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Max Weber's Sociology of Civilizations: The Five Major Themes

Stephen Kalberg

Abstract

As is well-known, Max Weber's three-volume *Economic Ethics of the World Religions* on China, India and ancient Israel yield 'contrast case' analyses that isolate the uniqueness of 'Western' and 'modern Western' rationalism. Less well-known is the *sociology of civilizations* contained in these volumes and in *Economy and Society*. This study identifies five themes that, taken in combination, are central to this project. Uniquely, Weber's approach to the study of civilizations stresses (a) the researcher's capacity to understand the subjective meaning of action by persons in groups quite different from those familiar in the modern West, (b) the constitution of the distinct 'rationalisms' of varying civilizations past and present, and (c) the capacity of values, under certain circumstances, to 'rationalize' action beyond utilitarian calculations. Comprehension of each civilization *on its own terms* comes here to the forefront, as does the unusually broad—civilizational—range of Weber's sociology.

Keywords: Max Weber, Civilizations, Subjective meaning, Value-rationalization.

Despite their expansive reach, Max Weber's works have seldom been appreciated for their capacity to offer a rigorous sociology of civilizations.¹ Indeed, in this respect some theorists today understand his legacy to have been fully appropriated by more recent scholarship. Nonetheless, correctly understood, his massive comparative-historical volumes—the *Economic Ethics of the World Religions* series (EEWR) and *Economy and Society* (E&S)—outline in detail a unique sociology of civilizations. This study examines *one* of its central aspects: its major themes.²

1. See, however, Nelson 1974; Arnason 2003: 83-104.

2. Its methodology must be addressed at a later date (see Kalberg 2015, forthcoming). For this reason, this article must be understood as a preliminary examination only.

Weber's EEWR investigations on China (see 1951), India (see 1958), and ancient Israel (see 1952) have been regularly misunderstood. Its volumes exclusively construct 'contrast cases', it is maintained—namely, a series of experimental explorations designed to isolate and define, through rigorous comparisons, *the West's uniqueness* (see Bendix 1962; Nelson 1974; Tenbruck 1980; Schluchter 1996: 17-21). Albeit correct, this reading severely truncates EEWR's scope. These wide-ranging studies execute an unusually ambitious project: their in-depth, multi-causal investigations rooted in subjective meaning not only demarcate the West's particularity, but also delineate the specific patterns of action indigenous to China, India and ancient Israel. They are investigated in EEWR *on their own terms*.

Likewise, the prevailing view of Weber's multi-volume *E&S*—this powerful *lexicon* offers a massive array of precisely-formulated and useful ideal types (bureaucracy, charisma, status groups, feudalism, power, authority, etc.) to be drawn upon for guidance by comparative-historical sociologists engaged in a wide variety of investigations—also omits far too much. A broad-ranging yet cohesive agenda lies just below the surface: Weber seeks here to formulate the constellation of concepts, elective affinity and antagonism relationships, and developmental models indispensable for the study of subjective meaning in complex civilizations.³

This article seeks to call attention to this *civilizational* dimension in both EEWR and *E&S*. It pursues this goal by identifying *five* major themes.⁴ Once discussed *in combination*, they lay the groundwork, it will be argued, for a uniquely rigorous *sociology of civilizations*.⁵

3. It should be emphasized that, despite the case study foundation of the EEWR volumes and the systematic orientation of *E&S*, these works are intimately connected: in the form of societal domains (mainly the religion, economy, law, and rulership [*Herrschaft*] spheres), innumerable ideal types connected to these arenas, and rationalization of action developmental models, *E&S* articulates a complex analytic framework. These heuristic constructs are utilized (albeit in a manner not always evident) in the China, India and ancient Israel volumes, as well as in his analysis of Western development from the ancient era to the present (see Kalberg 1994, 2012). Although strong, this interrelationship is never discussed explicitly by Weber.

4. Weber never defines his 'major' themes; rather, they have been selected from his entire corpus by the author (see Kalberg 1994; 2009, 2012). This entire article aims to offer convincing arguments for their centrality. This investigation rejects those attempts that claim to have discovered a *single main* theme in Weber's comparative sociology (see Hennis 1988; Tenbruck 1980).

5. Eisenstadt (2000) and Arnason (2003; Arnason and Raaflaub 2011; Arnason, Raaflaub and Wagner 2013) have offered in recent years distinct approaches

The five major themes in EEW and *E&S* must be noted at the outset:

1. The ways in which subjective meaning in different civilizations East and West are formulated and the causes behind its variation;
2. The uniqueness of the West and its rise and historical trajectory;
3. The heterogeneous impact of values upon action and the 'rationalization of action' by values, especially ethical values, in different religious, political, economic, legal, family, kinship (*Sippe*), and stratification contexts;
4. The 'civilizational rationalism' and world view of each major civilization in the East and West; and
5. The extent to which civilizations can be defined as more closed or more open and dynamic, and the significant outcomes that follow.

Again, by demarcating these themes we seek to take cognizance of Weber not only as an unusual practitioner of concept formation and as an analyst of the West's uniqueness and particular developmental pathway. In addition, our discussion of these themes will reveal this classical Founder as a sociologist of civilizations.

to the study of civilizations. Many have seen their efforts as appropriating—and exhausting—the relevant aspects of Weber's sociology of civilizations. However, they have done so in a highly irregular and incomplete manner. Indeed, in my view their approaches rely more on Durkheim (Eisenstadt) and Mauss (Arnason) than on Weber. In particular, while offering no systematic alternative, they neglect both Weber's multi-causal and conjunctural-causal modes of procedure and his synthesis of a rigorous/causal methodology with an emphasis upon the varying subjective meaning of actors in groups. (The author has discussed Weber's methodology in depth; see 1994: 21-176; 2012: 94-192.) In addition, that which is so central to Weber—the differing motives behind action and their varying intensity (see below)—is omitted. Nor do these comparative-historical sociologists offer configurations of models that provide heuristic lines of orientation to researchers engaged in the study of civilizations (as does Weber throughout his three-volume opus, *E&S*). Only a detailed discussion of the methodology of Weber's sociology of civilizations will reveal his distinctiveness and strength vis-à-vis Eisenstadt and Arnason. Nonetheless, in this respect the focus here upon Weber's civilizational *themes* will also be of assistance (see the following paragraph). Again, however, owing to the omission of a systematic discussion of his methodology, this article must be viewed as a preliminary study only (see Kalberg 1994 and a forthcoming work).

*The Formation of Subjective Meaning
and the Causes Behind its Variation*

Rather than referring 'to an objectively "correct" meaning or one which is "true" in some metaphysical sense' (Weber 1968: 4), Weber's sociology is concerned with the investigation of 'subjective meaning-complexes'.

