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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Eisenstadt, S. N. (2006). The Protestant ethic and modernity - comparative analysis with and beyond Weber. In K.-S. Rehberg (Ed.), *Soziale Ungleichheit, kulturelle Unterschiede: Verhandlungen des 32. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in München. Teilbd. 1 und 2* (pp. 161-184). Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verl. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-145439

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The Protestant Ethic and Modernity – Comparative Analysis with and beyond Weber

Shmuel N. Eisenstadt

I.

The major question I want to address here is what is the relevance of the »Protestant Ethic« today (Weber 2004 (1904/1905))? Is it only or mainly an illustration of a brilliant, seminal work which was for a century a source of inspiration and writing – but which is no longer of great significance or relevance on the contemporary scene; and if it is of such significance, what is the nature of this significance? Is the concrete hypothesis it presented – namely that Protestantism constitutes an important – even essential – component in the development of modern capitalism of any validity? But above all is its broader, in a sense central thesis, its broad civilizational theme – the claim that Protestantism is at the root of the modern civilization, of the »Rise of the West«, of full fledged capitalism of the Western rationality a problem so succinctly analyzed by Prof. Wolfgang Schluchter (1979, 1985a) – still valid, and if it is, can it be of any importance for the understanding of the contemporary world? Even if its basic claim about the crucial importance of Protestantism in the development of the first Western European modernity, despite the many criticisms which have been voiced against it throughout the years, throughout the century – at least partially accepted, is this of any help in understanding the contemporary world, the world multiple modernities, of intensive globalization, a world which seemingly has gone to far beyond the premises of the classical narrative of modernity, beyond the vision of the nation and revolutionary states, a world of be it end of history or of clash of civilizations?

Is the world of multiple modernities, of globalization related in any way to Weber's vision or is it contradictory to Weber's visions, and especially to the ways in which the Protestant Ethic thesis has been interpreted in the recent decades and which read this essay as attempting to explain the origins of the specific mode of rationalization that developed in the West.

This reading of Weber in the fifties and sixties gave rise to a search for the possibility of finding some equivalents of the Protestant Ethic in other civilizations – one of the best, and first, of which has been Robert N. Bellah's »Tokugawa Religion« (1957) – assuming, even if often only implicitly, that it is only in so far as such

equivalents of the Protestant Ethic do develop in these civilizations they will really become modern. Many recent developments – be it in South America or South Asia or analysis of social capital in different countries of Europe, have indeed shown that religious developments in the direction of the Protestant ethic, i.e. in this worldly ascetic direction do indeed contribute to the development of economic entrepreneurship (Yuchtman-Yaar/Alkalay 2005), even if it is not always clear which aspects of Protestantism that are of importance in this context – is it the belief in predestination, ascetic orientations; the emphasis on individual responsibility; or rather the sectarian organizations and disciplines? But even if these interpretations are valid, they do not explain the development of modern civilizations and above all also of different patterns of modernity, of multiple modernities that develop in these societies.

If one emphasizes only this reading of Weber it is seemingly irrelevant to the contemporary world of multiple modernities. There is however another reading of Weber's work, which is indeed highly relevant for the understanding of the contemporary world. This is the reading of the »Gesammelte Aufsätze für Religionssoziologie« as studies of the internal dynamics of the various Great Civilizations, in their own terms, in terms of their distinctive rationalities, with a special emphasis on the role of heterodoxies and sectarian movements in these dynamics. Truly enough Weber focused his analysis on the development of the first – Western, European – modernity – and did not conceive the possibility of the development of other modernities – but neither did he necessarily assume that the later ones will necessary develop under the same conditions. Accordingly such reading of Weber almost naturally leads the question of how these dynamics, the specific historical experience of these civilizations may influence – certainly not determine – some of the distinct characteristics of the modernities that develop in the frameworks of these civilizations. The kernels of such analysis can indeed be found in the series of Weber symposia edited by W. Schluchter (1981, 1983, 1984, 1985b, 1987, 1988) and those on the Axial civilizations (Eisenstadt 1987a, 1987b, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 2000), and I would like here to follow these indications and expand on them, emphasizing the comparison between the development of the first modernity within one Axial civilization, with modernities which developed with other Axial civilizations and which can also be applied to non-Axial one – namely Japan (Eisenstadt 1996).

