Notes and Queries
Translator’s Note on Weber’s
‘Introduction to the Economic Ethics of the World Religions’

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A new translation presents an opportunity to re-assess and re-read a work whose significance and content we think we already know.¹ I must confess to having regarded the ‘Einleitung’ (‘Introduction’) as inferior to its more spectacular sister essay, the ‘Zwischenbetrachtung’ (‘Intermediate Reflection’), which offers an intense and sustained study of the existential confusion of the human being when faced by the various spheres of life and the competing value systems. I regarded the ‘Einleitung’ essay, by contrast, as a necessary and prosaic account of some of the basic building blocks, in terms of concepts, needed to analyse the sociology of religion. Also I never found it wholly believable that Weber actually read the essay out to colleagues and friends, as he says he did in his opening footnote, as if it merited an oration before such a brilliant audience.²

Having completed a new translation, though, I would have to change this judgment. The ‘Zwischenbetrachtung’ still remains spectacular and agonized, but the ‘Einleitung’ has to take priority in explaining and outlining Weber’s whole approach to the comparative study of world religions. It is not at all prosaic in the way it is written—it positively sizzles with an abundance of intellectual energy and argument. At points it cascades examples in dazzling displays of intellectual brilliance. And, most notably, it contains a fundamental account of how religion in all its particularities is experienced.

The old translation by Gerth and Mills remains inevitably a creature of its time, where post-war America was being introduced to social science, which in large measure had been a European creation. The new social science in America was to be a serious, scientific and value-free affair,

¹. This will form part of the forthcoming The Essential Weber (ed. S. Whimster).

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and one has the impression that Gerth and Mills filtered out the high points of the essay as well as simplifying its theoretical density. This is perhaps understandable, given that the project of constructing social science after the war meant that Weber’s own brilliance had to be toned down. Weber’s essay is scientific in its own way, and the writing reflects the extraordinary care with which he develops his concepts and sets precise limits to their validity and applicability. But Weber also conveys an experiential dimension of religious states of mind and the *habitus* or disposition of the religious person. He pointedly brings this close to the reader’s attention and here his prose has similarities to the educated humanism of William James, who as we shall see provided Weber with a number of cues for his own studies.

The essay is not that long, especially when it is noted that the last third is an appendage that links it to Weber’s other sociological work. This means that it is very heavily loaded with ideas, concepts, typologies and arguments, and it is the carefully formulated language of ‘gebildete’ German that takes the strain of such demands. English, and certainly contemporary English, with its striving towards lucidity, communicates information in an entirely different way to that of the old German format. The German sentence has to be disassembled into its component parts, so to speak on the translator’s bench, and then re-assembled trying to reproduce the scaling of major and minor phrases and points in the original. I comment on this process in a postscript at the end. This is just to point out just how dependent we are on translation, and that a new translation has the ability to re-cast the essay afresh.

Incidentally, I do not think translators have any *special* authority in interpreting a work. Translating tends to be a passive activity with the mind being bent around the surface of the text—very much in contrast to the authoritative, programmatic interpretation where the text is bent to the will of the interpreter. I mention this because in the first draft of this Note I was so taken with the one line of Weber’s argument that I totally ignored Weber’s own countermand that subordinated his one line of argument to another one. It was an instructive error because re-reading the ‘Einleitung’ I noticed that each of these arguments was written in very different styles—intellectualism in contrast to enthusiasm; two facets, one might say, of Weber’s intellectual personality. The upshot of this, it seems to me—and probably to the despair of students and tutors—is that the essay has to be read and re-read. It is a prime candidate for being placed on the seminar table for discussion and analysis.

The first point to be aired in any seminar discussion is that it is not a terribly well-organized essay. Certain arguments loop around more than once, and Weber dives off into sub-arguments before returning to his
main thread. A commentator of the rank of Friedrich Tenbruck opined that Weber wrote the essay in a hurry, and that therefore it did not represent the core of his thinking. The second statement is a misjudgement in my view. That it was written in a hurry is believable—but only in the sense that Weber poured his thinking into this essay. One might ask for a more linear presentation of themes but equally it has to be acknowledged that Weber was exerting his intellect at full strength. Reconstituting the essay in revision was an option that Weber chose not to exercise, even though he had the opportunity. The Max Weber Gesamtausgabe edition (MWG) shows he made only minor changes for its final publication in his collected essays on the sociology of religion.

As a starting point the reader needs to have an idea of the essay’s positional complexity in addressing it. In the Gerth and Mills anthology the positional significance in Weber’s oeuvre was ignored. In fact the essay has four lines of title, to indicate what it is and where it stands, and also an explanatory footnote on its composition (that was omitted by Gerth and Mills). Translating, then, the essay’s title and first footnote:

III.

**The Economic Ethics of the World Religions.**

Comparative Essays in the Sociology of Religion

1) Introduction

1) [Weber’s Footnote] Appeared in Jaffé’s *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft*, pp. 41-46 (1915-19) in instalments; the first parts unchanged from when they were written down and read out to friends two years before. Entry into [military] service made it impossible to include the scientific ‘apparatus’ as intended; in its place were supplied short notes on the literature at the beginning of each section. This also explained the differences in how thoroughly the particular subjects were treated. If the essays in spite of this were published at the time, it was because it seemed then that it would be impossible after the war had ended, which for everyone meant an epoch in their lives, to go back and pick up the threads of the ideas from the earlier period. It was, moreover, also intended that the essays should appear at the same time with the sociology of religion section of the treatise on ‘Economy and Society’ which was part of the ‘Outline of Social-Economics’. The essays would have interpreted and enlarged the sociology of religion section (and to be sure would have been interpreted in many points by that section.) The essays seem to be publishable in the state that they were in at that time. What detracts from the essays’ value, as a result


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of their inevitably somewhat outline character and the varying amount of detail presented, will surely be improved in the future by the work of others than would have been possible by me. In order for the essays to be in any sense conclusive, they would have to rely less on the translated sources as were available to the author for the current presentation. Nevertheless the essays in their present form could be useful in some points for enlarging the terms of argument in the sociology of religion as well as here and there the sociology of economic life. I have sought to improve the essays, collected together for this edition, insofar as this is feasible for the non-specialist using the materials available to him. Some small oversights have been removed, the very much incomplete presentation, in particular of Chinese society, has been improved, and the references cited have been somewhat improved.

The roman III indicates that it is the third ‘section’ of a multi-volume work entitled Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie (‘Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion’). Roman I was his ‘essay’ ‘The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’ in its revised 1920 version. Roman II was his essay ‘The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism’, again heavily revised.

The second title, also in bold, was ‘Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen’ (‘The Economic Ethics of the World Religions’). This was followed on the third line by a subtitle in smaller print: ‘Vergleichende religionsssoziologische Versuche’ (‘Comparative essays in the sociology of religion’). ‘Versuche’ also has the sense of ‘attempts’, which suggests that these essays are experimental, pioneering efforts.