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Rather than referring 'to an objectively "correct" meaning or one which is "true" in some metaphysical sense' (Weber 1968: 4),⁷ Weber's sociology is concerned with the investigation of 'subjective

6. It should be stated at the outset that 'civilization' is not to be found in Weber's writings; rather, following the common usage in the comparative scholarship of his time, he refers to China and India, ancient Israel, Greece, and Rome and the West as 'Kulturen' or 'Hochkulturen'. Unfortunately, a literal translation of these terms—cultures, high cultures—fails to convey Weber's meaning, all the less today owing to the common understanding of 'culture' as referring to 'types' and 'gradations': that is, types of groups ('the culture of the native Americans') and sub-groups ('the culture of the gay scene'), and high (classical music, ballet and opera), low (working class), and pop (middle-brow) culture. 'Life styles' are also today often differentiated according to the possession (or lack thereof) of culture (see Bourdieu [1984], Swartz [1997]). Moreover, this term is still today freighted with debates regarding the causal status of cultural factors as opposed to economic and political forces; hence, the enduring expression from the 1980s: 'bring culture back in'. None of these familiar usages conform to Weber's broad interest: namely, in the distinctiveness of the civilizations of China, India, the ancient world, the medieval West, the modern West, etc. The appropriate English term that corresponds to his research and usage is 'civilization'. It should be also noted that he never became engaged in any form in the discussion in the German scholarship of his time that focused upon the distinction between 'German *Kultur*' (literature, the arts, classical music) and Anglo-Saxon 'Zivilisation' (mere technological 'progress' and the advance of the economy). Whereas Weber's interest involved the question of how subjective meaning was formulated in radically diverse macro settings (see below), this broad discussion in Germany implied a ranking of nations and the putative superiority of German *Kultur*. See Elias (1982); Ringer (1969).

7. 'Nicht etwa irgendein objektiv "richtiger" oder ein metaphysisch ergründeter "wahrer" Sinn' (1976b: 1).

meaning-complexes'. Through interpretive understanding (*verstehen*), Weberian sociologists 'recapture' the manner in which subjective meaning motivates persons in demarcated groups in specific and patterned ways. They do so by reconstructing, to the greatest degree possible, the variety of wider *contexts* of action in reference to which these patterns of action occur. Researchers then seek to *understand* the manner in which actors within their groups-based milieu 'make sense' of their situations – that is, endow them with subjective meaning – and act accordingly. On the basis of in-depth empirical research, motives *can* be comprehended by social scientists, indeed even patterns of meaning in long past and in geographically distant civilizations, Weber contends.

In perhaps his best known example, he sought to clarify in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (PE; 2011b) the ways in which the seventeenth-century Puritan endowed specific action with subjective meaning. To a certain extent this 'inner-worldly ascetic' baffled Weber.⁸ From the point of view of a 'natural' attitude toward life that takes delight in diverse worldly pleasures, the Puritan's strict asceticism could only be seen as strange. The enjoyment of eating, drinking, and relaxation was denied to the faithful; in addition, the single activity deserving of their energies – regular and systematic labor in a calling – connoted to most people sheer drudgery and pain. Even the cultivation of friendship and intimacy was prohibited to this believer; both constitute threats to one's exclusive allegiance to God (see Kalberg 2012: 291-300).

Hence, the actions of the ascetic devout must be judged as 'irrational' and 'odd' if examined from the perspective of all 'enjoyment of life' (2011b: 80, 92-94, 98, 130-31). However, a methodology rooted in interpretive understanding can never uphold this conclusion. Nor can it accept 'strange' as the final explanation. Instead, Weber insists that the actions of Puritans, if their meaning-complex is reconstructed through rigorous research, will be recognized as subjectively meaningful.

PE sought to comprehend why seventeenth-century Puritan believers in England, Holland, and the American colonies attributed meaning to systematic work and a concerted search for wealth and profit – even to the point of placing labor and material success

8. Inner-worldly implies to Weber that the action *this* believer perceives as relevant and meaningful to personal salvation is action *in* the world rather than separate from the world (as is the action of the monk secluded in a monastery).

at the very core of their lives. Through the careful study of diaries, sermons, autobiographies, and other documents, Weber aimed to reconstruct the intense faith of the devout and to comprehend the 'psychological premiums' their all-important manner of searching for salvation placed upon certain endeavors. Although seemingly odd, the meaningfulness of the faithful's action would then become plausible and understandable to the social scientist, he held. Written in 1904 and 1905, *PE* constitutes Weber's most powerful demonstration of how a variety of motives by an array of Puritan, Catholic, and Lutheran believers can influence activity in different ways.

This orientation to subjective meaning guided his empirical investigations. In *EEWR*, for example, he explored the origins of the beliefs and actions typical, among others, of Confucians, Daoists, Hindus, Buddhists and Jews. Even the extreme withdrawal from the world of Buddhist mystics can be understood as meaningful if placed within the framework of *their* perception of the transcendental realm (as dominated by an immanent and impersonal Being rather than an anthropomorphic and omnipotent Deity), definition of the goal of salvation (escape from the endless wheel of reincarnation), and view of the appropriate means toward its attainment (through contemplation and the 'silencing of the soul' that alone allows immersion into the All-One). Why, Weber queried further, for example, was scholarship meaningful to the Confucian Gentleman? And why were the commandments of an anthropomorphic God meaningful to the Old Testament prophets?

Weber emphasized that such cross-cultural and cross-epochal explorations must be acknowledged as complex and even precarious. 'We moderns' can scarcely imagine the intensity of the Puritan's devotion and focus upon the question of personal salvation, nor 'how large a significance those components of our consciousness rooted in religious beliefs have actually had upon culture...and the organization of life' (2011b: 178).⁹

This dual emphasis upon subjective meaning and its social context, implies the rejection of a major axiom central to Marxism, neo-Marxism, organicism, and structuralism: external structures should constitute the major subject of sociological investigation. For Weber, a principled disjunction always remains between the influence upon

9. '...der moderne Mensch [nicht imstande zu sein pfl egt], sich die Bedeutung, welche religiöse Bewußtseinsinhalte auf die Lebensführung [und] die Kultur... gehabt haben, so gross vorzustellen, wie sie tatsächlich gewesen ist...' (1920: 205).

action of 'external forms'—classes, status groups, and organizations, for example—and the motivations of individuals. It *may* exist to such an extent that an entire range of motives can be found among persons who otherwise orient their action to a single class, status group, or organization (see 1968: 29-38).