By claiming the relevance of such reading of Weber to the analysis of the contemporary society, of the contemporary world, I do not mean to imply that what is called for is a sort of exegetic reading of Weber as providing some direct explanations of different contemporary developments – even if such reading may often be of interest – but rather the possibility of learning from Weber's approach to comparative civilizations, from his basic analytical and methodological insights – re-

membering indeed that his approach constituted an unparalleled, probably the most forceful comparative sociological-historical approach developed in sociology.

In this context of great importance is the fact that Weber's *Religionssoziologie* constituted an analysis of the *dynamics* of a *special* type of civilization, Weber did not focus on the analysis of the Ancient Egyptian or Assyrian civilizations, of various South Asian and even of the Japanese ones. The religious or civilizational orientations of these civilizations did not constitute an inherent part of his *Religionssoziologie* – although he often referred to them in his analyses of structures of power, or of economic formations. In *Religionssoziologie* he focused on the analysis of a special type of civilizations of world religions – of what later Alfred Weber and above all his colleague Karl Jaspers, would call the »Axial Civilizations«, and on their different yet comparable dynamics (Jaspers 1953; Weber 1960 (1935)).

Contrary to some interpretations of Weber, as well as to later Orientalist approaches and the criticisms thereof, as well as in many ways contrary to Marx's analysis of the Asian mode of production, Weber did not assume that the »non-Western« civilizations he studied – Ancient Judaism, Chinese and Indian ones – were stagnant or even regressive, as against the dynamics of the Western world, which led via Protestants to the development of modernity, of an overall distinct type of rationality, encompassing all spheres of life – and generating its own tensions and antinomies. Rather his work constitutes an analysis of the dynamics of these civilizations – of dynamics which went in distinct ways, different from but comparable with those of the Western one. Or, to put in another way, he did not assume that most of these non-Western civilizations were non-reflexive, purely magical non- rational ones, but rather that there developed within them specific types of reflexivity, of rationality, above all different combinations of »Wert« and »Zweckrationalität«, different modes of rationality which generated different modes of institutional dynamics. It was indeed such different modes of rationality, with the tensions inherent in them, that generated different conceptions of »salvation«, of the implementation of the transcendental visions prevalent in these civilizations, that constituted, according to him, one at least of the motors of such dynamics.

Such a perspective necessitates a somewhat new look at Europe. If we do not assume that all the different structural, institutional and cultural characteristics of modernity, of modern society as they crystallized in Western Europe have been, as it were naturally, transplanted into other societies or civilizations and constitute the natural and only model of modernity, it is necessary to identify those dimensions of European modernity which may seem distinctly European, and to examine to what extent they are related to, or influenced by, some distinct aspect of European historical experience. Or, in other words, it necessitates a closer look at some of the distinct characteristics of the historical experience of European societies, of European Axiality, as they may bear on the development of the distinct characteristics of

the first – European – modernity, and of the distinct historical and structural conditions which were conducive to the development of these characteristics (Eisenstadt 1987c).

There is yet another additional methodological problem closely related to the evaluation of Weber's vision. Weber has been often accused, wrongly, of cultural determinism, of being a culturologist who believes that cultural visions constitute the driving force of human history. Although this accusation has been often – and indeed thoroughly refuted, yet it has been raised again and again. Does any endorsement of the Protestant Ethic thesis imply the acceptance of a methodologically »idealist« or »culturalist« as against more »materialist« or realist approach – an endorsement which probably would even make it less relevant for the understanding of the contemporary world, the world framework of global, geopolitical and economic competition? The examination of the relevance of Weber's vision for the contemporary world will also throw some light on this problem.

