a much noted essay, Friedrich H. Tenbruck (1975; a slightly condensed translation is Tenbruck 1980) took a comprehensive look at Weber's output and declared the relatively little studied essays in the *Economic Ethics of the World Religions* the core of Weber's complete works. Tenbruck's assessment of EEWR was grounded not least in the Weberian themes of rationalization and "the disenchantment of the world".

A few years later, this theme was picked up by Arnold Zingerle. His survey, as comprehensive as it was thorough, of the scholarly reception of Weber's 'historical sociology' concludes with the "comparative cultural studies" contained in the *Economic Ethics of the World Religions*. In these he sees Weber "at

<sup>6</sup> On this, and other matters, cf. Winckelmann (1986).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Marianne Weber (1932), 145. I'm grateful to Bärbel Meurer for making this text available to me.

the height of his sociological thinking” but also records their reception which, in comparison with other parts of his work, he considers “disproportionately narrow”.<sup>8</sup> In the context of the striking imbalance in the amount of attention paid to different parts of the Weberian oeuvre, Zingerle (1980) draws attention to a further difficulty that applies especially to the articles of the EEWR: the three studies in question deal respectively with China, India and Ancient Judaism, which makes each of them *monographs* in their own right, and so the connection between them is easily lost. This difficulty is compounded by what Weber stated himself with great emphasis (GARS I,13; PESC, 28f.): with regard to China only sinologists have the right to pass judgement, with regard to India only Indologists, and with regard to classical Judaism only experts on the Old Testament.

The Anglo-Saxon reception of Weber’s work is a special problem: the available translations make it difficult to perceive the unity and connectedness of the studies of EEWR. The *Vorbemerkung* (GARS I, 1ff.) is called ‘Author’s Introduction’ and is usually read in Parson’s translation of PE (PESC, 13ff.; now also EW, 101ff.). The *Einleitung/Introduction* (GARS I, 237ff.) and the *Zwischenbetrachtung/Intermediate reflection* (GARS I, 536ff.) - “substantial inserts” as Weber calls them - were published in 1949 in a volume of collected essays *From Max Weber* (FMW), edited by Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills. But there is no hint that they are connected to the EEWR studies. Having said this, Hans Gerth, on the occasion of the publication of his English translation of the China study (*The Religion of China*; RC, XIff.) made explicit reference, in a *Prefatory Note*, to its EEWR context and to the fact that he had translated the *Wirtschaftsethik* under the title of *Social Psychology* (FMW; 267ff.). And although *The Religion of China, Ancient Judaism* (AJ; 1952) and *The Religion of India* (RI; 1958) were brought out in a basically identical format by the same publisher there is no indication of their immediate connectedness in the framework of EEWR. Robert Bellah, who in his review (1959) was very critical of the translation of the study on India, even speaking of “distortions” in various places, was fully aware that the three volumes were “parts of a single building”.<sup>9</sup>

The further development of the book’s reception needs not be traced here in any great detail. Two things, however, must be mentioned. The *first* - in the 1980s - is the series of six volumes of collected essays, each edited with an introduction by Wolfgang Schluchter, which are devoted to the ‘great chapters on the history of religion’, if I may be allowed the expression, as Max Weber

<sup>8</sup> Zingerle (1981), 156ff., 188; also cf. Küenzlen (1980), who is prompted by Tenbruck, too.

<sup>9</sup> For problems of the international reception (and the translation, too) of the study on India (RI) since the fifties cf. Kantowsky (1982), 345ff. (“Dokumentation eines Mißverständnisses”).

envisaged them.<sup>10</sup> These volumes were published to prepare for the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* (MWG); they had attracted the attention of distinguished, international scholars; and experts from the most diverse fields expounded their views on Weberian topics, at times, however, in such a way that the discussion of Max Weber remained rather superficial, with the authors tending to deal with what was especially close to their research interests at the time. Above all, however, not only do these volumes keep to a monographic format, they even reinforce it and do not pay enough attention to the comparative character of EEW. Furthermore the reception and continuation of studies on Weber's concern with the world religions from a sociological and universal-historical angle was greatly helped by the fact that the line of research initiated by Schluchter was carried on in the debate on the "civilizations of the axial age", promoted by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt. Although the comparative element stood then a better chance, this did not mean, as Tenbruck would have wanted, that the studies of EEW took centre stage in scholarly interest in Max Weber's work. Indeed, these studies, not least in what has for some years been called "the Weber paradigm", cannot be said to occupy a prominent position.<sup>11</sup>