For example, the search for and legitimation of authority can be anchored in affectual motives (an emotional surrender to the ruler), traditional orientations (to customs and conventions), means-end rational calculations (conformity to conventions or obedience to laws for reasons of expediency and self-interests), and orientations to values (the belief in loyalty and duty, and in the rulership as just)—or a combination of all of these action-orientations (see 1968: 31).¹⁰ As is obvious if the functioning of structurally identical bureaucracies is compared cross-culturally, a 'bureaucratic ethos' motivates functionaries to varying degrees. Similarly, whether a civil servant within a bureaucracy fulfills tasks motivated by values, means-end rational calculations, or a respect for an accustomed way of doing things remains, for Weber, a question for empirical investigation (1968: 30-31)—one answered in different ways despite the formally similar features of this organization. He contends that even the extremely firm organizational structure of the religious sect will not determine the subjective meaning of the devout.¹¹

The evaluation of the subjective meaning of persons in groups stands at the foundation of his sociology of civilizations as well as his sociology generally. The motives behind observed action vary widely across groups and civilizations, Weber is convinced—hence, a methodology anchored in subjective meaning and interpretive understanding proves indispensable. The particular action *meaningful to persons in groups* here moves to center stage; it can now be investigated on its *own* terms. Weber's abandonment of a fixed point implied to him that empirical explorations seeking to reveal and

10. Weber's conviction that the diverse sources of legitimation constitute the central issue in respect to authority and rulership (*Herrschaft*), rather than the sheer 'external form' of a rulership organization, stands at the foundation of his interest in the subject of rulership (see, for example, 1968: 952-54, 1068-69, 1104-109).

11. 'Viewed externally, numerous Hinduist religious communities appear to be "sects" just as do many religious communities in the West. The sacred values, however, and the manner in which values were mediated, pointed in radically opposed directions' (1946b: 292 [translation altered]). [Äußerlich betrachtet, erscheinen zahlreiche hinduistische religiöse Gemeinschaften als 'Sekten' ebensogut wie die des Okzidents, — aber das Heilsgut und die Art der Heilsmittlung lagen nach radikal entgegengesetzter Richtung (1989: 116).]

define subjective meaning in the civilizations of the East and West, as well as in the past and the present, can be conducted.

In essence, his sociology of civilizations defines and utilizes a methodology that pushes aside Western-centric assumptions and allows an understanding from within—once the relevant research has been conducted in depth—even of patterns of action and groups radically different from groups familiar in the modern West. Weber's empirically-rooted sociology of subjective meaning opposed (a) the set of 'universal' concepts commonly utilized by his era's social scientists to evaluate other cultures and (b) had the effect of delegitimizing Western-centric value configurations and triumphalism. Albeit 'odd' at first glance, the subjective meaning of persons in groups must be investigated in terms of its *own* dynamics, however distant, he maintains.

The Uniqueness of the West and its Rise and Trajectory

Weber wishes also to comprehend the precise ways in which the modern West can be appropriately understood as constituted from unique configurations of meaningful and patterned—or group-based—actions. Only rigorous comparisons to China, India, the ancient Middle East, and the ancient and medieval West will enable a demarcation of this particularity, he insists. Here can be found a major focus of his sociology of civilizations. A further goal, however, closely accompanied this orientation: Weber sought also to explore the *causal origins* of the modern West's uniqueness.

He embarked around 1910 upon his comparative-historical research. Weber's expanded, post-*PE* agenda was now evident and his introduction to the EEWR series, 'Prefatory Remarks' (2011a), placed at its core a broad-ranging discussion of groups prominent only in the modern West. Central passages throughout *E&S* and EEWR turn to the 'specifically formed "rationalism" of Western civilization' (2011a: 245).¹²

12. 'Denn es handelt sich...von Eigenart offenbar um einen spezifisch gearteten "Rationalismus" der okzidentalen Kultur' (1920b: 11). Weber further notes: '...important here above all are the special *characteristic features* of Western rationalism and, within this particular type of rationalism, the characteristic features of modern Western rationalism. Our concern is to identify this uniqueness and to explain its origin' (2011a: 246; see also pp. 233-34). [Es kommt also zunächst wieder darauf an: die besondere *Eigenart* des okzidentalen und, innerhalb dieses, des modernen okzidentalen, Rationalismus zu erkennen und in ihrer Entstehung zu erklären (1920b: 12).]

Its major aspects include, for example, a legal system characterized by procedures formulated in reference to abstract, universally applicable prescriptions and executed, as well as interpreted, by specially trained jurists (see 1968: 883; 1927: 313). Bureaucratic rulership, as carried out by trained officials and managers administering their delineated tasks in an organized fashion and in a professional manner, were typical of large-scale organizations in the West (1968: 998). Parliaments, which involve regularly elected representatives, also possess Western roots, Weber contends (2011a: 236).

Similarly, in the West traditional forms of rulership (patriarchalism, feudalism, patrimonialism) have been replaced as the major 'political organizations' by a constitutional state anchored in a 'rationally enacted "constitution" and rationally enacted laws' (2011a: 236).¹³ Administration is carried out by civil servants 'possessing specialized arenas of competence and oriented to rules and "laws"' (2011a: 236).¹⁴ And modern science, characterized by the dominance of highly trained and specialized personnel, called forth systematic procedures based upon the rigorous application of the experimental method (see 2011a: 233-34).¹⁵ 'Modern capitalism', grounded in a systematic organization of free labor, businesses with fixed capital, certainty of calculation, and a unique 'economic rationalism' rooted in a methodical economic ethic, came to dominate the West since the seventeenth century 'as part of the rationalization of life in the public sphere which has become familiar in this part of the world' (1946b: 293; see also 2011a: 236-37; 1968: 505).¹⁶

'Again and again [we] discover in the West, and *only* in the West, specific *types* of rationalism' (2011a: 250; see 1927: 311-12).¹⁷ Weber

13. '...rational gesetzter "Verfassung", rational gesetztem Recht...' (1920b: 3). 'Rational' here alone implies discursively enacted.

14. '...an rationalen, gesetzten Regeln: "Gesetzen", orientierten Verwaltung durch *Fachbeamten*' (1920b: 3-4).

15. On the uniqueness of Western art, see 2011a: 234-35; 1968: 602-10; 1946a: 340-43.

16. '...als eine Teilerscheinung der [im Okzident] heimisch gewordenen Art der bürgerlichen Lebensrationalisierung' (1989: 117). *Today* these major aspects of Western civilization do not seem unique to it. We must at this point keep in mind that Weber is writing during a period when Asia in certain respects lagged behind the West. Furthermore, it must be stressed that his project aims to explain why these features developed *earliest* in the West. His position does not imply that the development of these, and other, major features of Western civilization, remain impossible outside the West.