It is only on the fourth line that we come to ‘Einleitung’ (Introduction). The essay, then, is an introduction to substantive studies in the economic ethics of world religions. And to appreciate the context of Section III, we have to turn to the table of contents at the front of the book (i.e. volume one of Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie) which reads as follows:

Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen
Einleitung
I Konfuzianismus und Taoismus
Zwischenbetrachtung: Theorie der Stufen und Richtungen religiöser Weltlehnnung
II Hinduismus und Buddhismus
III Das antike Judentum

(The Economic Ethics of World Religions
Introduction
Confucianism and Taoism
Intermediate Consideration: The Theory of the Stages and Directions of the religious Rejection of the World
Hinduism and Buddhism
Ancient Judaism)
The ‘Einleitung’ and the ‘Zwischenbetrachtung’ essays are theoretical commentaries and explanations of the three substantive studies on the world religions. They can make the claim to be the most important pieces that Weber ever wrote, but curiously for the poor English reader there is no indication of their positional significance. As has just been said, Weber collected his essays together in the Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie (hereafter GARS)\(^5\) and then wrote a prefacing introduction (‘Vorbemerkung’) to all three sections. All of these essays have been variously and separately translated (of a very uneven standard\(^6\)) but there is no English book entity of the ‘Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion’, nor is there an entity for Section III ‘The Economic Ethics of World Religions’.

When Gerth and Mills abstracted the ‘Einleitung’ and the ‘Zwischenbetrachtung’ essays from ‘Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen’ (hereafter WEWR), and published them as free-floating, stand-alone essays in From Max Weber, they changed the title of the ‘Einleitung’ from Introduction to ‘The Social Psychology of the World Religions’. In their edition it was not introducing anything, hence their ‘wheeze’ of supplying a new title (which is pertinent to only one aspect of the essay). Likewise, ‘Zwischenbetrachtung’ was dropped from their English title because it had nothing to intermediate between.\(^7\)

The positional significance of the ‘Einleitung’ essay can be summarized in three points. (1) It marks the start of the economic ethics of the world religions project and the transition away from an exclusive interest in the Protestant ethic studies. (2) It provides the theoretical grounding for a comparative study of world religions. (3) The last part of the essay, as well as Weber’s opening footnote, indicate how the WEWR project links across to his other mammoth intellectual undertaking Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (WuG) whose English translation is published as Economy and Society.\(^8\) Weber also wrote a very instructive advertisement for his publisher Mohr Siebeck for the publication of ‘The Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion’ (GARS), which the MWG shows to be from his own hand (see facsimile – Fig. 1.):


\(^6\) See the discussion of the state of English translation in Max Weber Studies, 2.1 (2001).

\(^7\) Generations of students, teachers and academic commentators have had to use translations that are sub-standard and that have been unable to place the individual pieces in the construction of the whole of Weber’s œuvre. It is difficult to think of a comparable state of affairs in neighbouring social science disciplines.

\(^8\) Economy and Society (eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
Almost all of the essays collected here have appeared in the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, but now not only checked but expanded with major inserts and the furnishing of evidence. At the start is the much-discussed essay on ‘The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism’. Then follows a sketch on ‘The protestant sects and the spirit of capitalism’(a re-working of an essay from the Die christliche Welt), and then the essays on ‘The Economic Ethics of World Religions’, expanded with a short presentation of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Zoroastrian religious ethics, and expanded in particular by an outline of the development of the European bourgeoisie in Antiquity and the Middle Ages; the outline is devoted to tracing the origins of the social distinctiveness of the Occident. The presentation of Judaism extends to the beginning of the Maccabaean period. A third volume will present early Christianity, Talmudic Judaism, Islam, and oriental Christianity. A final volume will deal with Christianity in the Occident. Overall the subject being discussed is: what is the economic and social distinctiveness [Eigenart, underlined by Weber in original] of the Occident founded upon, how did it come into being and in particular in what connection does it stand with the development of religious ethics?
The above quote shows that the scope of Weber’s comparisons to have been much more ambitious than what he achieved before his untimely death in 1920. The advert written in the summer of 1919 anticipated including a further five substantive studies in addition to the three he had completed: a new study of Islam, an additional study on Talmudic Judaism, and three additional studies on Christianity—in the Orient, in the ancient world, and in western history. All of these additional subjects surface for sometimes quite extended discussions in his ‘Sociology of Religion’ which existed in manuscript form before 1914. 9 Hence when we come to read the ‘Einleitung’ essay, the extent of Weber’s comparative ambitions demands nothing less than a general theory of religion in its sociological aspect. This, to use an Australian sporting term, is a really big ‘ask’.

Things appear a little daunting at this stage and perhaps we need to turn to the main German commentators—Friedrich Tenbruck, Wolfgang Schluchter and Wilhelm Hennis. Tenbruck wishes to give primacy to the autonomy of religious ideas in the dynamic of historical and civilizational development. Religions provide social actors with worldviews through which the world is seen, interpreted and thought in terms of. Worldviews are like lenses and have practical consequences for social action. This gives culture an autonomy over the power factors of economics, stratification, and politics, which Tenbruck regards as subsidiary. 10 Schluchter systematically refines and elaborates Weber’s typologies of religious worldviews: whether salvation beliefs turn towards or away from the

9. This has been translated into English by Ephraim Fischoff, The Sociology of Religion (London: Methuen, 1965) and it was also included in Economy and Society, pp. 399-634. The manuscript for this was published by Marianne Weber after Weber’s death and there is some dispute as to how complete and ready for publication the manuscript was. My own view is that had Weber lived to complete the whole programme of his religion studies, there would not have been such a call for him to publish what would have been his first detailed overview of the subject. But as it stands it provides some of Weber’s most brilliant comparative work.

10. Tenbruck, ‘The problem of thematic unity’. It is worth noting that in a preface to the English translation of his article, Tenbruck wrote, ‘Weber scholars were hampered by several assumptions. Firstly, they relied on existing editions which either gave Weber’s ultimate version of earlier publications or were shot through with reconstructions and corrections by his editors. This made it almost impossible to discover one of the main clues for reconstructing his sociology: the gradual development of his theory of rationalization. Lacking this clue, the reconstruction proceeded erroneously by freely combining statements from different strata of his work. For a full understanding of Max Weber we shall have to wait for a historical-critical edition of his works as I had earlier suggested (‘Wie gut kennen wir Max Weber?’, Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft, 131 [1975], pp. 719-42).’
world, and whether the consequences of these lead to flight from the world or its mastery.\textsuperscript{11} Hennis argues that Weber’s project is very similar to that of William James’ \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}.\textsuperscript{12} Weber read and met with William James on his visit to America in 1904.\textsuperscript{13} James is cited in both the Protestant ethic essay (in its 1905 instalment in the \textit{Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik}) and in the ‘Einleitung’ essay. Hennis notes Weber’s opening in the ‘Einleitung’ essay, ‘It is not the ethical theory of theological compendia...but rather those \textit{practical impulses to action} rooted in the psychological and pragmatic relationships of religions which will be treated here’.\textsuperscript{14} This is then compared to James’ own definition, ‘Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us \textit{the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine}. [Italics in original]\textsuperscript{15} The object of Weber’s concern is with the ‘Mensch’—human beings and their experiential state of being. Weber’s central concept is that of ‘conduct of life’ (\textit{Lebensführung})—how human beings organize a code of life that relates their being to living in a world of life orders and estates (or status groups).