The Multiplicity of Axial Civilizations and of World Histories

II.

The starting point of our exploration is the analysis of the implications of the Weberian analysis of the Axial Civilizations. The core of the specific »Axial« developments has been the combination between two strong tendencies. The first such tendency was, to follow Johann Arnason's formulation – between a radical

> »distinction between ultimate and derivative reality (or between transcendental and mundane dimensions, to use a more controversial formulation)« (…) »connected with an increasing orientation to some reality beyond the given one; with new temporal and spatial conceptions; with a radical problematization of the conceptions of cosmological and social order, and with growing reflexivity and second order thinking, with the resultant models of order generating new problems (the task of bridging the gap between the postulated levels of reality)« (Arnason et al. 2005).

The second tendency was the development on the structural level of far-reaching decoupling of many aspects of social structure, and their disembeddment from relatively closed kinship or territorial units; the concomitant development of many free-resources which can be organized or mobilized in many different ways, constituting challenges for the hitherto institutional formations.

The development of the conceptions of a chasm between the transcendental and the mundane orders gave rise in all these civilizations to attempts to implement some aspects of such vision in the mundane world, to reconstruct the mundane world human – personality and the socio-political and economic orders according

to the prevalent transcendental vision, formulated in religious, metaphysical and/or ethical terms (Eisenstadt 1986; Arnason 2005).

The core of tendencies to the reconstruction of mundane life was the development of conceptions of a world beyond the immediate boundaries of their respective societies – leading to the constitutions of broader institutional frameworks. The most important among such broader institutional formations that developed within all Axial civilizations in connection with the visions promulgated by them were very strong tendencies to the constitution of societal center or centers to serve as the major autonomous and symbolically distinct embodiments of the transcendental visions of ultimate reality as the major loci of the charismatic dimension of human existence, and to the attempts to permeate the periphery and restructure it according to their own autonomous visions, conceptions, and rules.

Second, concomitantly, there developed with the institutionalization of the various Axial cultural programs, strong tendencies to define certain collectivities and institutional arenas as the most appropriate ones to be the carriers of the distinct broader transcendental visions, and of new »civilizational« – often ›religious‹ – collectivities, which were distinct from existing political various ›primordial‹, ›ethnic‹, local, or religious ones, yet they continually impinged on them, interacted with them, and challenged them, generating continual reconstruction of their respective identities.

But while such center or centers and collectivities emerged as distinct symbolic and institutional arenas, their »givenness« could no longer be always taken for granted; the very constitution and characteristics of these centers tended to become a focus of reflexivity and of concomitant contestations focused on a critical examination of the existing social and political order and to some extent also of its premises (Eisenstadt/Silber 1988; and see also Seligman 1989). Such reflexivety and contestations were reinforced by the continual development of tensions and antinomies as inherent components of the Axial visions.

The most important of such antinomies were those focused first on the awareness of a great range of possibilities of transcendental visions and of the range of ways of their possible implementation; second, on the tension between reason and revelation or faith (or their equivalents in the non-monotheistic Axial civilizations); and third, on the problematic of the desirability of attempts at full institutionalisation of these visions in their pristine form, as against the recognition that given the fragility of human nature, such attempts are not only unrealisable but also dangerous. Such reflexivity was connected with the development of new patterns of cultural creativity, above all of theological or philosophical discourse that flourished and became constructed in much more elaborate and formalized ways, organized in different worlds of knowledge in manifold disciplines, and generating continual developments within such frameworks. Such reflexivity and contestations were

reinforced by the central development of the antinomies and tensions as inherent components of the Axial visions.

III.