17. '...wir immer wieder...im Okzident, und *nur* dort, bestimmte *Arten* von Rationalisierungen sich entwickeln finden...' (1920b: 15).

asks in general: 'How did it happen that scientific, artistic, and economic development, as well as state-building, were not directed in China and India into those tracks of *rationalization* specific to the West' (2011a: 245)?¹⁸ Although he remained convinced that modern capitalism, for example, could be *adopted* by, and would flourish in, a number of Eastern civilizations,¹⁹ he insisted that adoption involved different processes than his concern: the *origin* in a specific region of a *new* economic ethos and a *new* type of economy.²⁰

However, Weber seeks not only to define the West's 'particularity'; he aims also, as mentioned, to offer causal explanations of its origins (2011a: 246). One of his latest methodological writings expresses succinctly the focal importance to him of the causal question: 'European and American social and economic life is "rationalized" in a specific way and in a specific sense. To explain this rationalization, and to construct concepts appropriate to it, is one of the chief tasks of our disciplines' (1949: 34).²¹

Weber's quest to define the modern West's contours — its 'specific rationalism' — and to explain their origins endured across nearly two decades as an overarching concern. This theme combines with his attempt to provide, through multiple comparative studies designed to isolate significant patterns of action as constituted in groups, a causal explanation for this uniqueness.

Nonetheless, any description of this project as one oriented exclusively toward a precise definition of the modern West and an exploration of *its* origins must be seen as a dramatic foreshortening. A

18. 'Warum lenkten [in China und Indien] überhaupt weder die wissenschaftliche noch die künstlerische noch die staatliche noch die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in diejenigen Bahnen der *Rationalisierung* ein, welche dem Okzident eigen sind' (1920b: 11)?

19. Indeed, Weber identified the forces that would allow this to occur; on Japan, see 1958: 275.

20. The notion that Weber, because he wishes to define the West's uniqueness vis-à-vis the ancient and medieval West, and China and India, *itself* indicates Eurocentrism and Western triumphalism is here rejected. His harsh criticisms of the West remained simply too profound throughout his last fifteen years for this interpretation to be plausible. In addition, his methodology oriented to the interpretive understanding of subjective meaning, as noted, equipped him well to investigate the internal workings of non-Western and non-modern civilizations on their *own* terms. See above.

21. 'Unser europäisch-amerikanisches Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsleben ist in einer spezifischen Art und in einem spezifischen Sinn "rationalisiert". Diese Rationalisierung zu erklären und die ihr entsprechenden Begriffe zu bilden, ist daher eine der Hauptaufgaben unserer Disziplinen' (1973: 525).

focus upon a *particular* civilization scales back too far the full scope of Weber's endeavor. On the basis of comparative procedures, a multicausal framework, and an orientation to subjective meanings, *E&S* and *EEWR* seek to investigate an even larger theme: how *civilizations in general* congeal, establish patterned and meaningful actions among groups of people, and then unfold in specific directions along tracks.

This ambitious goal requires attention not only to the formation of subjective meaning and the modern West's uniqueness and causal origins, but also to the three further themes central in Weber's sociology of civilizations: the 'rationalization of action' as it proceeded to constellations of value-oriented action, the 'specific rationalisms' of a variety of civilizations, and the manner in which civilizations may be comprehended as placed along a spectrum anchored on one side by stagnation and on the other side by openness and even dynamism.

The Causal Impact of Values and the Rationalization of Action

Values have often, and throughout history, provided a foundation for the orientation of action and the formation of groups, Weber maintains. They *may* contest, and even constrict, economic interests and power calculations, he insists.

Feudalism, for example, can be examined by reference to the ways in which it orients action in a utilitarian manner toward economic interests and power. However, these components never capture fully this form of rulership, Weber is convinced. A feudal *ethos* is equally constitutive: a constellation of values that demarcates the rights, obligations, and life outlooks of vassals, princes, and peasants. Similarly, although his discussion of civil servants in bureaucratic organizations investigates their typical pragmatic practices and utilitarian strategies, it also examines their *ethos*: reliability, punctuality, respect for hierarchies, and the conscientious and dutiful performance of tasks and obligations. Further illustrations that note the potential of values to orient action reappear throughout Weber's sociology. Moreover, in certain cases values may *intensify* action oriented to economic interests. The Protestant ethic, as well as the spirit of capitalism, for example, did so.

Weber's sociology at this point poses fundamental civilizations questions. How do *values* become salient to the extent that they significantly guide action in groups and endow it with meaning—and

even continuity? How is subjective meaning formulated by reference to values and clusters of values, rather than exclusively by reference to means-end calculations, tradition-oriented action, or affectual action?²² And how do orientations to ethical values endure over longer periods despite their repeated contestation and violation by the orientation of action to material interests and power calculations? Is ethical action, especially if sanctified by a religious doctrine, then more capable of opposing action oriented to material and political interests? Such queries enter into Weber's comparative-historical studies on a regular basis.

Living amid social, economic, and political transformations that indicated to him the end of a 2,000-year historical development in the West, Weber pondered throughout his life whether binding values would continue to offer continuity and dignity to the activities of people living in a highly urbanized epoch dominated by widespread secularism and modern capitalism. If meaning is to be created and sustained by reference to values rather than to traditions on the one hand or the flow of material interests and political power on the other hand, how might this occur today?

The interpretive dimension of Weber's sociology now becomes especially apparent. As a sociologist concerned with the subjective meaning of people in demarcated groups, he wishes to *understand* the ways in which *certain* orientations of action to the 'universal groups' (the family and clan) and to groups in the rulership, religion, economy, law and social honor (*status*) arenas erect *contexts* of patterned action that – with some likelihood – give rise to values. Or do they at all? How do persons in groups become oriented to values – and then create further constellations of groups that assist orientations to values on a wider scale?

Although their impact may frequently be limited and circumscribed, values remain resilient, Weber holds. They *may* have wide-ranging and long-lasting consequences, and must not be *conceptualized* as fleeting or as perpetually of secondary or tertiary causal efficacy. Indeed, as noted, if supportive configurations of patterned action in groups congeal, values are empowered in Weber's sociology to place obstacles against traditions and the flux and flow of material interests and power-striving. Values *must* be included within a broad array of moving causes, he insists.

22. The point of reference, of course, for this sentence is Weber's 'four types of social action' (see 1968: 3-31).

However, Weber takes a further step in regard to the possible impact of values: Their capacity to contest and uproot opposing social action varies according to both their content *and* the internal make-up of value constellations. In his terminology, value-anchored regularities of action, when *carried* by supportive groups, *may rationalize*—or order under values—power-oriented, interest-based, and tradition-oriented patterns of action. And whenever values become aligned into an internally consistent configuration, a *wide-ranging organization of life* in reference to them *can* take place (1968: 30; 1951: 248). Action then becomes 'rationalized'—or organized and systematized—and acquires a 'directional' character, Weber asserts.