Despite the scholarly differences that these commentators maintain to each other,\textsuperscript{16} each of their views can be found in the ‘Einleitung’. These are all facets of the essay, which the reader can be alerted to, but they are by no means exhaustive. So, returning to the seminar table, how does Weber open his essay?

Under the heading of ‘world religions’ will be understood—in a completely value free way—the five religions, or religiously determined systems for the regulation of life, which have known how to gather about

\begin{itemize}
  \item 13. Lawrence A. Scaff, ‘The “objectivity of sociation”: Max and Marianne Weber in America’, \textit{History of the Human Sciences} 11/2 (1998), pp. 66-69. Scaff shows that ‘the shared central theme of their encounter would have been the meaning of religious experience for personal and associational life in a secularized society...’
  \item 16. Their differences stem from what Sven Eliaeson has termed ‘Gesamtdeutungen’—different overall conceptions of Weber’s oeuvre. Tenbruck has a strongly idealist programme, Schluchter an ethical one, and Hennis is committed to a pragmatist working out of tenable ways of life conduct. See Eliaeson, \textit{Max Weber’s Methodologies} (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).
\end{itemize}
them very large numbers of confessional followers, namely: the religious ethics of Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. To these needs to be added a sixth religion, that of Judaism, which contained the decisive historical pre-conditions for any understanding of the last two religions named above. As has been alleged, and is in part true, Judaism is also of uniquely historic significance for the unfolding of the modern economic ethic of the Occident, which is a subject that has been much debated recently.\(^{17}\) Other religions will only be mentioned to the extent that they are unavoidably part of the complete historical picture. On Christianity, reference will initially be made to the earlier essays that have appeared in this collection, and knowledge of which will be presumed.

It is hoped that what is meant by the ‘economic ethic’ of a religion will become increasingly clearer in the course of the exposition. Emphasis will be placed on the practical impulses for action that are grounded in the psychological and pragmatic contexts of religions, and the ethical theories of theological compendia will be used only as a means to knowledge (but are, under the circumstances, of not negligible importance). Although what follows is sketched only in broad outline, it will however allow it to be shown just how complicated a model a concrete economic ethic is and how multi-sided its determination tends to be. In addition it will be shown how organizational forms of the economy that on the outside appear similar are in fact linked to very different economic ethics, and that the particularity of an ethic is realized over time with very different historical consequences. An economic ethic is not a straightforward ‘function’ of the organizational forms of the economy, just as, conversely, an economic form cannot be unambiguously derived from a religious ethic.

No economic ethic has ever been determined solely by religion. It is obvious that economic ethics possess a high degree of autonomous working (Eigengesetzlichkeit) closely determined by economic geography and historical conditions in contrast to the attitudes of human beings to the world as determined by religious or other ‘inner’ factors of a similar nature to religion. But it is true to say that among the determinants of an economic ethic—and these determinants, it should be noted, are multiple—belongs the religious definition of conduct of life. The latter, in its turn, is naturally deeply influenced, within given geographical, political, social and national parameters (Grenzen), by economic and political factors. It would be a never-ending task if one wanted to chart these dependencies in all their details. What is presented here is merely an attempt to bring to light only those social strata which, in giving direction to the conduct of life, have most strongly influenced the practical ethic of the relevant religion and have imprinted on to the religion its characteristic features; by this is meant those features that distinguish it from other religious ethics and at the same time are important for the respective economic ethic.

\(^{17}\) In the following footnotes I wish to give explanations of Weber’s text. The reference here is to the debate caused by Sombart’s books: *The Jews and Modern Capitalism* (German, 1911; London: Fischer Unwin, 1913) and *The German Economy in the Nineteenth Century* (German, 1903).
This has never been the task of one social stratum alone, for in the course of history the influential strata, which have this directive function, can change. And it is never the case that an individual social stratum has an exclusive influence. Despite this, it is possible in most cases to indicate the social strata whose conduct of life has been particularly decisive for each of the given religions. To give some examples in advance:

- Confucianism was the status ethic of a humanistically educated and worldly-rationalistic group who lived off prebends.\(^{18}\) Anyone, who did not belong to this educated stratum, simply did not count. The religious status ethic (or, if one will, irreligious status ethic) of this stratum has defined the Chinese way of life and extended far beyond its own group.

- The older Hinduism, in contrast, was carried by a hereditary caste of the literary educated who were remote from any official position. They operated a kind of ritualistic care of the soul for individuals and for the communities, and, as the fixed centre-point around which status divisions were organized, they shaped the social order. Only those Brahmins educated in the Vedas,\(^{19}\) who were the carriers of the tradition, counted fully as the religious status group. It was only later that a non-Brahmin caste of ascetics moved in as competition to the Brahmins, and still later in the Indian Middle Ages, that there appeared on the scene in Hinduism the fervent, sacramental religiosity, based on a saviour, which with the plebeian mystagogues was found in the lower strata.

- Buddhism was propagated by homeless, wandering, and deeply contemplative monks, who, dependent on begging, rejected the world. They were the only group who belonged fully to the religious community. All the other groups were religiously inferior lay people—objects not subjects of religiosity.

- Islam in its first phase was a religion of world-conquering warriors—a knightly order of disciplined warriors of the faith, but without the sexual asceticism of their Christian counterparts in the Crusades. In the Islamic Middle Ages, however, contemplative-mystic Sufism came to the fore, and from it developed the sense of brotherhood of the small townspeople. They were not unlike the Christian Tertiaries\(^{20}\) but were far more universally developed, and they gained at least an equal role among the leadership of the plebeian experts of the orgy.

- Since the Exile, Judaism was the religion of a town dwelling (\textit{bürgerlich}) ‘pariah-people’—and we will come to understand the mean-

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18. A prebend, in its original sense, was an endowment in land or a pension in money used to support a priest in the mediaeval Christian church.

19. ‘Veda’ is the Sanskrit for ‘knowledge’. They are the oldest books of Indian religion.

20. These were a lay order of Franciscans, the ‘third’ order after the monks and the nuns.
ing of this pithy expression. In the Middle Ages the religion fell under the leadership of an intellectual stratum, which had a literary and ritualistic training, peculiar to Judaism, and which came to represent an increasingly semi-proletarian, rationalistic, and petit bourgeois intelligence.

