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Comparative Study of Religion: Emile Durkheim and Max Weber

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ABSTRACT: Classical, seminal sociological theorists of the late 19th and early 20th century such as Durkheim and Weber were greatly interested in religion and its effects on society. Like those of Plato and Aristotle from ancient Greece, and Enlightenment philosophers from the 17th through 19th centuries, the ideas posited by these sociologists continue to be examined today. Durkheim and Weber had very complex and developed theories about the nature and effects of religion. Of these, Durkheim and Weber are often more difficult to understand, especially in light of the lack of context and examples in their primary texts. Religion was considered to be an extremely important social variable in the work of these two.

KEYWORDS: religion, sociologists, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, philosophers, society

I. INTRODUCTION

A comparison of the views of Max Weber and Emil Durkheim in the area of religion and its role in shaping social behaviour and history shows that the two thinkers have a different method, language, and resulting theory. It is made more interesting by looking at the upbringing and religious orientation of each thinker, Weber being the Protestant Christian and Durkheim the agnostic. A few main themes of difference between the theories of the two thinkers are evident. Weber's focus was on the individual and their relationship with their god, Durkheim focusing on the effects of religion as a group activity. Weber focused on the economic effects, Durkheim, the moral. Durkheim's "science" focused on the moral effects of religion on real life social behaviour, and extended this to the philosophical and even psychological realm as he studied group religious behaviour but it is clear the Weber focused on the effects of religion on the economics aspects of life and the historical development of economic systems. Durkheim argued that repetitive religious ritual had a "conditioning" effect on the individual, which made the individual feel part of the group and behave in ways conducive to the survival of the group. As a result religion created the moral basic of society and held society together on a fundamental level. Weber's theories of religion were more contextual, as he analyzed all of the world religions, from Judaism through Islam, whereas Durkheim's theories were sweeping and more general to mankind as a whole and were primarily based on the study of the Totemism of early Australian Aboriginal religion. He believed that the study of early religious behaviour provided the key to its social [1,2,3]

Animism is the belief in spirits, the soul, a future state and a ghost-soul, which exists in dreams and fantasies. The divine is contrived from internal "mental experiences" of the soul and the ghost soul. Durkheim didn't think animism answered his questions about the distinction between the sacred and the profane. What elevates things to the level of the sacred, to form the religious beliefs? Durkheim also saw that the first "sacred" objects were external natural objects, "things" and forces of nature. This was Naturalism, the personification of these natural objects through metaphor and images. Awesome spectacles inspired religious ideas. Again, Durkheim asked, "How did these things acquire a sacred nature and character?" To answer these questions he turned to a study of early Australian aboriginal Totemism. He chose this group because he felt they represented the most basic, elementary forms of religion within a culture. Clans were groups originating from a common ancestor.

II. DISCUSSION

Religion can be defined as a collections of beliefs and cultural systems that relate humanity to an order of existence. One of the foundations of religion is social orientation that in one way or another influence a society 's social stability. Max Weber along with Emile Durkheim were very influential people in the course of social stability in the 19th century. Weber and Durkheim attempted to make comprehensible social changes, particularly in the aspects of religion of a society. Their perspectives on religion differ on some aspects. Their views on religion may be diverse, but they both seem to be in unity that religion to some extent shifts the worldview of people in society. Emile Durkheim is a sociologist, born 1858 in northeastern France. As a young boy he was also, strongly affected by a schoolteacher who was Romance Catholic. The influence by the school teacher may have contributed something to his general interest in

religious endeavors but they did not make him a believer (86). Durkheim spent much of his academic career studying religions, especially those of small societies. Max Weber (1864-1920), one of the founders of sociology, examined the features of modernity and propagated interpretive methodology for sociology. Therefore, Fletcher (2015: 381), while introducing 'subjective understanding of social action' as the prime sociological contribution of Max Weber writes: "Like Emile Durkheim, Max Weber is now taken to be one of the chief founders of distinctively modern (contemporary) sociology…" Unlike Durkheim, he did not develop any theory of education. Like Marx, Weber's contributions to the theory of education have to be culled out from his writings on the nature of modernity and methodological suggestions to study modern society. There are references to the role of education in his conceptualisation of bureaucracy. Also, while writing on the religion of China he studied the education of the Chinese literati.[4,5,6]

Weber's idea of sociology as a study of meaningful social action, his propagation of interpretive methodology to study social actions, and his substantive sociological studies of religion, class, status groups, power and bureaucracy have informed Weberian perspectives on education. Before attempting to understand these perspectives we have to know Max Weber's contributions to sociology in brief. Such a task is not easy given the magnitude and variety of his works.