This 'value-rationalization' *may* influence subjective meaning to such an extreme extent that *all* pragmatic and traditional action in a group becomes transformed and oriented to values. In this unusual case, a 'methodical-rational' organization of life and 'ethic of conviction' (*Gesinnungsethik*), as found among monks, Puritans, prophets, mystics, and revolutionaries, for example, suppresses orientations to traditions, material interests, and power-striving of all sorts, as well as the 'practical-rational'—or utilitarian—mode of organizing life generally. Among these elite 'virtuosi', a 'personality'—a unification of the person's activities around a set of core values—then crystallizes. Emanating from *within the person* rather than as a utilitarian response to external occurrences, action becomes *comprehensively* directed by values.²³

Weber often explores this value-rationalization theme by reference to variations in action's *intensity*. For example, with Puritanism, as discussed, a 'psychological premium' was placed upon heretofore utilitarian activity oriented to work, profit, and material success. The effect, he argues, is significant: because this premium connected mundane economic activity directly to the urgent need of anxious believers to clarify their 'salvation status', it heightened the intensity of orientations to work, profit, and material success. Now *sanctified*, these orientations became value-based.

This rationalization of action proved crucial to Weber's Protestant ethic thesis: *only* the systematic and disciplined economic activity anchored in Puritan asceticism, he holds, is empowered to uproot and push aside the age-old and entrenched 'traditional economic

23. Again, Weber contends that only a sociology grounded in subjective meaning (rather than, for example, networks, interaction, or group dynamics) is capable of capturing *these* distinctions at the level of motivations.

ethos' (see 2011b: 78-85, 160-76). However concerted, interest-based and power-based orientations lacked the requisite sustained intensity to do so, he insists. Sociologists of civilizations, seeking to comprehend social contours and transformations in various milieux, must formulate and practice methodologies capable of evaluating the *varying* intensity of social action, Weber maintains.

Throughout his inter-civilizational studies, Weber examines whether groups in different settings effectively cultivate values to such an extent that a broad-ranging rationalization of action takes place. This important point must not be misunderstood: neither a mono-causal driving force nor a linear rationalization of action is implied. Indeed, Weber emphasizes that the reverse line of development—a 'routinization'—may occur in different empirical contexts—here the influence of values upon action is weakened. It now becomes manifest in its utilitarian, tradition-based, or affectual forms. And this path may also be comprehended as uneven—namely, this routinization, which occurs only as a consequence of the concatenation of multiple interacting causes, may proceed at varying speeds and may include numerous tangents. The pathways of history and the present cannot be conceptualized, Weber holds, as driven by a single cause or as following stable 'evolution', 'progress', and 'decline' routes. Nor do they pursue unvarying rise and fall cycles.²⁴

A *civilization's* unfolding should never be understood in a linear fashion, Weber admonishes, as a long-term weakening of age-old traditions and values followed by a concomitant expansion of—now unbounded—economic and political interests. Far from banished with industrialization and urbanization, securely anchored values often endure and influence action despite these vast structural transformations, he contends—at times in sociologically-significant ways. Indeed, lives organized in a methodical-rational manner around values, such as those of Puritans and their secular descendants, often possess an epoch-transcending influence, Weber argues. He investigates continuously groups in particular civilizational settings that give birth to—and cultivate—specific configurations of values capable of organizing and directing the 'flow of life'. Civilizations, Weber is convinced, are never constituted alone from utilitarian calculations, orientations to

24. '...the long and continuous history of Mediterranean-European civilization does not show either closed "cycles" or linear progress' (1976: 366). ['Das Kontinuum der mittel-ländisch-europäischen Kulturentwicklung kannte *bisher* weder abgeschlossene 'Kreisläufe' noch eine eindeutige orientierte 'gradlinige' Entwicklung' (1988: 278).]

dominant groups, and the raw flux of power. All contain significant—even 'autonomous'—orientations to values and traditions.

As will be examined, his four 'types of rationality'—practical, theoretical, formal, and substantive (see Kalberg 2012: 13–42)—offer a framework that assists the formation of rigorous definitions of the major values in empirical groups. These models serve as heuristic yardsticks and points of orientation throughout his sociology of civilizations. At its core stands an exploration of both value-oriented action's causal capacity and the rationalization of action by values. These two pivotal themes, in terms of scope and analytic range, surpass far more familiar themes in his writings: bureaucratization, the disenchantment of the world, and the rise of a spirit of capitalism. They more adequately ground Weber's sociology of civilization.

Civilizational Rationalisms and World Views

The precise contours of his comparative-historical scholarship became apparent to Weber around 1910. A variety of studies ranging across the entire histories of India, China, and the West, as well as the ancient Near East and Mediterranean areas, followed over the next decade. Albeit more circumscribed, explorations of the Middle East also were written. Each civilization possesses distinguishing configurations of subjective meanings, he maintains. However daunting the task, rigorous research will enable the isolation, definition, and explanation of this uniqueness, he insists.

Utilizing a comparative and experimental methodology, sociologists can isolate and define multiple patterns of action, the causes behind their origin and development, and their distinct manifestations in groups possessing demarcated boundaries. A civilization's 'particular rationalism'—cohesive groups juxtaposed into multiple arrays of groups substantively connected one with another—can be delineated, Weber contends.²⁵ He discovers a 'Chinese rationalism', an 'Indian rationalism', a 'rationalism of the Middle East', a 'rationalism of ancient Greece', a 'rationalism of ancient Rome', a 'medieval rationalism in the West', and a 'modern Western rationalism.'²⁶

25. Weber never offers a precise definition of a civilization's rationalism.

26. In calling attention to this 'rationalism of civilizations' theme, I am here opposing the prevalent interpretation among scholars of the EEWR series; they see these volumes on China, India, and ancient Israel as offering 'contrast cases' only. See above.

In each case Weber aims to understand a civilization's broad spectrum of subjective meanings 'from within' and on its own terms.²⁷ They become significantly (though not entirely) apparent to him from the empirically-discovered patterns of action of persons in constellations of groups in the major spheres of life: the economy, religion, rulership, law, status and universal organizations (the family, the clan) arenas. His research seeks to identify the *diverse multiplicity* of groups in each civilization that interact, form specific configurations, and embed patterns of action deeply in complex arrays of action. The formulation of causal hypotheses regarding their origins and unique pathways of development can then take place.

In pursuit of this research agenda, Weber's investigations span a broad horizon and at times replicate in rigor the controlled experiment. He maintains, for example, that economic interests assisted the development of a highly formal type of law in the West, yet failed to do so in China or India (see 2011a: 245). And why did 'this-worldly' asceticism appear in the West instead of 'other-worldly' mysticism? Why did the latter arise prominently in India but not in China? And how did specific juxtapositions of multiple groups give birth to monotheism in ancient Israel (see Kalberg 2012: 179-91), the caste system in India (see Kalberg 2012: 165-78), and Confucianism in China (see Kalberg 2012: 145-64)?

Whereas intellectual strata tended to play important roles in the formation of the world religions in China and India, they proved less central in the Middle East and in the West. What constellations of groups account for this difference and what consequences follow for the conduct of believers? How did it occur that the question of salvation became linked to systematic work almost exclusively in the West—and there only in a few religious groups?²⁸ How did firm classes, as common in Europe, become transformed only in India into rigid castes and an enduring caste system?