The *second*, most important aspect to be mentioned is of course the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*, which has given Weber's *Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen* in the new edition a new lease of life: in 1989, *Konfuzianismus und Taoismus* appeared, as part one i.e. the study on China (MWG I/19). This was followed in 1996 by the study on India: *Hinduismus und Buddhismus* (MWG I/20), and finally, in 2005, edited by Eckart Otto and divided into two volumes, *Das antike Judentum* appeared (MWG I/21,1, MWG I/21,2). This makes all the work on EEW available in a complete edition, and an unrepeatably intensive concern with textual scrutiny and the editorial fine tuning of the text has thus been brought to conclusion. The mass of Weber's text is now available, fully annotated and easy to consult, offering totally new opportunities for its appreciation. With great caution I would like to add that not all the volumes have received the same amount of devotion and concern for detail. Dirk Kaesler (1996, 150ff.), rightly in my view, has drawn attention to a num-

<sup>10</sup> I want to refer here only to the first and last published volumes; cf. Schluchter, ed. (1981), (1988). The aim of the project as a whole is (1988, 10) said there to be the "interpretation of the most important finished and unfinished parts of Max Weber's sociology of religion and its exposure to the critique of the specialist disciplines."

<sup>11</sup> For the 'axial age' see the demanding evaluation of the two multivolume collections of essays edited by Eisenstadt in Breuer (1994); cf. also Bellah (2005). With reference to the Weber paradigm, I only want to mention Albert, Bienfait, Sigmund, and Wendt, eds. (2003); in this volume only Pietro Rossi's contribution (111ff), which - investigating inter alia the question of Weber's concept of universal history - concentrates above all on EEW.

ber of disappointments that in particular await the reader who approaches the China study with great expectations: these disappointments include the two seminal texts, the *Einleitung* (cf. EW, 55ff.) and the *Zwischenbetrachtung* (cf. EW, 215ff.) both of them framing the China study. The overall context of the essays on EEWR, it would seem, has not been taken into account sufficiently here. It would seem that the Weber text that focuses most on this aspect has been kept out of the first WEWR-volume of the MWG, by which I mean the above-mentioned *Vorbemerkung* ('Author's Introduction'). Far be it from me to play off the individual volumes of MWG against one another, but as I have given reasons for my opinion in a review elsewhere (*Theologische Rundschau* 72 (2007), 121-126) it may be acceptable to repeat here that Eckart Otto's *Das antike Judentum* is a perfect model of how to edit. Furthermore, Otto has added to his edition a framework of important publications that supplement and draw attention to new aspects (cf. Otto, 2002). This will guide and direct all future critical engagement with Weber's Ancient Judaism.

### III.

1. The remarks to be made in the following section are based on the fragmentary character of Weber's work, especially that of his writings on the sociology of religion. In these, I pursue a dual purpose: I want to show that Max Weber's work on the sociology of religion as a whole is indeed like an unfinished torso; but despite all its heterogeneity, it is characterised by strong inner cohesion. Weber himself pointed this out sufficiently clearly, and the following discussion will therefore give a more precise picture of the connectedness of his sociology of religion and the position in it of the EEWR in particular, the *Protestant Ethic* will be relegated to the background. On the other hand, my specific concern will be with Weber's studies on EEWR and the question of what holds them together and gives them unity. The impression, mentioned above, that the studies are really three separate monographs – will be corrected. It will be a matter of avoiding the obvious mistake of taking the three studies out of their context and assessing them one by one. I will do that in a brief remark at the end, especially with regard to their sustained comparative character.

When we speak of Max Weber's sociology of religion we are thinking of three bodies of work. All of them remained uncompleted and Weber worked on all of them up to the final years of his life. Of these three parts, which are at the centre of this article, his studies on EEWR are the most voluminous and it will be my task to establish a connection between them and the two others. What needs to be underlined, by the way, is the word *sociology* in the label 'sociology of religion': in stressing this word, we need not however think pri-



marily of the sociology of the *Basic sociological concepts* (E&S 1, 3 ff.; EW, 311ff.). It may be enough here to refer to Max Weber's first editor, Marianne Weber, who draws up a very convincing list of "three different forms" in which Weber offered his sociology.<sup>12</sup>