- Lastly, Christianity began its progress as the teaching of a wandering brotherhood of artisans. It was, and it remained, a specifically urban, and above all, middle-class (bürgerlich) religion during all the periods of its outward and inner upswing, whether in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, or Puritanism. The city of the Occident, unique in relation to all other cities, along with the middle classes (Bürgertum) in the sense in which they originated only in the Occident, 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 reformation period through to Pietism and Methodism.

Now it needs to be made very clear what is being advanced in the following exposition. It is not being argued that a specific religiosity is a simple function of the social position of the stratum, which appears to be its characteristic carrier, as if it were the ‘ideology’ or a ‘reflection’ of the material and ideal interest situation of that stratum. It would be difficult to conceive of such a complete misunderstanding of what is being discussed here. The primary imprint of a religious ethic is received from religious sources—foremost being the content of its promises and message. It does not come from the politically and economically determined social influences acting in each case on a religious ethic, however far reaching these factors may be. And on the frequent occasions when the message and promises of a religious ethic are re-interpreted by the next generation in order to meet the requirements of the community, this always occurs most of all for religious needs. The influence of other spheres of interest, while often quite emphatic and occasionally decisive, can only be of secondary importance. It will be convincingly shown that for every religion a change in its socially decisive stratum does indeed tend to be of far-reaching significance; but, on the other hand, once a religion has received its typical

21. The pariahs were the Indian untouchables, who existed outside the caste system. Weber uses the term to describe a people rejected by their god (but who promises to restore them their kingdom) as well as their ritualistic exclusion from local communities as a migrant people (Gastvolk). See Weber, Ancient Judaism (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952), p. 3 and The Sociology of Religion (London, Methuen, 1965), pp. 108-109.

22. A reference to the Gnostic communities of early Christianity in the second century CE. In The Body and Society (London: Faber, 1989), pp. 116-17, Peter Brown writes, ‘For Valentinus [a Gnostic Christian], the human soul was peopled by a host of unruly spirits, of pneuma. These were incomplete, needy creatures, who used the person to seek their own fulfilment, in the manner of a permanent, half-conscious state of possession.’
imprint, this influence tends to be quite extensive, even exerting control over the conduct of life of very heterogeneous strata.

Various efforts have been made to interpret the interrelationship between a religious ethic and the interest position of its carriers, so that the former appears only as a ‘function’ of the latter. This has occurred not just in so-called historical materialism—and this cannot be debated here—but also in terms of pure psychology.23

Readers can note for themselves the extreme care Weber takes in outlining the balance of ideal and material factors in his approach, and the complexity of his views on determination and co-determination. The bullet points (discreet dashes in the original) are the keys for how Weber will handle religious ideas and their carriers in his separate studies on the world religions. For religious ideas to have efficacy in the world they have to have carriers, preferably a leading, or at least a significant, social stratum. Ideas and their carriers can generate a mutual attraction—what Weber terms an ‘elective affinity’—they are drawn to each other like compatible chemical elements. Once we have understood how Weber will use his keys, things become far less daunting—he has demonstrated his method for comparison.

But, of course, the essay has only just begun. What follows is a seemingly intellectual detour via Marx and Nietzsche, but one that establishes a crucial idea—Weber’s sociological version of theodicy. Marx, as is well-known, remarked in the ‘Communist Manifesto’ that religion was the ‘opium of the people’. Weber argued that religion could not be reduced to an ideology that cloaked the real nature of the interests of the ruling class. But there was some truth in Marx’s assertion. Throughout history oppressed social classes have held religious beliefs which have accommodated and explained away social injustice in the world. The Marxist explanation for this is that religion obscures the real basis of oppression. Weber’s comparative observation was that the lower social classes in urban societies have come to accept the social order as part of the design of the cosmos. Religions provide cosmological accounts for the way the world is, and these religions are mediated and propagated by urban intellectuals and priests. Hindus accept the caste system as part of the process of reincarnation, Chinese ancestor cults revere tradition and authority, the urban Muslim accedes to the fatalism expressed in the Koran. One of the central tenets of Judaism is God’s justice, which is experienced by the unworthy Jewish community as the injustice of the world, justice only appearing in the future in the form of the Messiah. The Christian believes that suffering of the individual will be redeemed in an afterlife.


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Nietzsche asserted that Christianity was a slave morality believed in by the masses out of resentment for their subordination to their political and economic masters. Christianity was plebeian not noble. It glorified suffering as a common condition, and through its doctrine of renunciation it denied to the individual person the realization and enjoyment of their true, instinctual nature. Only the superman has no religion, refuses to belong to the herd, and makes his own destiny.

Having criticized Marx, Weber also distances himself from Nietzsche’s exclusive derivation of religion from oppression. But he does use Nietzsche against the contemporary marxists. Weber thought that the adherence of the German working class to a marxist political party (the German Social Democratic Party) was a kind of substitute religion. Present injustice would be redeemed at some, unspecified, time in a future socialist utopia. And because the revolution was never called into existence, the working class was condemned to political quiescence and resentment.

This is, however, something of a detail in Weber’s more general theory. Weber turned Nietzsche’s ideas into a sociology of theodicy. This is the theological term for why God, who is all powerful, allows the existence of evil alongside good in the world. Seen sociologically, a theodicy is a form of justification to explain why there is no moral meritocracy in the world. For the most part those who act virtuously receive no reward in this life, while conversely those who are rich and enjoy the pleasures of the world have done little to deserve such happiness. Religions, in the context of large urban and stratified communities, are adapted to explain the gulf between virtue and social situation; ‘just rewards’ are rarely realized in the here and now. It is one of the constants in all forms of religion. Weber, then, was taking a psychological insight of Nietzsche’s and providing it with a sociological validity. His sociological purpose is to show how sets of beliefs are moulded and mediated by the intellectuals and priests within the social context of interests and powers.

Weber also sociologized Nietzsche’s theory of sublimation. This is now more usually understood in its Freudian form, where culture and civilization is the product of the psychological sublimation of the id and the work of the disciplined part of the personality, the superego.

Nietzsche had first formulated these arguments, using a different language and drawing different consequences. The primitive energy of human life is the Dionysian, named after the Greek god of wine, dance and orgy. In his The Birth of Tragedy (1872) Nietzsche argued this raw energy was culturally tamed and given artistic form. This was the relation of the culturally superior Apollo over Dionysius. Later in his life Nietzsche argued for a naturalistic psychology – that individuals should
be true to their own instincts and find their own way to giving form and values to their life energies; this is sometimes termed ‘vitalism’.

Weber and Freud stand for different appropriations of Nietzsche’s insights. When Weber speaks of the sublimation of orgy and ecstasy in the direction of ritual and sacraments, this is a religio-sociological version of what Freud understood in terms of personality. Freud directly confronted the irrational with his new psychoanalytical theory, whereas Weber centred his thinking on the way people’s conduct is given cultural form by the process of religious rationalization.