Weber's queries turn also to the comparative strength of the sib group, or clan: whereas it assumed an extended, long-term, and unusually influential form in China, its impact gradually waned in the West. Further comparative studies led him to investigate the *varying* strength, endurance, and impact in China, India, and the West of magic and ritual. Causal examination then followed.

27. In this regard Weber's debt to Herder, Mommsen, and Burckhardt—in part mediated by Dilthey—is clear. On the relationship to Burckhardt, see Bendix 1971.

28. Weber discovered a certain connection in Jainism in India. See 1958: 193-203.

In Weber's writings, multi-causal investigations chart the crystallization of action-orientations into patterns of action and bounded groups, configurations of groups, and then arrays of large-scale groups. Central to a civilization's rationalism are constellations of groups on the one hand that embed deeply patterned action in further groups and on the other hand formulate deep contexts for epochal-range developments.

In these diverse ways, each civilization's distinguishing continuity and dynamic – its 'rationalism' – is shaped, as is its capacity to influence the action of persons in groups in a singular fashion through embedding processes.²⁹ Again, civilizations *do* possess indigenous configurations of subjective meaning, Weber maintains. The dominance of a class of highly literate administrators, in combination with an expansive patrimonial bureaucracy and the centralization of power around a strong emperor, erected a 'rationalism' that directed China's trajectory for 2,000 years along a particular pathway. The history of India unfolded along a different route as a consequence of the alliance of a caste of Hindu priests (Brahmins) with secular rulers (the Kshatriya) and a firm caste system interwoven with – and legitimized by – Hinduism (1958: 63-76, 123-33). Distinct also was the grounding of the West's salvation religions in ancient Judaism's monotheism. And also unique was the extent to which politically independent cities and a formal-rational type of law developed in the Western medieval period. The long-term past of every civilization, Weber insists, has an enduring impact.

However, arrays of groups, their dynamic interaction, and the manner in which they embed action never fully captures the long-range pathway of a civilization's rationalism. It becomes endowed with continuity *also* as a consequence of a further element, Weber holds: *world views* (*Weltbilder*). As 'tracks' (*Gleise*), they chart outer boundaries and a direction of development, thereby further anchoring a civilization's uniqueness and rationalism.

World views always imply a coherent set of values, he argues. Although they vary in terms of their internal cohesiveness, these

29. This conclusion – that civilizations for Weber possess a 'characteristic individuality' or 'particular rationalism' – should never, however, lead to their conceptualization as 'organic unities' – if only as a consequence of the rootedness of his sociology in life spheres and ideal types, rather than 'society', and its general emphasis upon conflict (see Kalberg 2011: 314-15, 341-43). For Weber, unlike for structural-functionalists, the question of a culture's unity remains an *empirical* one and is always one of degree. See, for example, 1968: 1193.

values assume a great comprehensiveness: they offer answers to ultimate questions. What is the meaning of life? What purpose does our existence serve? How do we best live our lives? Why do suffering, injustice, and misery persist?

Hence, a civilization's world view, rooted in shared cultural presuppositions as carried effectively by identifiable groups, demarcates a moral universe and a cosmological vision that offers instructions regarding the meaningfulness—or lack thereof—of mundane activity. Meaning constellations in strict opposition to the practical-rational, utilitarian 'flow of life' are articulated. Weber especially attends to whether world views direct believers to 'adapt to' the world (China) or to orient their search for salvation 'toward' (as in the West) or 'away' from the world (as in India). And does a world view, he queries, imply modes of action that can be realistically pursued and fulfilled by the devout laity as well as by elites?

The *worldly* realm may also ground a world view's coherent and expansive value constellation, Weber maintains. Secularized intellectual, social, and political groups may offer broad-ranging sets of values and an 'ordered meaningfulness'. However, this world view's 'correctness' or 'superiority' also can never be definitively proven, he argues: its legitimacy is anchored alone by the subjective meaningfulness of beliefs across sociologically significant groups.

World views contribute to a civilization's rationalism in a further manner. By articulating coherent values and pronounced ideals, they formulate an 'ethical order', whether rooted in 'religion or world'. Hence, they always stand opposed to the realm of daily life. A disjunction is apparent: although varying in intensity depending upon the world view's values and the forcefulness of their articulation by prophets, carrier groups, and organizations, this ethical order always sets standards against which pragmatic action is evaluated.³⁰ The *discrepancy* between an 'ordered totality' and 'irrational' earthly events itself places an *ideal, autonomous thrust* into motion, Weber maintains. For example:

To the [missionary] prophet, both life and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent 'meaning' to which man's conduct must be oriented if it is to bring salvation and after which it must be patterned in an integrally meaningful manner...

30. Again, the severity of this tension varies. It is minimized in China owing to Confucianism's predominant 'adaptation to the world' ethos. It relates in India mainly to Hindu and Buddhist elites.

[This meaning] always contains the important religious conception of the 'world' as a 'cosmos' which is challenged to produce somehow a 'meaningful', ordered totality, the particular manifestations of which are to be measured and evaluated according to this postulate (1968: 450-51).³¹

Weber emphasizes that world views provide a deep cultural legitimation for the formation of patterned action and groups. Group formation, history's events and occurrences, and a civilization's rationalism, he contends, arises not only from the economic, legal, political, and status interests of daily life, nor alone from traditions, mundane values, organizations, social structures, power considerations and 'rational choices'. The transformation, for example, of Christian religious doctrine – throughout the Middle Ages and from medieval Catholicism to Lutheranism and then to the ascetic Protestant sects and churches – cannot be comprehended by reference to worldly action oriented alone to the rulership, law, economy, family, clan, and social status domains (see Kalberg 2012: 43-72). Because they formulate the 'tracks' along which each civilization develops, world views play a prominent role in defining a civilization's rationalism. In some civilizations, they cast a broad influence across millennia:

Not ideas, but (material and ideal) interests directly impact the action of people. Yet very frequently the 'world views' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks within which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest. 'From what' and 'for what' one wished to be 'redeemed' and, let us not forget, could be 'redeemed', were defined in accord with one's world view (1946b: 280; translation altered).³²

31. 'Leben und Welt, die sozialen wie die kosmischen Geschehnisse, haben für den Propheten einen bestimmten systematisch einheitlichen "Sinn", und das Verhalten der Menschen muß, um ihnen Heil zu bringen, daran orientiert und durch die Beziehung auf ihn einheitlich sinnvoll gestaltet werden... Immer enthält [der Sinn] ferner die wichtige religiöse Konzeption der "Welt" als eines "Kosmos", an welchen nun die Anforderung gestellt wird, daß er ein irgendwie "sinnvoll" geordnetes Ganzes bilden müsse, und dessen Einzelercheinungen an diesem Postulate gemessen und gewertet werden' (2001: 193-94).