Now, before I briefly turn to the three texts mentioned, I cannot avoid looking more closely at Weber's 'sociology', and more particularly at the sort of questions which he examines. This is because the 'Protestant Ethic' is the first of the three studies and because Weber, at the time of its first publication (1904/5), was still emphatically keeping aloof from sociology as a discipline (cf. Kruse, 2001, 1990). This is clearly expressed in his essay on *The 'objectivity' of knowledge in social science and social policy* (1904; EW, 359ff.), which immediately preceded PE. At the same time, the essay lays down the research programme which determined the direction of the questions he asked both in PE and the whole of his later sociology. This programme is called *Social Economy* ("Sozialökonomik") in his essay on 'objectivity' (EW, 368ff.) and states openly that it belongs to the tradition of Historical Materialism. To put it simply the 'social-economic' questions establish a relation between the *economic* with the *non-economic* social contexts (politics, law, religion etc); in particular they ask about the degree to which the respective political, legal and religious facts are "determined by the economy" ("ökonomisch *bedingt*") or, in turn, "are relevant for the economy" ("ökonomisch *relevant*"). It can be seen that PE, in as much as it is about the *religious* roots of capitalism, belongs to what is *relevant* for the economy; but it also goes without saying that Weber considers the reverse i.e. the determination of the religious by factors relating to the economy and, not least, the various social strata. Of course a systematic approach to religion has also to consider purely religious phenomena, i.e. social constellations in which religious things that happen or develop are *not* conditioned by poli-

<sup>12</sup> Marianne Weber (1932, 145), not least with reference to Weber's writings in the field of the sociology of religion states: "Max Weber offers his sociological works in three different forms: in one of these he mostly describes, analyses and searches out the causal connections which are also used in historiography, although he puts a greater emphasis on the conceptualization of his subject matter ("begriffliche Stoffdurchdringung"). This is the form of the essays on the sociology of religion (EEWR, HT). The second form see the construction of, as it were, the frame of a half-timbered house into which the historical material is then inserted. This is the way in which are presented his writings on the systematic sociology of religion, the sociology of law, the sociology of domination and of the city. The third form finally deals with abstractions on the theoretical level in which the concrete materials are bound in a tight conceptual network and only serve to illustrate the concepts by way of example. This conceptual network covers the basic forms of social, economic and political action, not in order to build a closed system, which he refuses to do, but for the purpose of gaining special insights." For a good survey of Weber's sociology of religion see also the recent study by Eberle (2008), 63ff., 89ff., 103ff.

tics or the economy, but, as in the case of charisma, achieve a breakthrough on their own or follow in their dynamics specific inner-religious regularities (“Eigengesetzlichkeiten”). These things have been given, as I have shown elsewhere, a not inconsiderable amount of space in Weber’s sociology of religion.<sup>13</sup>

As far as Weber the sociologist is concerned, it may suffice to point out that this briefly sketched programme became an integral part of his later ‘sociology’. Both *Economy and Society* and the studies on EEWB adopt this approach, and both reveal his overriding concern with socio-economic questions.

2. This brings me to the *Protestant Ethic*, which is still being talked about today but more as the object of historical scholarship (cf. Ghosh, 2008, Lehmann, 2008; see also Firsching/Tyrell, 2009). Evidence of the basic ‘socio-economic’ nature of PE may be seen in the fact that both parts of the essay end with thoughts on the relationship between base and superstructure. “In view of the tremendous confusion of interdependent influences between the material basis, the forms of social and political organization, and the ideas current in reform periods,” Weber insists on the necessity in his search for historical causes to ask about the relevance of ideas for the development of economic material (GARS I, 83f., 204ff.; PESC, 91f., 182f.). What is however of paramount interest here is that Weber had clearly planned more than the two parts to the essay published in 1904/5; he stopped work on it in 1906 - very likely because the Revolution in Russia had made such an impression on him – but he was more or less forced to remain faithful to his role as counter-critic reacting to the critiques by H. Karl Fischer and Felix Rachfahl. Weber took up the two finished parts again in the last year of his life and published them in the first volume of GARS with a considerable amount of new material, rightly stressing the continuity of this version with the earlier one. He also took over what he had already stated in the form of a programme at the end of that essay as “the task” which he would have to face if he continued to work on the historical “significance of ascetic rationalism”. He shifts, it is true, in this passage from the indicative to the subjunctive, with “have to” being replaced by “should” (cf. Tyrell, 1994b, 399; Ghosh, 2008, 61ff.; Lehmann 2008).