Introducing Weber's Sociological Ideas

Aron (1967: 185-186), before examining the major sociological contributions of Weber arranges his books into four categories. 1. Studies in methodology, criticism, and philosophy. These studies are concerned essentially with the social sciences in general, history, and sociology. 2. Strictly historical works which concentrated on the relations of production in the ancient world. 3. Studies in the sociology of religion which include Weber's much acclaimed Protestant Ethic Thesis and later comparative study of world religions. 4. The fourth category which Aron considers is Weber's master work on general sociology "Economy and Society" which was published posthumously. It is a treatise on general sociology. It is in this work that Weber gave a definition of sociology which clarifies the nature, scope and methodology of the fledgling discipline which he practiced.

"Sociology…is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences. We shall speak of 'action' insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior – be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is 'social' insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (Quoted in Turner et al. 2012: 201).

Concerning himself with social action Weber wanted to achieve two goals. Weber was a theorist of modernity and he wanted to understand the origin and unique features of modern Western societies. Secondly, he wanted to construct a system of abstract concepts that would be useful in describing and understanding the social actions of modern actors. As systematic social scientific research is not possible without such precise concepts, Weber constructed a series of such sensitising concepts (Turner et al. 2012: 201).

Distinguishing Characteristics of Sociology

Fletcher (2015: 418-426) identifies the following five features of Weber's sociology:

1. Subjective Understanding as a Causal Explanation. Subjective understanding of social action contributes to causal explanation of why actors select certain course/s of action and not certain others.
2. Man in Society- A Qualitatively Distinctive Subject-Matter. In the work of Weber, men as feeling, thinking, willing, acting, and responsible beings constitute the subject matter of sociology. Men attach meaning to their actions and the subject-matter of sociology contains these subjective dimensions of meaning which are actually operative as causes of social action.
3. The Scientific Study of Man in Society – A Distinctive Dimension of Explanation. The type of methodology to deal with this distinctive subject matter too has to be distinctive. Such a methodology is different from that of natural sciences. In methodological and theoretical sense, a sociologist goes beyond the perception of the phenomenal actuality. Sociology and other cultural sciences are richer in their subject matter than the natural sciences can possibly be. Their facts have dimensions other than the phenomenal, which the natural sciences simply do not possess. For socio-cultural sciences, Weber suggests interpretive methodology.
4. Sociology a Science Richer in Subject-Matter and Methods-but therefore Less Exact. Because of the subjective orientations of Sociology, it could neither hope nor expect to attain the same degree of measurable exactness in

conclusions. This does not mean that sociology and other cultural sciences are unscientific. This means that given the nature of its subject matter only certain degree of exactitude can be expected.

5. **Values and Problems in Scientific Sociology.** Weber commented on the role of values in sociological research. During Weber's time, many observers did not think that an objective social science was plausible because it seemed impossible to separate values from the research process. So most scholars attempting to describe human behaviour infused their analyses with political, religious and other values. Weber confronted the problem of values by observing that sociological inquiry should be objective. Weber claimed that sociological practice should be "value-free", a phrase which continues to draw considerable criticism. Turner and others (2012: 202) consider that unfortunate because if one reads Weber's analysis of what he meant by this phrase it becomes clear that Weber did not call upon social scientists to discard all values while pursuing their research. He meant that researcher's personal values and economic interests should not affect the process of social scientific analysis. He believed that if such factors influenced the research process, the structure of social action could not be depicted objectively.

In Weber's view sociology should not be a moral science. It is not possible to state scientifically which norms, values, or patterns of behaviour are correct or best, but it is only possible to describe them objectively. Detachment from the personal values from the actual investigation reflects an ongoing historical process in which magic and other forms of inherited wisdom become less acceptable as means of explaining events in the day-to-life. Weber conceives this change as rationalisation, and it is the dominant theme of Weber's sociology. His ideas on the disenchantment and demystification of the modern world stems from this notion. Weber believed that social life is becoming increasingly "rationalised" in the sense that people lead relatively methodical lives. They rely on reason supported by objective evidence in various domains of life. For example, in the sphere of economy, relying on improved means of accounting, the use of technology and other methods produced modern capitalism. Rationalisation of governance resulted in the rise of the modern political state. Need for modern education arose because of the rationalisation in the sphere of job market and requirement of skilled labour force. Sociology and other cultural sciences are 'rationalised disciplines' whose practice is not guided by the personal values of the researchers. But values remain relevant.[7,8,9]