32. 'Interessen (materielle und ideelle), nicht: Ideen, beherrschen unmittelbar das Handeln der Menschen. Aber: die 'Weltbilder', welche durch 'Ideen' geschaffen wurden, haben sehr oft als Weichensteller die Bahnen bestimmt, in denen die Dynamik der Interessen das Handeln fortbewegte. Nach dem Weltbild richtete es sich ja: 'wovon' und 'wozu' man 'erlöst' sein wollte und – nicht zu vergessen – konnte (1989: 101).

In this manner, world views stand ‘behind’ historical developments as moral universes and *may, under conducive arrays of conditions* (see Kalberg 2012: 81-86), offer background justifications for particular patterns of social action by people in groups. They contribute a degree of coherence, as well as uniqueness, to each civilization’s rationalism and a degree of coherence to its development—indeed to an extent that barriers are erected against external influences. Here, as well as elsewhere, Weber’s sociology of civilizations distinctly diverges from all schools rooted predominantly in utilitarian axioms.³³

In sum, ‘particular rationalisms’ can be found in China, India, ancient Israel, the medieval Middle East, and the ancient, medieval, and modern eras in the West, according to Weber. Each demarcates cultural presuppositions and a developmental pathway endowed with a distinct direction. What diverse constellations of subjective meaning and patterned action, as aligned in groups, explain the unique origins, contours, and direction, Weber queries, of *each* civilization’s rationalism?

Long-Term Social Change and Continuity: Stagnation and Dynamism

Weber’s sociology assists identification of the arrays of social groups dominant in a given civilization. Highly cognizant of paradoxical turns and unforeseen consequences, he rejects, as argued, all ‘meaning of history’ theories that discover universal laws and chart evolutionary advances. The ‘faith in progress’ schools widespread in the Anglo-Saxon world during his time, all of which pronounced the modern West’s general superiority, also failed to impress Weber (see Kalberg 2011: 309-15). As now evident, his works also fundamentally oppose all schools of thought that view history as a random and unending flow of interests, power, class-based struggles, and status-based conflicts.

As also now apparent, Weber’s sociology of long-range change and continuity comprehends civilizations as comprised of multitudes of cohesive groups. Some set thrusts into motion toward social transformations while others resist change adamantly. Some impulses remain weak and marginal while others become intense and strike at the marrow of a civilization. Even these thrusts, however, may prove incapable of introducing significant transformations

33. For a more detailed discussion of world views, see Kalberg 2012: 73-92.

if sustaining coalitions of carrier groups fail to congeal on their behalf. And every development calls forth a reaction, he maintains. Social movements initially focused on new values and interests may fade quickly, smothered by heretofore antagonistic groups now allied in opposition against all transformations. Both 'change' and 'continuity' must be conceptualized as located amid complex constellations of groups.

Rather than seeking either to demonstrate the existence of overarching developmental laws or history's random ebb and flow, Weber aims to evaluate whether values, traditions, interests, and charismatic leaders (or combinations thereof) effectively orient the subjective meanings of persons to such an extent that demarcated groups crystallize. How are their patterns of action distinct and what 'directions' of action are manifest? And do *powerful* groups arise and *impose* a degree of cross-group continuity and uniformity? In addition, his sociology constantly inquires whether—in light of the contexts and directions established by configurations of groups—groups carrying new patterns of action rooted in values, material and political interests, and emotional loyalties *can* arise and influence action. *Some* contexts render certain groups 'available' as agents of change.

Hence, Weber's emphasis upon the *diverse* origins of patterned action grounds his understanding of social transformations. Discrete historical events, technological innovations, geographical changes and charismatic leaders may also give rise to social change. Change may further congeal from new sets of values articulated by non-charismatic actors. Moreover, conflict and competition regularly call forth new patterns of action (see 1968: 38–40), as do the tendencies for groups in possession of prestige and power to define, through the formulation of ideas and values, their positive status as 'legitimate'. Likewise, 'negatively privileged groups' tend to form ideas and values that 'compensate' for their lowly position (see 1968: 490–92). And the defense of interests of all sorts, often occurring on the basis of sheer power machinations, is all-pervasive, Weber contends. Finally, ideas and values that give rise to new patterns of action and groups may emanate from the domain of religion. Indeed, as noted, they may even crystallize and become ordered into a world view that forms the overarching 'track' for a civilization's development.

Acknowledgement of these pivotal elements in Weber's sociology — its orientation to arrays of bounded groups and thus its broad multi-causality, its emphasis upon the multiple ways in which patterned action becomes situated in contexts of patterned action, and

its conceptualization of civilizations as each in possession of a 'characteristic individuality' or 'rationalism' – lead to the conclusion that his understanding of long-range change and continuity cannot be captured alone by reference to the transformative influence of charisma and its subsequent routinization, as is often argued in commentaries on Weber. History's unfolding follows far more complex processes, he contends. As discussed, its course must never be viewed as following a linear line, whether one of evolution or 'differentiation'. Instead, multiple groups are perpetually involved in the most dissimilar fissions and fusions. Rather than a collapsing of patterned action-orientations into a necessary and predictable ebb and flow or a unity of harmony and equilibrium, history's journey evidences – as apparent throughout Weber's sociology – repeated switchbacks and reversals, unforeseen coalitions and consequences, and paradox and irony.

To him, whether alliances of groups cause entire civilizations to develop in a clear direction remains a question for empirical investigation. Even concerted social change may involve 'progress' exclusively in respect to a specific societal domain. Similarly, whether 'rationalization' or 'bureaucratization' occurs, and whether an 'iron cage' society of cold and impersonal relationships appears, depends upon singular concatenations of multiple groups (see Kalberg 2001). The influence of each must be examined through empirical investigations.

All such general phrases fail adequately to depict Western rationalism and its developmental trajectory. In *E&S* in particular, Weber insists that the various territories and nations of the West, due to intense and enduring inter-state competition, distinct indigenous constellations, and perpetual internal struggles between relatively autonomous societal domains and their respective groups, followed unique pathways. These distinctions held even as each nation entered into the twentieth century, he maintains, and despite the homogenizing structural constraints associated with the broad-scale impact of industrialization and urbanization.

Weber's focus upon domains and domain-specific ideal types (such as the types of rulership – patriarchal, feudal, patrimonial and bureaucratic – within the rulership arena and the multiple 'salvation paths' in the religion sphere), his proclivity to compare unceasingly, and his awareness of the sociological significance of historical occurrences and contingencies precludes an understanding of the 'rationalization of action' as a *general* process in the West, one homogeneous

across all industrializing states and nations (see, for example, 2011b: 96-98). As he repeatedly emphasizes, 'fateful events' play a significant part and unrepeatable configurations abound as polychromatic tapestries repeatedly shift and kaleidoscopic inter-weavings occur. These same foundational features of his sociology led Weber to reject all cross-epochal and cross-civilizational analogies and parallels (see 1976a: 39, 341, 385; Kalberg 1994: 83). They also place his sociology of civilizations firmly in opposition to all cyclical views of history (1976a: 357).