Now, with regard to the relationship of PE to the studies on WEWB, I just want to give readers a brief quote found in the final but connecting note of the PE (GARS I, 205, note 1; PESC, 284, note 119; cf. also Küenzlen, 1980, 55ff.) in which the late Weber talks about these matters: “Instead of following up with an immediate continuation in terms of the above programme, as

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Winckelmann (1982); with regard to the sociology of religion Tyrell (1992), 181ff. There the aspect of the *purely religious* is dealt in greater detail.

originally planned”<sup>14</sup> - “I decided at the time - partly for fortuitous reasons, especially the appearance of Troeltsch’s *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* which disposed of many things I should have had to investigate in a way in which I, not being a theologian, could not have done it; but partly also in order to correct the isolation of this study and to place it in relation to the whole of cultural development – I decided as I say, first to write down some comparative studies on the general historical relationship of religion and society. It is these that follow here.” We are, given here three pieces of information: first, a further reference to the “originally planned immediate continuation”, which, as mentioned above, was never realized; instead what the author did accomplish was a vastly expanded scholarly horizon. Second, we are given a hint at the connection of PE with EEW: PE is to be placed in the “whole of cultural development” (“in die Gesamtheit der Kulturentwicklung”). That means, as we shall see, that Weber placed at the beginning of his long march through universal history what originally had been planned for its final chapter. This was intended to lead back to PE. And, third, the studies on the EEW are characterized here as a presentation of the results of the “comparative studies of the general interrelation between religion and society.” What I would like to stress here is the *comparative* intention and, on the other hand, Weber’s use of the concept of *society*, a comprehensive term usually studiously avoided by him. “*Religion and society*” – religion is seen in relation to its intrasocietal environment - in close analogy to “economy and society”; it is only here that this phrase is to be found (cf. Tyrell, 1994a, Schwinn, 2001).

Finally, I would like to mention briefly that the final chapter of the China study returns explicitly to the theme of ‘ascetic Protestantism’. It bears the title “Conclusions: Confucianism and Puritanism” (GARS I, 512ff.; RC, 226ff.; now, newly translated, EW, 25ff.) and is from the point of view of the systematic study of religion of considerable importance. As is well known, the chapter starts with the question of ‘religious rationalism’. Here Weber has two things in mind: on the one hand the comparison of *two* forms of rationalism, the Protestant and “Confucian rationalism – for the name is appropriate.” On the other hand, he wants to point to aspects and criteria for “judging the level of rationalization that a religion represents”(GARS I, 512; RC, 226). This is an important step in clarifying the declaredly ambiguous vocabulary of ‘the rational’ and ‘rationalization’, which was in fact used excessively by Weber. And it is in this sense that the final chapter of the China study contains central considerations on ‘religious rationalization’: it deals both with the religious repression

<sup>14</sup> “Statt der *ursprünglich beabsichtigten* unmittelbaren Fortsetzung” – this is not translated in Parsons’ edition!

of magic (attributed above all to Puritanism), or the “disenchantment of the world”, and the ‘systematization’ which is carried by religion “in the relation between God and the world” and therewith “into its own ethical relationship to the world.” With regard to the latter, Confucianism represents for Weber the ‘adaptive’ case of a religion that minimizes “the tension with the world”.

3. The second, equally unfinished piece of sociology of religion is his *Sociology of Religion* in E&S, which is referred to by Weber repeatedly as his “systematic” sociology of religion (E&S 2, 399ff.; cf. Kippenberg / Riesebrodt 2001).<sup>15</sup> The text in question is mainly the extensive chapter in E&S which, in Marianne Weber’s early edition, bore the title “Sociology of Religion”. Since 2001 it has been edited with an introduction by Hans G. Kippenberg, under the title of *Religiöse Gemeinschaften* (volume I/22-2 of the MWG). However, this chapter does not contain everything that Weber wrote on the topic in E&S: as mentioned above, there is also the large section in the ‘Herrschaftssoziologie’ with the title of *Political and Hierocratic Domination*.<sup>16</sup> And this is precisely the problem: in his first attempt at E&S, Max Weber dealt with questions of religious organisation and religious domination *outside* the chapter devoted to the sociology of religion. And although he was especially proud of the chapter on this topic in E&S (cf. MWG I/22-2, 87), he wanted to make changes to it in the final version of E&S, which was to be organized into paragraphs. The issue of hierocracy, including the themes of churches and sects, as stated explicitly in §17 of *Basic sociological concepts*, was to have been dealt with, in a chapter on the “sociology of religion”. It is in accordance with this intention that these themes do not appear in the new, later version of the ‘Herrschaftssoziologie’ (cf. E&S 1, 212ff.; also Tyrell, 2003, 208f.). However this projected chapter, whose exact structure we do not know, was never written. It must be added that the text passages of the ‘systematic sociology of religion’, as we now have them in the MWG-edition, are all part of that “*thick* old manuscript” (of E&S) which Weber no longer wanted to see published in that form in 1919; as he wrote to his publisher, he was planning to “revise it thoroughly” (cf. MWG I/22-1, 32) dividing it into paragraphs. In fact Weber was able to undertake this re-writing only for part of the manuscript.