Distinctive Methods of Sociology

Weber's conception of the subject matter of sociology and his ideas on the distinction between values and science decided his views on the methodology of sociology. While acknowledging the difficulty in separating values from objective scientific practice, Weber also highlighted the relevance of values before and after the research process. The choice of topic comes before the actual conducting of research where the researchers' religious beliefs, economic interests and other values lead to the topics for research.

Unlike other classical sociologists, Weber rejected the search for general laws in favour of historical theories that provide for an interpretive understanding of social action and to arrive at causal explanation of its course and consequences (Turner et al. 2012: 204). In his substantial sociological studies Weber focused on the "big empirical questions," such as the emergence of capitalism in the West and not in the East. The development of general theories would not allow for an examination of such issues. Ideal types were his methodological tools for dealing with these issues (Ibid: 205).

The Ideal Type

Construction of 'ideal type' is a central requirement for interpretive historical and sociological researches. In general terms, it is essential to have a description of the key elements of the phenomena under reference. After carefully examining Weber's description of an 'ideal type', Fletcher (2015: 428-430), lists ten features of an ideal type.

1. The 'Ideal Type' is a clearly constructed ideal model of the specific set of social relationships of which an understanding and causal explanation is sought.
2. It is not a description of those factors or laws which are thought to be found 'on the average' in that kind of configuration – though such factors and laws may be drawn upon.
3. It is an ideality of rational construction imputing certain meanings in terms of values held, ends sought, calculations made, and means employed, in which the imputed meanings of actions are interpreted as having causal validity in terms of value-relevance. It is a clear rational construction of the nature, essentially, of an exercise in imputation of meanings for causal understanding.
4. It is not ideal in the sense of ethically good or right.

5. It is not rational in the sense of assuming pure rationality among men and women in the specific configuration of actions and relationships. The investigator knows well enough that non-rational and irrational elements are powerfully present in much human behavior.
6. It is ideal and rational only in the sense of being a conceptual and logical ideality imputing a pure rationality of means-end actions simply as a limiting case.
7. It is essentially a 'one-sided' model: deliberately emphasizing those imputations thought to be worth postulating and testing.
8. Its nature is not, therefore, to be an exhaustive description or account of an entire social configuration.
9. It is not a basis of comparative experiment for the purpose of setting up 'general laws'.
10. The ideal type is also selective in that – given its imputations of meaning and its knowledge of conditions – it gives a clear picture of those courses of social action which are valid (in terms of value-relevance) and objectively possible.

An ideal type or pure type, Weber opines, summarizes the basic properties of social phenomena, which, in turn, can help the search for its historical causes. Weber tended to develop two different kinds of ideal types: historical and general (Turner et al. 2012: 205-207).

Historical Ideal Types

Historical events can be described by analytically accentuating their key components. In his famous analysis of "the spirit of capitalism", Weber drew up a list of features of this belief system. Once the essence of the pure form of this belief system is highlighted, it then becomes possible to seek the causes for the emergence of this distinctive historical event. In Weber's analysis the emergence of Protestant ethic is a key cause for the development of the spirit of capitalism. Thus, after accentuating the key features of a historical event the researcher would search the cause or causes for the same.[6,7,8]

General Ideal Type

Although Weber did not believe that socio-cultural world is because of some general laws of human social organisation, he still wanted to make generalisations about social phenomena. This desire led him to formulate ideal types of phenomena that are always present in human action. These ideal types do not describe historical events, but rather, they accentuate certain key properties of actors, action, and social organisation in general. Among the various abstract and general ideal types constructed by Weber, the typology of action is most famous (Turner et al. 2012:206). As social action model as against system model in approaching education draws from Weber's sociology we will look into that model now.

Education: A Social Action Model

As we noted in the beginning, Weber considers meaningful social action as the subject matter of sociology. Weber's point of departure from other classical sociologists, according to Aron (1967:186), is the distinction between four types of action:

1. Zweckrational action, or rational action in relation to a goal,
2. Wertrational action, or rational action in relation to a value,
3. Affective or emotional action, and
4. Traditional action

This classification of types of action has been argued, elaborated, and refined ever since Weber conceived it for several reasons. Aron (1967: 187-188) postulates four reasons.