These new visions were promulgated by specific bearers or carriers, of »Kulturträger« autonomous cultural and religious or secular carriers of models of cultural and social order – such as the ancient Israelite prophets and priests and later on the Jewish sages, the Greek philosophers and sophists, the Chinese literati, the Hindu Brahmins, the Buddhist Sangha, and the Islamic Ulema. These groups constituted a new social element, a new type of elites which were differed distinctly from the ritual, magical and sacral specialists in the pre-Axial civilizations. These new elites – the intellectuals and clerics – were recruited and legitimized according to distinct, autonomous criteria, usually promulgated by themselves, and were organized in autonomous settings distinct from those of the basic ascriptive or political units of the society. Usually they acquired potential countrywide status consciousness of their own. It was these elites that constituted the most active elements in the restructuring of the world, in the development of the new ›civilizational‹ formations and the concomitant new patterns of collective identity and world visions of new types of centers, institutional creativity that developed in these societies.

In all these civilizations there developed a multiplicity of secondary cultural, political or educational elites, each very often carrying different conceptions of the cultural and social order. Accordingly the institutionalization of these Axial visions was never a simple peaceful process. It has usually been connected with struggle and constitution between many groups and their respective visions. The very multiplicity of such alternative visions gave rise to an awareness of the uncertainty of different roads to implementation of such visions, of the possibility of existence of alternative conceptions of social and cultural order, and of the seeming arbitrariness of any single solution. Such awareness was closely related to the development of a high degree or »second order« thinking, i.e. of reflexivity turning on the basic premises of the social and cultural order.

One of the central foci of such contestations focused, to use the terminology proposed by Boltanski, around the criteria of justification of different modes of activities and institutional formats – be it of economic institution or also of the criteria of accountability of rulers. One of the major breakthroughs of Protestantism, leading presumably to the modernity, has been as Ilana Silber has pointed out, the radical change in the justification of different types of mundane activities, indeed of the endorsement of different mundane above all economic activities and organizations with their charismatic aura, as the carriers or embodiment of the

charismatic dimensions of their respective cosmological vision (Boltanski/Thevenot 1983; 1991; 1999; Silber 2003).

IV.

The different modes of reflexivity that developed in these civilizations focused to a large extent, although certainly not only on the constitution of the political order – the crux of which was the transformation of the conception of the accountability of rulers. The political order as one of the central loci of the mundane order was usually conceived as lower than the transcendental visions and had to be reconstituted according to the precepts of the latter, and the rulers were usually held responsible for organizing the political order according to such precepts.

At the same time the nature of the rulers was greatly transformed. The King-God, the embodiment of the cosmic and earthly order, disappeared, and a secular even with strong social attributes ruler, in principle accountable to some higher order, appeared. Thus emerged the conception of the accountability of the rulers and the community to a higher authority, God or Divine Law. One such dramatic appearance appeared in the priestly and prophetic pronunciations of Ancient Israel. A different, »secular«, conception of such accountability, to the community and its laws, appeared in the northern shores of the Eastern Mediterranean, in Ancient Greece, and also in the Chinese conception of the Mandate of Heaven.

V.

The general tendency to the reconstitution of the world, with all its symbolic-ideological and institutional repercussions, and to continual expansion was common to all the Axial Age civilizations but they differed greatly with respect to the concrete ways in which these tendencies developed and became institutionalized within them.

Two sets of conditions were of special importance in shaping the different modes of institutional creativity and of expansion of these civilizations. One such set consists of variations or differences in their basic cultural transcendental visions or orientations. The other is the structure of the social arenas in which these institutional tendencies can be played out.

Among the different cultural orientations the most important have been first the differences in the very definition – religious or secular – of the tension between the transcendental and mundane orders and in the modes of resolving this tension. Second, within the religious context, there was the distinction between the mono-

theistic religions in which there was a concept of God standing outside the Universe and potentially guiding it, and those systems, like Hinduism and Buddhism, in which the transcendental, cosmic system was conceived in impersonal, usually metaphysical terms, and in a state of continuous existential tension with the mundane system. A third major distinction refers to the focus of the resolution of the transcendental tensions, especially between purely this-worldly, purely other-worldly and mixed this – and other – worldly transcendental visions, visions of »salvation« (a distinctly Christian term employed by Weber – but one which can be extended, with important qualifications, to other religions or civilizations).