What about the relation of the *systematic Sociology of Religion* to EEW? Here again the answer is given in a note to be found at the beginning of the

<sup>15</sup> This chapter was translated into English by Ephraim Fischhoff and published as such in book form under the title of *Sociology of Religion* (in the following SR) in 1964; cf. the review by Nelson (1965).

<sup>16</sup> Now MWG I/22-4, 564ff. (“Staat und Hierokratie”); cf. E&S 3, 1158ff.) One should mention that this section does not immediately conform to the triad of Weber’s legitimation types (traditional, charismatic or rational-legal), that dominate the Weberian sociology of domination.

*Introduction* (“Einleitung“), to the EEWR (GARS I, 237ff., note 1; EW, 55ff.) that directly precedes the study on *Confucianism and Taoism*. In this footnote referring to the essays in EEWR, Weber says: “It was (...) intended that the essays should appear at the same time with the sociology-of-religion section of the treatise on ‘Economy and Society’ (...). The essays would have interpreted and enlarged the sociology-of-religion section (and to be sure would have been interpreted in their turn at many points by that section)“ (EW, 55). In a letter to his publisher of 1915 Weber downgrades the essays and calls them mere “preparatory work and explanatory notes on the systematic sociology of religion“ in E&S (MWG I/19, 35). However this means that the connection between EEWR and the *Sociology of Religion* in E&S, and thus between the *historical* and the *systematic* sociology of religion is, in the author’s intention, a very close and complementary one. Yet, as indicated above, there are in the EEWR studies insertions of a systematic nature.

In his review, mentioned above, Benjamin Nelson (1965, 597) calls with some justification for “a synoptic table collating passages in the *Sociology of Religion* with the related passages in the three-volume *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*”. Such a synoptic table does not exist so far, but at least we now have an abundance of very helpful commentary footnotes and indexes in the MWG. At this point we can safely claim that the essays of the EEWR are not isolated works; the *Sociology of Religion* in E&S is a systematically oriented supplement. However, up to now Weberian scholars have not given enough attention either to the difference or to the interconnection between both. It appears remarkable to me that we possess no less than *two* sociologies of religion by the *same* scholar, two sociologies, I might add, of a very different design and execution. In this connection it might be of interest to mention that Heinrich Rickert has written about the coexistence of Weber’s two different sociologies of religion in accordance with his own Logic of Science and felt affirmed by that.<sup>17</sup>

4. I now move on to the series of articles of the EEWR itself as first published from 1916 in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, in which the series subtitle was “religionssoziologische Skizzen”. In a letter to his publisher of 1915, Weber said that the texts to be published were only appropriate “in their current form” for “journal articles”. At the same time he related them explicitly to PE with regard to the “general execution (“allgemeine Durch-

<sup>17</sup> Rickert, however, thinks that the EEWR studies, “despite a strongly constructive element”, “pose mainly *historical* problems for themselves” whereas E&S represents “the logical possibility of a generalising *sociology*.” “The same scholar treats the same subject in two logically distinct ways. In this respect Max Weber’s work in its *entirety* constitutes the best possible confirmation of our logic of science (Wissenschaftslehre).” Cf. Rickert (1929), 262f.

führung”) of the method”. And in the ‘Author’s Introduction’ Weber also underlined the series’ continuity in socioeconomic terms. He says there, with regard to the complex relationship between religion and economy (and at the same time between ideas and interests), that the PE investigates “only one side of the causal relationship”. The project of the EEWWR carries this further but is much wider in scope: it attempts an “overview of the relations of the most important religions to economic life and to the social stratification of their environment” (GARS I, 12; PESC, 27). EEWWR goes beyond PE in that Weber now wants to “investigate both causal relations”. The importance for Weber of the stratification aspect – that is the “economic conditions of the religious” – already becomes obvious in the *Introduction*, which comes directly before the China study. Its design is systematic and is entirely focused on this aspect and of course has features in common with the stratification chapter in the “systematic sociology of religion” in E&S (MWG I/22-2, 218ff.; SR, 80ff.; E&S 2, 468ff.). From the point of view of his research strategy, however, Weber adds an important qualification to the reciprocal causality of religion and economy/stratification: it is to be investigated only in “so far as it is necessary in order to find points of comparison with the Western development, whose analysis is to be further pursued” (GARS I, 12, PESC, 27). With this we can perceive the universal historical reach of Weber’s project.