1. Weber conceives of sociology as a comprehensive science of social action. The typology of actions is therefore the most abstract level of the conceptual system applicable to the social field. The classification of types of domination – rational domination, traditional domination, charismatic domination – depends on the previous classification, on an even higher level of abstraction, of the four types of action.
2. Sociology is also a comprehensive science of social action. Aron gives accentuation to comprehensive which refers to an understanding of the meaning man gives to his conduct.
3. The classification of types of action to a certain extent governs the Weberian interpretation of the contemporary era. For Weber prime feature of the modern era is rationalisation which is the product of the widening sphere of zweckrational actions.

4. This classification of types of action may be correlated with what constitutes the heart of Weber's philosophical thought; namely the independence between science and politics. Throughout his life Weber was passionately interested in the question: What is the ideal type of the political man? Who is the ideal type of a professor? How can one be both a politician and a professor? The last question was for him both personal and philosophical.

Sociologists of education compare this social action model of society with social system model of society. Evetts (1973: 128-141), for example, juxtaposes system and action models in sociology of education. While applying the social system model education is addressed holistically in terms of social needs fulfilled by it. For an action theorist, an analysis of education always means analysis in terms of the motivation of a hypothetical actor. In this approach the needs of the social system to have education is not highlighted. It is the motivation of individual actors who make the educational system is seen as the prime subject matter of sociology of education.

Proponents of this model distinguish sociological and psychological explanation. A simple psychological explanation would describe human behaviour in terms of what effect an individual's own motivation had on his overt behaviour. The sociological explanation includes the notion of social interaction where motivation of individual actors in relation to each other is considered for explanation. In this perspective the actions of the various categories of individuals in the educational sphere are attempted to be understood. One of the advantages of this approach, according to Evetts (1973: 135), is the freedom from the consensus framework of system theory. The social action approach even facilitates to look into the conflict and change aspects of education as a socio-cultural institution.

When we combine the notion of action with that of interaction, we can attempt at a reconciliation of system and action approaches. By looking in to the interactions taking place in the educational system we can discern the unintended consequences of different actors in an educational system. Therefore, system and action approach in sociology of education may complement each other.

Modernity and the Need for 'Value Free' Education

Sociology as a discipline emerged to study the changes taking place in the transition from a traditional to a modern society. Like other classical sociologists, Weber too was interested in analysing the newly emerging modern society. For Weber, modern society was characterised by a shift from traditional to a rational worldview. This rationality involved a way of thinking that emphasises deliberate, matter-of- fact calculation of the most efficient way to accomplish a particular task. As already highlighted in the social action theory, modernity is characterised by increasing rationalisation. In his analysis of the status of education as a social institution, Weber feels that the rationality and rationalisation of modernity has seeped into all spheres of life, including education. This in turn has led to disenchantment.

Weber opines that as the academic community modernised and adjusted itself to the socio-economic transformations taking place in Germany and other parts of Europe, it failed to maintain its integrity and distinction. Weber saw the university moving away from its moral focus on self formation and as succumbing to the whims and dictates of political establishments as well as industrial capitalism. He writes:

"All concessions which the faculties make to non intellectual considerations, and particularly all deviations from the fundamental principle of appointing as many intellectually outstanding persons as possible, take their revenge in the ultimate weakening of the moral authority of the faculties" (Myers 2004: 273).

The threat to the professoriate from "patronage," Weber viewed as endangering "the academic profession's sense of corporate solidarity (Myers 2004: 273). For Weber the pursuit of knowledge as practiced in the academic world was an honourable task, and a professor was a member of a guild with a calling, The politicians of the new age were threatening to take that agency away, reducing a vocation to a salary.[3,4,5]

Weber feared that the academic profession would gradually become a system of what he calls "operators," persons w ho will fit into this machinery without any further thought, "while "it actually produces conflicts of conscience and leads them into taking false steps, the consequences of which they will have to bear throughout their academic lives" (Myers 2002: 274).