These presuppositions bring Weber directly to a central axiom: some civilizations manifest more openness and others less so. Competition, high levels of internal tension, and conflict across a pluralism of groups and societal domains typifies the former. Regular and medium-scope social transformations occur as a consequence of this sustained openness.

More closed civilizations assume different contours. The societal domains here tend more so to complement each other and groups tend toward symbiotic alignment. The outcome is clear to Weber: competition and even conflict are more effectively held in check. Stagnation may ensue, especially if power and authority are monopolized over longer periods by small and closed groups. Stratification lines become overt, vertical, symbiotic, and rigid. An 'organic' status hierarchy 'as austere as a machine' may then be imposed broadly across all societal arenas; bureaucratization and a 'pacifism of social impotence' become widespread (2005: 255-56; 1978: 281-83). Civil servants, functionaries, and managers become capable of pushing aside risk-taking entrepreneurs and even charismatic political leaders.

Weber emphasizes that a distinction between more closed and more open civilizations must not be understood as implying consecutive historical stages or pendulum movements. As discussed, 'inevitable developments' remain foreign to his sociology of civilizations. Instead, empirical investigations capture his attention. What identifiable causes stand behind a particular civilization's relative stagnation or openness? Over the last millennium in the West, Weber discovers 'less unity', a greater 'structural heterogeneity', and a more accelerated tempo of change than appeared in India, China, and Egypt in this or the classical eras (1968: 1192-93).

Capitalism's transformation into modern capitalism in the West was opposed by powerful groups, whether in the form of competing patrimonial empires, the struggle of each against politically

independent and wealthy cities in the High Middle Ages, feudalism's scorn for the systematic pursuit of wealth, Catholicism's 'traditional' economic ethic and Canon law, or the opposition of mercantilism in England – supported by the monarchy – to the methodical economic ethic of Puritans. Long-lasting conflicts between the church, the cities, secular rulers, Canon law, secular law and patrimonial nation-states created enduring competition – namely, a situation that sustained a relative openness and adaptation to the new: 'Rulership was set against rulership, legitimacy against legitimacy, one office charisma against the other' (1968: 1193).

Thus, the rise of modern capitalism in the West must be comprehended not only by reference to a Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism, Weber maintains, but also as a consequence of massive internal tensions and perpetual struggles. The contestation across societal spheres appeared to him significantly greater in intensity than occurred in the ancient West as well as in the classical and post-classical eras in China, India, and Egypt.³⁴

Weber views a civilization's relative open or closed contours as highly significant for a further reason: Depending upon its *location* on this spectrum, the extent to which non-elite groups orient their action to ethical values varies. To the degree that movement toward dynamism occurs, value-based activity becomes manifest with a greater likelihood, he contends: characterized by tensions across arrays of demarcated groups and societal domains, 'open' civilizations cultivate values to a greater extent than closed civilizations. Value-oriented action here eventually withers, Weber argues. How is this the case?

Cross-group competition ensues wherever value-based groups stand in relationships of enduring tension. Boundaries become manifest to the same degree and loyalties emerge as persons defend indigenous values, Weber insists. As allegiances become more firm,

34. Despite several unfortunate phrases (e.g., 'Chinese ossification'), Weber's passages concerning a 'stagnant' China can be best understood in reference to his comparisons to the West—where he discovered, as noted, a structural heterogeneity that sustained severe conflict over the last 1,000 years. Nonetheless, his selection of terms is inappropriate as concerns China; his volume (1951) reveals an acute awareness of periods of conflict, particularly in respect to the complex relationship involving the, at times, competing interests of the emperor, the literati, and the patrimonial bureaucracy. The author has examined this theme in the context of a reconstruction of Weber's analysis of the rise of Confucianism in China (see Kalberg 2012: 145-64).

more viable and binding values congeal and become endowed with a greater capacity to guide action. They form the basis for pride, initiative-taking, leadership, and a sense of dignity and self-worth. Such rejuvenated values *may* contest vigorously even the influence of material interests. Hence, in dynamic and open civilizations a higher probability exists that people will become 'responsible' in reference to a constellation of values, Weber holds, and capable of pursuing *ethical* action on a regular basis. Conduct *may* even become patterned and directed by ethical values.

The converse scenario is apparent to him. Wherever extreme bureaucratization exists, the cautious and static rule of managers oriented to technical efficiency expands widely. Contending societal domains and multiple groups then increasingly merge, in the process losing their distinct boundaries and vitality. A less dynamic civilization appears, one perhaps even too stable to give birth to strong leaders pronouncing and defending values, demanding an autonomous public sphere, and forming political parties that struggle over values. Action becomes increasingly oriented to strategic calculation and the influence of a utilitarian-based, practical rationalism expands in scope. In part, Weber's interest in highly comparative investigations can be understood as a quest to comprehend, through contrast cases, the varying extent to which values-based, ethical action becomes embedded in more open, as opposed to more closed, civilizations.

In conclusion, this study has sought to demonstrate that five themes at the core of Weber's sociology constitute, when taken in combination, the thematic foundation for a largely neglected – yet fundamental – aspect of his works: his sociology of civilizations. This discussion has sought to identify these themes as pivotal in his work and to demonstrate the ways in which they form the foundation for his sociology of civilizations. It has also attempted to convey a preliminary impression of their complexity and the broad *civilizational* range of Weber's works, in particular of *EEWR* and *E&S*. Taken in combination, these themes outline a series of issues that comparative researchers even today must acknowledge and utilize as orienting guideposts if they wish to undertake a *Weberian* analysis of civilizations.

Albeit crucial, *themes* must be acknowledged as only *one* component central to Weber's sociology of civilizations. It must be investigated also by reference to its major methodological concepts and research strategies. All are central to, and utilized in, his explorations

of the subjective meanings dominant in various civilizations. A rigorous juxtaposition of the major themes of Weber's sociology of civilizations with a detailed examination of his comparative-historical methodology will alone serve adequately to reconstruct Weber's sociology of civilizations and to demonstrate its full potential (see Kalberg 2015, forthcoming).³⁵

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35. The Weber reception of the 1970s and 1980s, which moved distinctly away from the familiar 'main concepts' reception (that is, discussions of ideal types as defined in *E&S*, such as charisma, status, power, domination, and the bureaucracy) to a focus upon Weber's big picture themes—the rationalization process, the uniqueness of the West, and the rise of the West (see Tenbruck 1980; Schluchter 1981; Nelson 1974; Kalberg 1980, 1979, 1997)—laid the groundwork for systematic reconstructions of Weber as a sociologist of civilizations. However, the reception over the last three decades has largely reverted to a 'main concepts' focus.

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