Religious rationalization would appear to be a contradiction. None of the main religions have a rational basis for their beliefs. Confucianism is based on magic. Islam, Christianity and Judaism are based on revelation set down in sacred texts. Hinduism is based on the supernatural activities of a richly complex set of mythical gods and goddesses, and Buddhism on the idea of a self progressing through reincarnated lives towards enlightenment. Weber’s ‘Introduction to the Economic Ethics of the World Religions’ offers an explanation of how religions develop from the primal, dionysian states in which people have always tried temporarily to escape from the mundane and the ordinary into well-worked cosmologies of the universe and the place of human beings in it. Religions, through the work of priests, who are the first intellectuals, are successful rationalizations of unformed primal experiences. Unformed experiences are induced through techniques — intoxicating drugs and rhythmic music that produce frenzy, ecstasy and trance. But these occasions, like today’s techno-clubs which use the same techniques, leave no lasting impression — the feeling of oneness with the world and humanity is strictly temporary. Religions as well as magic sublimate these vitalist experiences through the creation of sacred rites and ceremonies (and which are never far-removed from their original profane rites and ceremonies) and through intellectual rationalization they create permanent understandings of extraordinary states of being.

Now while I have outlined Weber’s train of argument, it has to be noted that the move from the primal to the religious rationalization is not at all easily accomplished. The primal holds religious development back and even then the popular forms of world religions attempt to draw them back to simpler forms, (and to a certain extent echoing Nietzsche theory of relapse in the face of repression). As the following passage shows — one of Weber’s bravura pieces — *this*-worldly religious experiences are far more common than other-worldly salvation beliefs.

In order to avoid repetitions about these issues, some observations will be made in advance. Religions promise and offer different salvation benefits (*Heilsgüter*), but empirical researchers do not study them only, or even
mainly, as ‘other-worldly’; leaving aside the fact, that by no means all
religions, and also not all of the world religions, had an idea anyway of the
Beyond as a site of definite promises. With the only partial exception of
Christianity and a few other specifically ascetic faiths, the salvation ben-
fits of all the religions, whether primitive or cultivated, prophetic or non-
prophetic, belonged very much to this world. Health, long-life, and wealth
were promised by Chinese, Vedic, Zoroastrian, ancient Judaic, Islamic in
exactly the same way as Phoenician, Egyptian, Babylonian, and old Ger-
manic religions, as did Hinduism and Buddhism for pious lay persons.
Only the religious virtuosi—the ascetic, the monk, the sufi, the dervish—
strove for ‘extra-worldly’ (außerweltlich) salvation goods in contrast to those
belonging most solidly to this world. The extra-worldly salvation goods
however were by no means solely other-worldly (jenseitig), not even when
they were understood by the believers to be so. For those who were seek-
ing after salvation, it was instead to the present, this-worldly (diesseitig)
habitus24 that they primarily turned, if one looks at this psychologically.
The Puritan’s certainty of salvation—the permanent state of grace that
belongs to the feeling of ‘affirmation’—could only be grasped psychologi-
cally through the salvation goods of this ascetic religiosity.25 The acosmic
feeling of love that accompanied the assured Buddhist monk on entering
into Nirvana, the bhakti (the ardent love of divinity within)26 or the
apathetic27 ecstasy of the pious Hindu, the orgiastic ecstasies of the Chlysts
in the radjani28 and of the whirling Dervish,29 those possessed by God or
seeking to possess God, the ‘courtly’ love of Mary and the saviour,30 the
Jesuitical cult of the heart of Jesus,31 quietistic reverence, pietistic tender-

24. Habitus is the Latin word for frame of mind, bearing, or psychological
disposition.
25. The Puritan’s sense of affirmation, while nominally holding to a belief in the
world beyond, is psychologically made real by everyday ascetic practices. Then in the
following list occur similar psychological states that are desired in the first instance
solely for the positive feelings that they produce.
26. A practice among Hindus where a deity, like Krishna or Rama, becomes the
object of deep reverence and contemplation. It is one of three paths to religious
enlightenment.
27. Weber does not use ‘apathetic’ in its normal English sense of ‘disinterested’. The
word here signifies a condition of ‘a-pathos’ or ‘without suffering’.
28. A Christian sect founded in Russia in the seventeenth century. They had their
own peculiar form of worship—the radjani—that involved ecstatic dancing.
29. An order of Islamic ascetics who sought through abstinence, singing and
dancing unification with the soul of the world.
30. Weber’s German here is very idiosyncratic. He refers to ‘Marien- und Heilands-
minne’ whose literal meaning is the courtly love of Mary (the virgin mother of Jesus)
and the saviour. Mariology is a form of ‘courtly love’. The ‘courts of love’ were made
up of mediaeval feudal knights who wooed the ladies of the court with songs, verse,
and a seemingly complete devotion. Love of the saviour could refer to the Lutheran
Zinzerdorfs sentimental popularization of the love of Jesus (Cf. GARS, II, p. 198).
31. The bleeding Heart of Jesus became a devotional object in the Catholic Church.
ness for the infant Jesus and the blood of the wounded Christ, the sexual and half sexual orgies in the love of Krishna, the refined cultic dinners of the Vallabhacharyas, the masturbatory practices of the Gnostic cults, and the different forms of mystic union and the contemplative surrender to the All-oneness—all of these states (Zustände) have clearly been sought in the first instance for what they in themselves directly contributed to the believer’s positive feelings.

As positively valued states of feelings, these examples are very much the equivalents of the religious intoxication of alcohol produced in Dionysiac and soma cults, totemistic meat orgies, cannibalistic feasts, the use of hashish, opium and nicotine which used to have a religious function, and in general all kinds of magical frenzy. There is almost an air of the consecrated and the divine about these psychically extraordinary states, which in their particular circumstances come to have their own autonomous value. And when, at the start, the rationalized religions managed in a specifically religious way to smuggle in a metaphysical sense of meaning alongside their direct appropriation of salvation benefits, and thereby sublimated the orgy to the ‘sacrament’, a sense of meaning was by no means completely absent from the existing primitive orgy. But the orgy was purely magical and animistic and it did not have the capacity for, or even suggestion of, being included in a universal, cosmic pragmatics of salvation (Heilspragmatik) that is a feature of all religious rationalism. Actually, even after the transition from orgy to sacrament, the acquisition of the benefits of salvation by the pious still retained, naturally enough, a sense of belonging to the immediate present when seen psychologically. That is, in the habitus of feeling (Gefühlsabitus) of the pious there existed a condition that was directly called forth by a specific religious (or magical) act, or by methodical asceticism, or through contemplation.