But the concrete working out of all tendencies, the concrete institutional patterns that developed in different Axial societies, depended on the second set of conditions – namely the arenas in which these broad institutional tendencies can be implemented. These conditions included, first, the respective concrete economic political-ecological settings, especially whether they were small or great societies, whether they were societies with continuous compact boundaries, or with cross-cutting and flexible ones. Second was the specific historical experience of these civilizations and societies, including encounters with other societies, especially in terms of mutual penetration, conquest, or colonization.

It is the interplay between, on the one hand, the different cultural orientations, their carriers, and their respective visions of restructuring of the world, and on the other hand, the concrete arenas and historical conditions in which such visions could be concretized, that has shaped the institutional contours and dynamics that developed in the different Axial Age civilizations, and the subsequent courses of world histories.

VI.

The development, on the one hand, of different cosmological conceptions and, on the other hand, of growing structural differentiation and the concomitant development of free resources took place in different Axial societies to some extent at least independently of one another, generated by the internal momentum of these dimensions of social order – albeit continually reinforcing one another in a variety of ways. Neither the cosmological visions nor the patterns of structural differentiation determined each other. At most there developed certain affinities between different institutional implications which are generated by the openness of both the cosmological visions as well as of structural differentiation and the concomitant development of free resources. Accordingly there developed within these civilizations, multiple constellations of collective identities and of political and economic formations, each with its own dynamics.

Indeed all these dimensions of the social order – be it political formations, constitution of collective identity, or economic formations – as they developed in Axial civilizations or societies were autonomous, to a larger extent independent of, even if closely interwoven with each other and especially with the distinctive Axial cosmologies.

Thus indeed within the framework of Axial civilizations there developed a great variety of political frameworks – be it full-fledged empires – indeed a very great variety thereof (be it Chinese, Byzantine or Ottoman); rather fragile kingdoms or tribal federations (e.g. ancient Israel); combinations of tribal federations of city-states (e.g. ancient Greece); the complex decentralized pattern of the Hindu civilization; or the imperial-feudal configurations of Europe.

Moreover the relations between different collectivities and political, economic formations, the contestations and struggles between their respective carriers – constituted a continual aspect of the dynamics of Axial civilizations, giving rise to the concretization of different institutional patterns, to different – as it were – institutional »choices« and to continual contestations about these patterns. The concretization of any such choice, which could be, as was the case of China long-lasting or, as in other cases, of a much shorter span, was influenced by a variety of historical contingencies which certainly were not fore-ordained in either the cosmological vision or the »original« ecological settings of the respective societies. Nor did they constitute some sort of universal evolutionary stages. Rather such programs and patterns were shaped as is indeed also the case with other institutional formations in the history of mankind, by the continuous interaction between several factors – the most important among which are, first the basic premises of cosmic and social order, the basic »cosmologies« that were prevalent in these societies in their »orthodox« and »heterodox« formulations alike as they have crystallized in these societies throughout their histories. A second shaping factor was the pattern of differentiation between the different dimensions of the social order and of institutional formations that developed within experience. The third set of factors shaping such programs and historical experiences was the internal tensions, dynamics and contradictions that developed in the basic Axial premises of these Axial civilizations in conjunction with the structural-demographic, economic, and political changes attendant on the institutionalization of Axial frameworks. In this context of special importance was the fact that the Axial cosmological programs were continually as it were born by internal tensions and antinomies, which as we have seen above, were inherent in them.