Marianne Weber (1932, 145) called her husband’s life work “a torso”, and we see that most painfully in EEWWR. I say this for two reasons. On the one hand, it is only necessary to list what Weber planned *to add* to what we have in the three volumes. I am quoting here from his publisher’s announcement of October 1919: “a short presentation of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and also Zarathustrian religious ethic, (...) a sketch, devoted to the peculiarity of the West, of the development of the European middle classes (*Bürgertum*) in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages. The description of Judaism encompasses the beginning of the Maccabean Period. In a third volume early Christianity, Talmudic Judaism, Islam and eastern Christianity will be dealt with, where as a final volume will deal with Western Christianity” (MWG I/19, 28). This leads back to the beginning, i.e. to the PE. As is apparent, the larger part of Weber’s project was never realized.

On the other hand: we must be clear that what Weber planned was, to a large degree, a comparative play off between *East and West*. But Weber completed his game – first treating China, then India<sup>18</sup> - only for the oriental or Asian part. The study on India stops with the section called “the general character of Asiatic religion” (RI, 329ff.; GARS II, 363ff.; MWG I/20, 526ff.)

<sup>18</sup> This order is deliberate; cf. GARS I, 267, note 1.

and the last and transitional sentence of this section (and of the whole book) directs our attention by force of contrast to the specificity of the *Western* development. This was, especially in its beginnings, “conditioned by highly particular historical constellations without which, despite differences in natural conditions, the development there could easily have taken the course typical of Asia, more specifically of India” (RI, 343; GARS II, 378; MWG I/20, 543f.). Published after Weber’s death, it was *Ancient Judaism* that immediately followed the Study of India. This work is incomplete and as Julius Guttman, Weber’s early reviewer, noted in 1925, it “remained a torso”. What this means is that Weber’s rationalization history of the West, his Western serialized novel was not continued beyond the first chapter, and as a result *Ancient Judaism* stayed – a strangely isolated text especially in comparison with the Asiatic-oriental parts. The “to be continued” was never written.

But the evidence for the trunk-like character of the EEWR does not end here. We should look at Weber’s *insertions*, namely his intercalated and systematic theory pieces such as the famous *Zwischenbetrachtung* (GARS I, 536ff.; MWG I/19, 479ff.; EW, 215ff.)<sup>19</sup>, inserted between the study of China and that of India.

This section uses the fact that “Indian religiosity was the cradle of the theoretically and practically most world-denying (*weltverneinend*) form of religious ethic that the world has ever known” for “a schematic and theoretical construction” that is concerned itself in a very specific way with the relation between ‘religion and society’. This construction sees ‘world-denying religiosity’ in relation to the various ‘life orders’ or ‘value-spheres’ of its intrasocietal environment and enquires after ‘inner conflicts’ or ‘conflicts of values’ (“Wertkollisionen”), issues that have been raised especially from the point of view of religion. As is well known, Weber undertakes this construction with regard to the ‘economic sphere’, the ‘political order’, the ‘aesthetic’, the ‘erotic’ and the ‘intellectual sphere’. As far as the *Zwischenbetrachtung* is concerned we should add here that there is an earlier version in the ‘systematic sociology of religion’ in E&S (2, 576ff.; MWG I/22-2, 367ff.), in which the intellectual sphere is not yet taken into account.

Weber also intended to make an insertion of this kind (but on a completely different topic) which was to precede the study of *Ancient Judaism*. To be more precise, the “sketch of the development of the European ‘Bürgertum’ in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages”, mentioned above, was to be placed at the beginning of the presentation of Western affairs. Its theme would have been “the development of the socio-economic distinctiveness of the West”. In a let-

<sup>19</sup> Under the title “Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions” in FMW, 323ff.; see now as “Intermediate Reflection” in ES, 215ff.

ter to his publisher dated September 1919 Weber says this about the sketch: “*India* is almost ready to go to press (...). *Then* an essay still to be written though completely thought out (“im Kopf fertig”) has to be inserted, an essay about the general conditions of the distinct development of the West. *Then* Judaism will follow” (MWG I/19, 44). What is interesting here, among other things, is the clue to Weber’s intellectual production – a little reminiscent of Mozart: “im Kopf fertig”; only the troublesome work of getting it all down on paper remains to be done. But what I want to stress above all is that this text would have dealt with the very core of the project of the EEW. The publisher’s announcement of October 1919 ends with the sentence: “The subject is always how to answer the question: what is the basis of the economic and social *distinctiveness* of the West, how this developed and in particular what connection this distinctiveness has with the development of the religious ethic.” The essay we are speaking about would have addressed this question explicitly and thoroughly.