Because of its purely outward nature, this condition could not sustain an extraordinary habitus beyond being a simply temporary affair, and originally this was, of course, the case everywhere. There is no way of distinguishing the ‘religious’ from the ‘profane’ condition, except by the extraordinariness of the first. But a condition attained by religious means could be made more permanent in its effects when what was striven for was to grasp the ‘condition of salvation’ of the whole person and his destiny. The transition was fluid. In religiously sublimated salvation doctrine the two highest conceptions are ‘rebirth’ and ‘salvation’, and it was rebirth that was in its age-old

32. An Indian sect that worshipped the deity Vishnu.
33. The early Christian bishops condemned Gnostics as heretics and ascribed to them irreligious sexual practices.
34. Although Weber does not specify its forms, all-oneness was and is a prevalent feature in very many religions and philosophies. It is the idea that humanity is not apart from the cosmic and material world but is part of it and can merge into it. Nirvana is ‘acosmic’ because it is a state of pure spiritual enlightenment that has completely escaped the material and cosmic world.
35. Sublimation is a chemical process of refinement of materials. Weber’s usage should not be directly equated with Freud’s theory of sublimation.
origins a magical good. It meant the acquisition of a new soul through an orgiastic act or through systematic asceticism. Its acquisition was temporary in ecstasy, but it could also be sought as a permanent habitus and be attained by means of magical asceticism. A youth required a new soul if he was about to enter into the warrior community as a hero, or wished as a member of a cultic community to take part in its magical dances or orgies, or wanted to commune with the deities at the cult dinner. The asceticism of the hero and the magician, the initiation of the youth, and the sacramental customs of rebirth at significant points of private and communal life were therefore an age-old phenomenon. Aside from the means employed, what was different was the goals of these actions, above all, the answer to the question ‘for what’ one should be reborn.  

This passage puts one in William James territory, and well beyond it. Hennis has observed that Weber himself acknowledged an intellectual debt.

As is true of every experience, the religious experience as such is obviously irrational. In its highest mystical form it is exactly that inner experience [that is singular and extraordinary]. As so beautifully analysed by James, it is distinguished by its absolute incommunicability. This inner experience possesses a specific character and appears to us as if it were knowledge, even though the tools given to us by language and concepts do not allow us to capture it adequately. Moreover, it is also correct that every religious experience, whenever one attempts to formulate it rationally, immediately loses part of its content—and loses [that content] all the more the greater the development of the conceptual formulation.

All religion is a religious state of affairs; it is primarily an experience that becomes framed within a psychological habitus or disposition. It is even pleasurable, something which Weber’s language does not sometimes convey. That is the import of the primal states of mystical experience, apathetic ecstasy, and orgiastic possession. ‘Apathetic’ is a hopelessly out of date word for what Weber is describing—just as much as disinterest in the world, it also means here the absence of pain, i.e. pleasure. Havelock Ellis, whom James quotes only semi-approvingly, puts the same point more directly.

Every one who is at all acquainted with the Persian mystics knows how wine may be regarded as an instrument of religion. Indeed, in all countries and in all ages, some form of physical enlargement—singing, dancing, drinking, sexual excitement—has been intimately associated with worship.

36. GARS, pp. 249-51.
39. Quoted in William James, Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 49. James is far less
Weber’s ‘Einleitung’ shows a preoccupation with the universal propensity of people to consume the psychological state provided by forms of religiosity. This universal condition, however, is then so to speak ‘carved up’ according to the needs of social stratification, of the carriers of religion—or religious intellectuals, and in turn these ideas interrelate to the contingencies of history and geography. The primal experience of religiosity is the central datum, from which Weber then proceeds to typologize. As a translator one would also add this material is a subject of great animation for Weber. These passages still have a capacity to shock and must have riveted his audience when read aloud. He also uses terms to denote this pre-ontological stage of religion which are extremely hard to translate into English. The primary excitation of religion is an ‘urwüchsig’ experience that is ‘primaeval’ and people have a natural or naive attitude to the world that is ‘ungebrochen’—the sense of being one in nature. The neo-Kantian in Weber is not allowed any nearer than these suggestive terms, which represent the lure of the noumenal, and it is not altogether unsurprising to see them re-appearing in Heidegger’s explicitly vitalist philosophy.

This central part of the essay shows Weber as enthusiastic but he has to move his analysis on to a more intellectualist analysis of the content of salvation beliefs. The content of religious ideas, as Weber says, from what they are to be saved and to what delivered determines the directionality of behaviour. Salvation beliefs and prophecy represent high-level rationalizations.

There is nothing primitive about these distinctions [the development of ethical prophecy in two directions—exemplary and missionary]. Quite the opposite, for they have only come about through a far-reaching sublimation of representations of primitive animistic spirits and heroic gods—a process that was very similar everywhere. And this has proceeded strongly assisted by the interrelationships mentioned above, whereby the salvation benefit (Heilsgut) relates to the desired and valued religious states of affairs (Zuständigkeiten). The direction in which the various conceptions of god were interpreted was dependent on the religious state of affairs: according to whether the highest sacred state was a contemplative and mystical experience, apathetic ecstasy, orgastic possession of the divine, or visionary inspirations and ‘commissions’ (‘Aufträge’). Seen from the standpoint that today is widespread and obviously widely justified, it is the emotional contents (Gefühlsinhalte) that alone are primary and ideas are merely their secondary manifestations. This leads to the causal relationship of the keen to explore what he terms ‘the lower superstitions’ (p. 31), and in a long footnote (p. 11) he seeks to distance his psychology from quasi sexual phenomena. Weber’s sources, also, were far more extensive than James’—see MWG I/22-2, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Religiöse Gemeinschaften (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), pp. 75-83.
primacy of the ‘psychological’ over ‘rational’ constructions as being exclusively important; the latter should be seen as merely an interpretation of the former. This would however go far beyond the evidence of the facts.\footnote{\textit{GARS}, p. 258.}

This is the point when Weber countermands the psychological aspects of religiosity and moves on to chart the major differences in salvation beliefs and their consequences for economic ethics. It is the move from James and the experiential to the typological. Although Weber presents a different facet, the linkage has to be retained — religious rationalizations still have to stay in touch with their psychological bases or else a religion becomes purely intellectualistic and the mass base of a world religion is endangered. For example, ascetic practices are valuable psychologically in their own right, and the discovery of saints and miracles maintains the allure of magic. In addition Weber takes great pains to show that the transition from low-level popular religiosity to the higher level of a salvation belief is always problematic and dependent upon a favourable set of historical circumstances. Christianity could well have remained a splinter sect of Judaism, no more momentous than the Essenes and confined to Palestine. Jesus was a wandering miracle worker with charismatic powers of preaching. To this he added a salvation message, adapted from Judaism, that took root among the semi-urban artisanal class, which in turn was given a wider universalist appeal by St Paul.