Value free education as a means of political calling

Weber sought to define value-free science as a means to re-establish the integrity of the academic calling (Myers 2004: 272). The academic goals of all intellectual pursuits, should emphasise their ethical and moral contributions to society. He is perturbed by the increasingly practical nature of universities. He considers education to be a moral force that is more important than profit. Weber opined that more than technical knowhow and gaining factual knowledge, a student should focus on developing an academic personality. This personality is cultivated through the development of a critical mind and the ability to differentiate facts from value judgements.

Weber envisions a revamped academic role in society as the older, traditional professorial type is no longer capable of adequately functioning "under conditions of disenchantment."The moot question for Weber is how "modern" science can inform political decision-making without relinquishing its status and distinction as a producer of knowledge. Weber opines that the practice of a value free education is a solution this modern predicament plaguing education.

Weber outrightly rejects the direct academic involvement in the political domain as he feels that this will destroy the integrity and status of academia. He nevertheless saw academics as an indispensible informant of political praxis. It needs to provide new models for political leadership to minimise the hold that bureaucratic domination has in political establishments. By mastering the art of value-free science, the academic could enter the elite group of a special intellectual class that embodied an almost spiritual dimension. The scientist's unique access to otherwise inaccessible knowledge of the world, as Weber's model of value-free science asserts, suggests a near prophetic application of scientific results (Myers 2004: 281).

Like other classical sociologists Max Weber was a theorist of modernity. He conceived subjective understanding of social action as the main goal of sociology. He suggested interpretive methodology for sociology. Weber proposed the construction of "Ideal Type" as a methodological tool for socio-cultural sciences. Rationalisation of the modern world social order was Weber's major sociological concern.

Unlike Emile Durkheim, Weber did not develop a theory of education. However, his methodological writings and substantive arguments on the various sociological issues are relevant for sociology of education and continue to inspire interpretive perspectives in education. There are direct references to education in Weber's study of bureaucracy and comparative study of world religions. In modern bureaucracy which is the example of legal-rational domination there is education based status -group domination. The elaborate system of formal education where degrees and diplomas are given and made essential condition for entry to specialised bureaucratic positions is a characteristic feature of modern society. In his study of religion of China, Weber elaborates cultural monopolisation of occupations. The Confucian administrative system granted administrative offices on the basis of the mastery of esoteric texts, rather than on technical competence. The literati in China were such administrative officers.

His work in the field of sociology has contributed to our understanding of many aspects of education. He is noted for his contributions to the understanding of bureaucracy and for the concept of status group relationships. In fact, he writes that the primary activity of schools is to teach particular "status cultures." Power relationships and the conflicting interests of individuals and groups in society influence educational systems, for it is the interests and purposes of the dominant groups in society that shape the schools (Ballantine and Joan 2007).

Weber has continued relevance for interpretive approaches in sociology of education. Though Weber has not directly written on education as a social institution, his ideas on rationalisation in modernity, power, bureaucracy and religion have inspired interpretive thinking in sociology of education. Some neo-Weberian perspectives have relied on Weber's ideas to critically analyse contemporary society and culture. Some of them employ Max Weber's theories of bureaucracy and power to analyse contemporary schooling. Mills (1956), who adopts elements of both Marxian and Weberian analysis in his scathing social critique, argues that the process of rationalization has contributed to the rise of a mass society in which our lives are governed by a power elite of business, political, and military leaders. Formal education, particularly within private schools and colleges, is an important mechanism through which access to elite positions can be controlled and elite solidarity fostered.[4,5,6]

III. RESULTS

Durkheim's work The Elementary Forms of Religious Life is an important one. Its major ideas are discussed and debated by scholars and students even today. Before we go on to examine its major arguments, let us take up an important question. Why was Durkheim interested in the 'elementary forms' of religious life? Could he not have

directed his attention to major religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity? Let us try to answer this question by taking a simple example from day-to-day life. If you can ride a bicycle, you will find it easier to balance on a motor-bike. Similarly, if the simplest form of religion is understood, it will be of immense use in understanding the complexities of 'organised' religions, in Durkheim's view. The most elementary or simple form of religion will be found in those societies with a correspondingly 'elementary' social organisation, namely, amongst the aborigines or primitive tribal communities. It is by understanding the aboriginal religion that Durkheim hoped to contribute to the understanding of complex systems of thought and belief. In the following sub-sections, we will try and see how he does this. Let us begin by examining how Durkheim defines religio Sociologist define religion as a cultural system of commonly shared beliefs and rituals that provides a sense of ultimate meaning and purpose by creating an idea of reality that is sacred, all-encompassing and supernatural. Emile Durkheim's Functionalism and religion In contrast to Marx, Emile Durkheim does not connect religion primarily with social inequalities or power but relates it to the overall nature of the institutions of a society. He bases his work on a study of totemism as practiced by Australian Aboriginal societies, and he argues that totemism represents religion in its most 'elementary' or simple form – hence the title of his book.[5,6,7]