I do not believe that here Weber had directly in mind his study of the *City* (“Die Stadt”, now MWG I/22-5), which is a part of the E&S we are familiar with, but something that closely corresponds to it nevertheless. The *City* lacks a focus on *religion* among other things, and it does not fit in to the religio-sociological context. However my ‘Weberian’ basic instinct tells me that the following theme – presented in the *Introduction* to the EEW (GARS I, 237ff.; FMW, 267ff., EW, 55ff.) - would have figured prominently in that basic text on Western affairs. The *Einleitung*, as is well known, begins with a rough sketch of world religions from the perspective of stratification. The different religions are characterised here according to the respective dominant stratum or status group that functions as their ‘carrier’. Judaism is called once more “the religion of a town dwelling (*bürgerlich*) ‘pariah people” (EW, 57). Christianity is characterised here as follows: “It was, and remained, a specifically urban, and above all, civic (*bürgerlich*) religion at least during all the periods of its outward and inner upswing, whether in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, or Puritanism. The city of the West, unique in relation to all other cities, along with the middle classes (*Bürgertum*) in the sense in which they originated only in the West, was the main setting in which Christianity appeared. This was so for the spiritualistic religious communities (*pneumatische Gemeindefrömmigkeit*) of Antiquity, for the mendicant orders of the high Middle Ages, and the sects of the period through to Pietism and Methodism” (EW, 58).

This passage, should give us at least a partial idea of what Weber had ‘completely thought out in his head’ but not written down and which was to inform his presentation of western matters. The structural interconnection between *urban* and *Christian* development, the rise and development of towns and the evolution of Christian religiosity – both understood as exclusively western phenomena – are the decisive points here. However, Weber restricts this interconnection to the



three Christian epochs mentioned. As far as the third is concerned, the period of the Reformation, it would have been here that he would have written what he had promised but not done in the context of PE: to show how the social stratification conditioned the Reformation and early Protestantism. It only remains to add that Weber thought ancient Judaism was a crossroad at the beginning of the history of the West and its separate development. It had a decisive impact on the origins of Christianity and the direction of its development and it became more and more an essentially urban religion (cf. RS II:372; MWG I/20: 537): it was “the polis of Jerusalem” that was the social locus of the prophets’ communicative impact, the place of their ‘demagogy’ (AJ, 267ff.).

5. Should we ask what the unifying elements are of these very heterogeneous Weberian studies collected in EEWR, three things above all should be mentioned, of which the first two have already been discussed. First, there is the ‘Western question’, mentioned in the first sentence of the ‘Author’s Introduction’; as the publisher’s announcement of 1919 says, the question was ‘in the air’ “everywhere”. The second thread running through the studies is Weber’s ‘socio-economic’ approach, or rather, thanks to the phrase of “*religion* and society”, his ‘socio-religious’ approach. To put it simply, this is concerned with the determination of religion by economic, political and, most importantly, stratificatory conditions and, on the other hand, with religion’s relevance for its intrasocietal (economic, political etc) environment. The third feature that needs pointing out is the underlying *comparative* nature of Weber’s sociology in general and of EEWR in particular.

Stephen Kalberg (1994), for instance, following in the footsteps of Benjamin Nelson, has characterised Weber’s undertaking as “comparative historical sociology”. This label has been chosen with some justification despite the fact that Weber hardly anywhere talks about comparisons, let alone the ‘comparative method’ in a systematic, reflective way. This silence is remarkable and requires explanation, which however cannot be given here. The clearest hints are found in a letter of 1914 to the historian Georg von Below.<sup>20</sup> In any case, all advertisements and descriptions, particularly of the EEWR-project, emphasize the work’s comparative character (cf. GARS I: 12f.; PESC, 27f.). The EEWR’s subtitle (“Comparative essays on the sociology of religion”) has