Salvation messages are in comparative terms few in number and through their social and intellectual origins they can be very different. Weber says these messages are like switches. A salvation belief centred on the attainment on Nirvana will have very different consequences in terms of the dynamics of civilization than the Calvinist idea of predestination. The former leads to a frame of mind that seeks escape from the mundane world, while the latter seeks affirmation in the mundane world; the one leads to the renunciation of work, the other to its sanctification. In a crucial explanatory passage, he writes:

The task of the intellectuals has predominantly been to take the possession of religious salvation (\textit{Heilsbesitz}) and to refine it into the belief in ‘redemption’. If one thinks of the liberation from privation, hunger, thirst, disease and, finally, suffering and death, then the conception of the idea of salvation in itself was age-old. But redemption only achieved a specific meaning when it became the expression of a systematically rationalized ‘worldview’ and the stance taken to the world. What redemption could and wished to signify in terms of its meaning and its psychological quality has depended on that worldview and stance. It is interests (material and ideal), and not ideas, which have directly governed the actions of human beings. But the
‘worldviews’ that have been created by ideas have very often, like switches, decided the lines on which the dynamic of interests has propelled behaviour.\(^{41}\)

The directionality of the worldviews is closely related to their principal carriers. Warriors believe in the fates and a gallery of gods and demons. Peasants, close to the forces of nature, have an overpowering tendency to believe in magic and to desire states of ‘possession’ created through dance and intoxicants. These two strata are capable of only low levels of religious rationalization. In contrast the strata of merchants and intellectuals are capable of a much higher level of religious rationalization. They formulate salvation ideas into ethically rational worldviews. It is these worldviews in terms of the ideas of ‘from what’ and ‘to what’ one will be saved that set the directionality of everyday economic behaviour and so the course of civilizational histories.

In comparative terms, the contents and degree of the ethical rationalization of the world contain crucial differences. Weber speaks of a worldview of active asceticism willed by god, which throws the switch in favour of world mastery, in contrast to those conceptions of the divine that he classes as (a) contemplative mysticism, and (b) orgy and apathetic ecstasy.

Not divine possession nor abandonment to contemplation of the god within, which have appeared as the highest good in those religions influenced by gentile intellectual classes, but active asceticism—action willed by god with the sense of being the ‘instrument’ of god—has tended to be the preferred religious \(\textit{habitus}\) in the Occident. It was the \(\textit{habitus}\) of active asceticism that more and more gained the upper hand over contemplative mysticism and orgiastic and apathetic ecstasy that was also known in the Occident.\(^{42}\)

For a clear diagrammatic sketch of the full array of the directionality of salvation beliefs see Wolfgang Schluchter’s classification of cultural religions.\(^{43}\)

Finally over the last eight pages of the ‘Einleitung’\(^{44}\) Weber provides the reader with a condensed version of many sociological categories,

\(^{41}\) The crucial imagery of switches was added for the second edition of the essay. See Max Weber Gesamtausgabe, 1/19 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989), p. 101. As a translator, in the electronic age, I have favoured ‘switches’ over the more literal ‘switchmen’.

\(^{42}\) \textit{GARS}, p. 257.


\(^{44}\) \textit{GARS}, pp. 267-75.
which, as he points out, are taken from his other great project *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, as Weber himself notes in his own opening footnote (see above). He introduces political structures, their legitimacy, and the typology of legitimacy based on traditionalism, charisma and bureaucracy. He also summarizes his position on social class, status groups, and markets. All of these concepts will occur and recur in the WEWR essays, so Weber feels it necessary to provide their basic definitions for the reader.

In broad terms then we can say that the intention of the WEWR essays is to pursue issues of religious experience, their development by carriers, and the interaction of religiously determined economic mentalities with the surrounding political, social, and economic structures. The division of labour between the WEWR project and the WuG project can be seen in the crucial sentence, already quoted above. (‘It is interests [material and ideal], and not ideas, that have directly governed the actions of human beings. But the ‘worldviews’ that have been created by ideas have very often, like switches, decided the lines on which the dynamic of interests has propelled behaviour’.) The material interests of political power and economic power and the ideal interests of religion are the two principal drivers of change in societies. In the WEWR essays religion is the focus, as one of two principal drivers in society, and the overall thrust of the analysis is to establish the dynamic of particular civilizations. In WuG the focus on the dynamics of change in society is not so obviously to the fore. Instead the reader is being educated in the relevant sociological concepts in order to be able to analyse stratification and power structures as well as economic institutions for the provision of wants. Some of these sociological categories do have dynamic features built into them; charisma is an inherently dynamic phenomenon, as in a wholly different way is modern rational bureaucracy. But the main intention of WuG is to supply the reader with a comprehensive web of sociological typologies and categories that are necessary to make sense of societies when seen in comparative perspective both over time and between civilizations.

Needless to say this is not a nuanced account of the interrelation of the two projects. Rather, if the reader looks out of the window provided by Weber himself in the last pages of the ‘Einleitung’, this in broad-brush terms is the view.

45. For a fuller discussion see Schluchter’s ‘The sociology of religion. A reconstruction of its development’, in *Rationalism, Religion and Domination*, pp. 411-32; also the forthcoming article in the next issue of *Max Weber Studies* on the integrity of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* by Hiroshi Orihara.
Postscript

Finally, by way of postscript, in line with the editorial interest of MWS in the process of translation, I append a few comments. Much has been written about Weber’s style of German — as legalistic, baroque in its complexity, and reader unfriendly. It is certainly not immediately accessible and it uses the full resources of the German language to capture, indeed to layer on top of each other, qualifying phrases. But once the sentence has been unlocked, so to speak, Weber’s main concern would seem to be precision and clarity. Hence to regard Weber’s German as burdened by literary humanism, or legalism, or a disrespect for the reader, rather misses the point. He is writing in the language, as he sees it, of science. In the section at the beginning on the extent of determination and co-determination of religion and economics, he is extraordinary careful to set the limits of what he is saying and is not saying. And behind this concern, one feels was his experience of being misunderstood in his earlier Protestant ethic essays.46

As already explained, his whole treatment of religion is one that sees it as experience and as an ideal interest, and in these senses it has a materiality as a social phenomenon. Therefore the English translation of concepts should correctly weight the dimensions of interests and the experiential. Religiosität has been directly translated as ‘religiosity’.47

46. I noted during my forays upstairs to the German Department in the university that opinion was divided about Weber’s German. The Lektorin could make sense of Weber’s German, only having first read the English translation. Their linguistics person thought that Weber’s sentences were very well constructed. One of the greatest difficulties for the English eye is to solve an apparent ellipsis in the German. Weber will carry an argument over pages and the reader can too soon lose the specific reference to what becomes an ‘it’ or ‘to it’ or ‘about which’. This back referencing to the train of argument which Weber continually does, simply cannot be reproduced in English (because English does not have gender and declension specific pronouns and possessive adjectives and has no easy equivalent to the ‘da-’ compound words). The ‘it’ or ‘what’ has to be correctly located and then has to be explicitly repeated. In this respect, Weber’s German has clear advantages of elegance and economy when sustaining an argument. Another difficulty to note is that Weber’s mode of presentation is to contrast arguments and positions and it becomes critical to grasp the specific weighting he assigns to the point and counterpoint of argumentation. He fine-tunes his weighting with little intensifying adverbs, words or combination of words like auch, doch, noch, eben, freilich, keineswegs, nur, durchaus, recht, erst etc. These are like little wedges that lever the argument up to the required weighting, and they are quite hard to estimate, not least because some of them are bi-valent—they can intensify as in ‘a lot of’ or, alternatively, signify ‘not so much’ or ‘quite’.