1. A totem was originally an animal or plant taken as having particular symbolic significance for a group. It is a sacred object, regarded with veneration and surrounded by various ritual activities. Durkheim defines religion in terms of a distinction between the sacred and the profane. Sacred objects and symbols, he holds, are treated as apart from the routine aspects of existence, which are totemic animal or plant, except on special ceremonial occasions, is usually forbidden, and as a sacred object the totem is believed to have divine properties which separate it completely from other animals that might be hunted, or crops gathered and consumed.

2. Why is the totem sacred? According to Durkheim, it is because it is the symbol of the group itself; it stands for the values central to the group or community. The reverence which people feel for the totem actually derives from the respect they hold for central social values. In religion, the object of worship is actually society itself.

3. Durkheim strongly emphasized that religions are never just a matter of belief. All religion involves regular ceremonial and ritual activities in which a group of believers meets together….. In collective ceremonials a sense of group solidarity is affirmed and heightened. Ceremonials take individuals away from the concerns of profane social life into an elevated sphere, in which they feel in contact with higher forces, attributed to totems, divine influence or goods, are really the expression of the influence of the collectivity over the individual.

4. Ceremony and ritual, in Durkheim's view, are essential to binding the members of groups not only in regular situations of worship, but also in the various life crises when major social transitions are experienced – for example, birth, marriage and death. In virtually all societies, ritual and ceremonial procedures are observed on such occasions. Durkheim reasons that collective ceremonials reaffirm group solidarity at a time when people are forced to adjust to major changes in their lives. Funeral rituals demonstrate that the values of the group outlive the passing of particular individuals, and so provide a means for bereaved people to adjust to their altered circumstances. Mourning is not the spontaneous expression of grief or, at least, it is only so for those personally affected by the death. Mourning is a duty imposed by the group.

5. In small traditional cultures, Durkheim argued, almost all aspects of life are permeated by religion. Religious ceremonials both originate new ideas and categories of thought and reaffirm existing values. Religion is not just a series of sentiments and activities; it actually conditions the modes of thinking of individuals in traditional cultures. Even the most basic categories of thought, including how time and space are thought of, were first framed in religious terms. The concept of 'time', for instance, was originally derived from counting the intervals involved in the religious ceremonials.

6. With the development of modern societies, Durkheim believed, the influence of religion wanes. Scientific thinking increasingly replaces religious explanation, and ceremonial and ritual activities come to occupy only a small part of individuals' lives. Durkheim agrees with Marx that traditional religion – that is, religion involving divine force or gods – is on the verge of disappearing. "The old gods are dead', Durkheim writes. Yet he says that there is sense in which religion, in altered forms, is likely to continue. Even modern societies depend for their cohesion on rituals that reaffirm their values; new ceremonial activities can thus be expected to emerge to replace the old. Durkheim is vague about what these might be, but it seems that he has in mind the celebration of humanist and political values such as freedom, equality and social cooperation.

Max weber's symbolic interactionist theory of religion

Durkheim based his arguments on a very small range of examples, even though he claims his ideas apply to religion in general. Max weber, by contrast, embarked on a massive study of religions worldwide. No scholar before or since has undertaken a task of such scope. Most of his attention was concentrated on what he called the world religions – those that have attracted large numbers of believers and decisively affected the course of global history. He made detailed studies of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and ancient Judaism and in the protestant ethnic and the spirit of capitalism and elsewhere,

he wrote extensively about the impact of Christianity on the history of the West. He did not, however, complete his projected study of Islam.