<sup>20</sup> Cf. MWG II/8, 723ff., where Weber refers however to E&S; in that context, he writes that “the form of political institutions receives a *comparative* and systematic treatment, even if that runs the danger of falling prey to the anathema of ‘amateurs making comparisons’”; see *ibidem* for more detail. Cf. also Nelson (1974), 273 ff., who makes an important reference to Weber’s debate with Eduard Meyer. Only on rare occasions does Weber seek explicitly to link his work to the ‘comparative religion’ of his time.

already been mentioned. The most instructive and enlightening discussion of Weber's comparativism has, in any case, been made by Song-U Chon (1992), a Korean Weber scholar, whose focus is chiefly on the China study. In that article it is made clear that employing comparisons was not just a welcome heuristic tool for Weber but a decisive tool in his search for knowledge, which he used deliberately and *continuously*. This, of course, applies above all to the series of essays for the EEW, which is not only arranged around the contrast of East and West, a contrast he pursues (inter alia in the contrast of mysticism and asceticism) right down to his 'systematic sociology of religion'. In fact, the series uses the comparative method throughout, and makes free use of comparisons as, for example in the case of China and India in political and religious terms, or in the description of Judaism as the religion of a "pariah people"- here adopting the ethnic and stratificatory categories of India.

Finally, I would like to touch on just one further aspect in a little more detail. Benjamin Nelson, by calling Weber's sociology a "differential" one, expresses the high degree to which Weber, given his interest in 'individualizing knowledge', was eager to offer descriptions and definitions of cultures and social structures that captured their respective *distinctiveness*. The chosen path here was a 'differential' one, i.e. one of comparison. Comparison is the way to identify and weight "the differences and individual features of cultures." Song-U Chon (1992, 118) has given an impressive demonstration of how far Weber ignored the trivial wisdom of "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" ("fremde Länder fremde Sitten"). It was precisely this *non-trivial* peculiarity and 'otherness' of customs elsewhere that he saw as something for which he had to give a differential description. This was also the place where he encountered the decisive sociological and historical problems of *explanation*: as Song-U Chon puts it pointedly, "Why different customs in different places?" Why, and here my essay has come full circle, did 'disenchantment' take place only and especially in Europe, why did 'rational science' and 'modern capitalism' only develop there?

### *Abbreviations of Weber's Works*

- AJ = *Ancient Judaism*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale. New York: Free Press, 1952.
- E&S = *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich Three Volumes. New York: Bedminster, 1976.
- EW = *The Essential Weber: A Reader*. Edited by Sam Whimster. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- FMW = *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1947.

- GARS I = *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I*. Tübingen: Mohr 1920.
- GARS II = *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie II: Hinduismus und Buddhismus*. Tübingen: Mohr 1920.
- GARS III = *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie III: Das antike Judentum*. Tübingen: Mohr 1920.
- MWG I/19 = *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen. Konfuzianismus und Taoismus 1915-1920*. Edited by Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer and Petra Kolonko. Max Weber Gesamtausgabe I/19. Tübingen: Mohr, 1989.
- MWG I/20 = *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen. Hinduismus und Buddhismus 1916-1920*. Edited by Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer and Karl-Heinz Golzio. Max Weber Gesamtausgabe I/20. Tübingen: Mohr, 1996.
- MWG I/21 = *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen. Das antike Judentum 1911-1920*. Zwei Halbbände. Edited by Eckart Otto. Max Weber Gesamtausgabe I/21. Tübingen: Mohr, 2005.
- MWG I/22-2 = *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Die Wirtschaft und die gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächte*. Nachlaß, Teilband 2: Religiöse Gemeinschaften. Edited by Hans G. Kippenberg. Max Weber Gesamtausgabe I/22-2. Tübingen: Mohr 2001.
- MWG I/22-4 = *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Die Wirtschaft und die gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächte*. Nachlaß, Teilband 4: Herrschaft. Edited by Edith Hanke. Max Weber Gesamtausgabe I/22-4. Tübingen: Mohr 2005.
- MWG II/8 = *Briefe 1913-1914*. Edited by M. Rainer Lepsius and Wolfgang J. Mommsen. Max Weber Gesamtausgabe II/8. Tübingen: Mohr, 2003.
- PESC = *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Talcott Parsons. New York: Scribner's, 1930 (1950).
- RC = *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoismus*. Translated and edited by Hans. H. Gerth. New York: Free Press, 1951.
- RI = *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale. New York: Free Press, 1958.
- SR = *The Sociology of Religion*. Translated by Ephraim Fischhoff. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.

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Con gli studenti agli incontri di Lauenstein nel 1917.