This is a pejorative word in the Anglican or Evangelical tradition, suggestive of non-conformist enthusiasm in the case of Methodism or sentimentality in cases like Unitarianism. This is a prejudice that should be ignored. Religiosity is the psychological character of the religious experience, whether high or low church, or orgy or meditation; it is a neutral term. In the Gerth and Mills translation this crucial dimension is lost in favour of the supposedly simpler ‘religion’. But simplifying does not make the argument clearer, it just makes it harder to follow or even incomprehensible. Therefore, as a translator, I have tried to copy Weber’s conceptual precision. Obviously this makes the vocabulary more differentiated, but it does have the advantage of making the steps in his argument discernible and so capable of being followed.

The other striking characteristic of Weber’s use of language is his terminology of consumption: religion is a good or commodity that is consumed. Weber’s value-free use of concepts is no respecter of the elemental need for religion by human beings, to which at points his essay eloquently speaks. His concepts emphasize not the idealism of religion but its materiality in so far as pragmatic experience is a form of materialism. Here translation is crucial and the existing English translation obscures a whole dimension of Weber’s theoretical approach. Gerth and Mills translate Heilsgüter as ‘sacred values’. The German word is a tricky compound noun. ‘Heil’ means ‘salvation’ and ‘Güter’ has the double meaning of goods (as in commodities) and good (as in virtue). ‘Salvation goods’ is the exact translation, though not terribly felicitous since it mixes up different senses of ‘good’ and ‘goods’.48 (But also the German could not be so pretty, and this indicates that Weber is going out of his way to coin a somewhat ugly neologism.) Often I have preferred ‘salvation benefits’. Crucial to the translation of the term is an awareness that Weber has transposed an idealist and religious term into a materialist, or economic, or at least an interest-oriented term. ‘Sacred values’ does not accomplish the transposition that is deliberately intended by Weber.

‘Heilsgüter’ moreover is the lynchpin concept for the whole essay. They are the ‘end’ or ‘goal’ of religious belief. Religious states, like asceticism, ecstasy and the drugs and practices that are used to induce these psychological states, can be seen as the means to those ends. ‘To where’ a person is saved is the end or purpose of religious action. How a person attains that is a matter of means — whether by Puritan asceticism, Buddhist contemplation, or warrior frenzy. Weber dissects the overall religious feeling into its components and, needless to say, this would be

totally at odds with the subjective understanding of the genuinely religious person. In the Gerth and Mills translation, when the reader comes to the crux passage of the whole essay — ‘It is interests (material and ideal) and not ideas that have directly governed the action of human beings… etc’. — it is quite feasible for the reader to miss entirely the significance of ideal interests. Weber treats ideal interests on a level with any other interest of human beings, such as the economic need for subsistence. The emphasis has to be placed on ‘interests’ not ‘ideals’. Weber is not counteringpoising the materiality of power and property to the idealism of religious salvation beliefs. Instead the ideal and the material are equivalent and what makes them for Weber equi-valent is that they are both interests. Weber, just to remind ourselves, was a social scientist influenced by economic theory rather than a philosopher of any hue. A look at his choice of terminology shows his tendency to use economic terms. He talks of a ‘salvation economy’ (*Heilsökonomie*),49 goods or benefits (*Güter*) of good fortune, priests and magicians ‘monopolize’ for themselves ‘the provision of salvation benefits’, the highest religious states are carried out as marketing ‘commissions’ by prophets, salvation is a matter of pragmatics (*Heilspragmatik*), and religious virtuosoi have to hold on to ‘a mass customer base’.

On more specific words: *Träger* is translated as ‘carrier’ because this makes its sociological function clearer rather than the more literary ‘bearer’. *Stellungnahme* causes problems since it unpacks in English as something like ‘taking an attitude or position towards the world’ and sometimes the far too simple ‘stance’ is used when the room for manoeuvre within a sentence is too restricted. *Motive* is motive but it does carry with it the mechanics of force and impulse. *Sublimierung* is a chemical term or rather process in the sense of refining a substance; again Weber’s bias to a materialist language (and this does not mean Marxist) can be seen and has to be respected. Some terms now look a little odd in translation. *Pneumatisch* has never been quite the same in English since Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* and probably no longer denotes the ‘breath of the spirit’ within a human being. But the Latin *habitus* has been retained in place of its direct translation as ‘predisposition’, not least

49. Economy is, of course, a very old word. The catechism of the Christian church refers to a ‘sacramental economy’, where economy (*oikonomia*) is the working in the world of priests. And in German the link between ‘oikos’ and ‘Wirtschaft’ is well understood. So, Weber does have some licence to adopt a more expansive meaning of ‘economy’, and for this reason the translation of ‘Wirtschaft’ and ‘wirtschaftlich’ is not best served by the bald ‘the economy’; ‘economic life’ often gets the sense better. Nevertheless I would still argue that in his use of terminology in this essay, Weber adopts an economistic way.
because of the subsequent use of the term by sociologists, such as Pierre Bourdieu. *Bürgerlichen Schichten* tends to defeat the English language. The ‘bourgeois strata’ (in the plural) is an approximate translation. Weber is referring to a lower middle class sector of artisans, traders, merchants, shopkeepers, who live both within towns and outside them. ‘Lower middle classes’ is getting close, but in an estate society they are not middle in the sense that Marx put them in the sandwich of ruling class and proletariat. This brings us to *Stand*, which is ‘estate’, but this is a word more frequently misunderstood than understood by an Anglo-American readership. For this reason the inferior ‘status group’ is sometimes used. *Menschen* is translated as human beings. *Beruf* and *Lebensführung* have multiple meanings and the translation follows according to the context that gives the meaning. *Beruf* variously stands for calling as in the Christian calling, vocation as in professional vocation, and occupation. *Lebensführung* can be a given ‘way of life’ within a social structure, or it can be the more active attitude of the way someone chooses to lead their life, and in this sense is often translated as ‘conduct of life’. In its passive form *Lebensführung* may be thought of as an ethos, and in its active form as an ethic. As Weber makes abundantly clear in the ‘Einleitung’ essay, the directionality of determination can proceed either from religion or from social structure, and the particular modality will affect the sense of *Lebensführung*. I have tended to translate *bedingen* as determine, and *bestimmen* as define.

Again, needless to say, no two translators would indubitably agree on these decisions. This postscript merely indicates some of this translator’s thinking.