1. Weber's writings on religion differ from those of Durkheim in that they concentrate on the connection between religion and social change, something to which Durkheim gave little attention. They contrast with the work of Marx because weber argues that religion is not necessarily a conservative force; on the contrary, religiously inspired movements have often produced dramatic social transformations. Thus Protestantism – was the source of the capitalistic outlook found in the modern West. The early entrepreneurs were mostly Calvinists. Their drive to succeed, which helped initiate western economic development, was originally promoted by a desire to serve god. Material success was for them a sign of divine favour.[7,8,9]

2. His discussion of the impact of Protestantism on the development of the west is part of a comprehensive attempt to understand the influence of religion on social and economic life in carrying cultures. Analysing the Eastern religions, Weber concluded that they provided insuperable barriers to the development of industrial capitalism, such as took place in the West. This is not because the non-Western civilizations are backward; they have simply accepted values different from those which came to predominate in Europe. In traditional China and India, Weber pointed out, there was at certain periods a significant development of commerce, manufacture and urbanism, but these did not generate the radical patterns of social change involved in the rise of industrial capitalism in the West. Religion was a major influence in inhibiting such change.

3. For example, Hinduism is what Weber called on 'other-worldly' religion. That is to say, its highest values stress escape from the toils of the material world to a higher plane of spiritual existence. The religious feelings and motivations produced by Hinduism do not focus on controlling or shaping the material world. On the contrary, Hinduism sees material reality as a veil hiding the true concerns to which humankind should be oriented. Confucianism also acted to direct effort away from economic development, as this came to be understood in the West, emphasizing harmony with the world rather than promoting active mastery of it. Although China was for a long while the most powerful and culturally most developed civilization in the world, its dominant religious values acted as a brake on a strong commitment to economic development for its own sake.

4. Weber regarded Christianity as a salvation religion, involving the belief that human beings can be 'saved' if they adopt the beliefs of the religion and follow its moral tenets. The notions of sin and of being rescued from sinfulness by God's grace are important here. They generate a tension and an emotional dynamism essentially absent from the Eastern religions. Salvation religions have a 'revolutionary' aspect. While the religions of the East cultivate an attitude of passivity in the believes towards the existing order, Christianity involves a constant struggle against sin, and hence can stimulate revolt against the existing order of things. Religious leaders – like Jesus – arise, who reinterpret existing doctrines in such a way as to challenge the prevailing power structure.

IV. CONCLUSION

For almost one hundred years, all sociologists of religion have taken Max Weber's great work on comparative religions as a primary point of departure. Whole libraries of scholarship have been produced to explicate Weber, expand on Weber, disagree with Weber, revise Weber. In the next hundred years, I think, the point of departure will be Robert Bellah rather than Weber. Bellah's new masterpiece, Religion in Human Evolution is comparable in scope, breadth of scholarship, and depth of erudition to Weber's study of world religions, but it is grounded in all of the advances of historical, linguistic, and archeological scholarship that have taken place since Weber, as well as theoretical advances in evolutionary biology and cognitive science. There is enough complexity in Bellah's work to generate as many academic inspirations and controversies—and, inevitably, oversimplifications and misunderstandings—as have arisen from Weber's, but Bellah's will have more resonance with contemporary issues than Weber's century-old scholarship. Even more fundamental, however, is that Bellah's new book is in style and pathos more in tune with the spirit of the early twenty-first century than Weber. What are some of the key contrasts between Bellah and Weber? First of all, having deeply absorbed the perspectives of Durkheim, Bellah is focused much more on religious practice, especially ritual practice. This puts him in line with the dominant contemporary trends in the anthropology of religion, trends that see religions mainly as ways of life rather than systems of ideas. Weber doesn't ignore religious practices, but puts much more emphasis on the ideas that animate the great world religions. Bellah by no means ignores religious ideas, but he emphasizes how thinking about religion grows out of doing religion. Social theorist Émile Durkheim defined religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things." To him, sacred meant extraordinary—something that inspired wonder and that seemed connected to the concept of "the divine." Durkheim argued that "religion happens" in society when there is a separation between the profane (ordinary) life) and the sacred. A rock, for example, isn't sacred or profane as it exists. But if someone makes it into a headstone, or another person uses it for landscaping, it takes on different meanings—one sacred, one profane (secular). Max Weber believed religion could be a force for social change. He examined the effects of religion on economic activities

and noticed that heavily Protestant societies—such as those in the Netherlands, England, Scotland, and Germany—were the most highly developed capitalist societies and that their most successful business leaders were Protestant. In his writing The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, he contends that the Protestant work ethic influenced the development of capitalism. Weber noted that certain kinds of Protestantism supported the pursuit of material gain by motivating believers to work hard, be successful, and not spend their profits on frivolous things. (The modern use of "work ethic" comes directly from Weber's Protestant ethic, although it has now lost its religious connotations.)[9]

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