Such continual reconstitution of different combinations between cosmological visions and structural characteristics, of different structures of power and of collective identities, has been in Axial civilizations reinforced by the fact that with the institutionalization of Axial Civilizations, a new type of inter-societal and inter-civi-

lizational world history emerged. To be sure, political and economic interconnections existed, as we have indicated already above, between different societies throughout human history. Some conceptions of a universal or world kingdom emerged in many pre-Axial civilizations, like that of Genghis Kahn, and many cultural interconnections developed between them, but only with the institutionalization of Axial Civilizations a more distinctive ideological and reflexive mode of expansion developed (Biran 2004). Within all these civilizations there developed, in close connection with the tendencies to reconstruct the world, a certain propensity to expansion, in which ideological, religious impulses were combined with political and to some extent economic ones. Although often radically divergent in terms of their concrete institutionalization, the political formations which developed in these civilizations – which can be seen as ›ecumenical‹ – comprised representations and ideologies of quasi-global empire, and some, at moments in their history, even the facts of such Empire. This mode of expansion also gave rise to awareness of creating possible ›world histories‹ encompassing many different societies. But neither a homogeneous world history emerged nor were the different types of civilizations similar or convergent. Rather, there emerged a multiplicity of different, divergent, yet continuously mutually impinging world civilizations, each attempting to reconstruct the world in its own mode, according to its basic premises, and either to absorb the others or consciously to segregate itself from them.

VII.

The preceeding analysis of some aspects of the dynamics of Axial Civilization while going beyond the concrete concerns of Weber in his *Religionssoziologie* yet builds very much on some of the basic components of his approach, especially on the emphasis on the importance of sectarian groups and heterodoxies in the constitution of such dynamics, and of contingent historical circumstances in the concretization of institutional patterns.

This analysis bears also very closely on the analytical problem of the relations between »culture« and social structure – on the allegation of Weber as a culturologist, reinforcing all the refutations of such allegations. Weber did not conflate as was the case with many Marxists and with Foucault (1975; 1988) power and culture; rather throughout his works he attempted to specify how the basic ontological premises, especially conceptions of the transcendental visions, visions of salvation, prevalent in a society, influence – but do not determine the contours of specific institutional patterns – such as the structure of rulership or configurations of strata – as well as the mechanism through which such influence is exerted. He did not assume that these conceptions and premises directly shape institutional patterns, but

rather that they open up specific ranges of institutional possibilities, and that the concrete institutional patterns which develop within these ranges crystallize through human agency, through the inter-relation between these premises as promulgated by their different carriers, and the different »real« »material« forces as they come together in different historical contexts in the constitution of which contingency plays a central role. His strong emphasis on the importance among such carriers of heterodoxies indicates that such challenges are influenced not only by pure »power« contestation but also by the basic premises of the different religions or systems of belief and knowledge that became hegemonic in their respective societies, and that such premises, especially when institutionalized, contain within them seeds of potential challenge – and transformation.

The Comparative Analysis of Modernity: Multiple Modernities – The Basic Problematic

VIII.

What is the significance, if any, of such interpretations of Weber's comparative civilizational analysis for the analysis of modernity, especially indeed of the contemporary world of multiple modernities and intensive globalization? After all, Weber's conception of modernity was deeply rooted in the Western-European tradition, and it can be easily interpreted as assuming that European modernity is the only possible one, even if some reading of his analysis of the Americas can be interpreted as at least implicitly recognizing the possibility of some diversity of modernities. But above all Weber's Europecentrism, of course, is manifest in his claim that it was only Western modernity that constituted the only development of universal, world historical significance. Given the fact that it was only within the imperialist, colonialist and capitalist expansion that Western modernity expanded throughout almost the entire world, this assertion is, of course, true in the narrow factual sense. But obviously this assertion does not take into account the world historical orientations and claims of the Axial Great Religions – and is, of course, entirely out of tune with the contemporary situation – and here again it may be seen that Weber's analysis of modernity may not be relevant for the understanding of the contemporary world.

But at the same time there is, I think, another side or another answer to the question of whether Weber's analysis of modernity is relevant to the analysis of the world of multiple modernities in the age of globalization. Of central importance in this context Weber's implicit recognition of modernity as a distinct civilization

constitutes a very important starting point such analysis of multiple modernities – even if the concretization of these implications necessarily brings us beyond Weber.

IX.

The view of multiple modernities entails certain assumptions about the nature of modernity. The first is that modernity is to be viewed as a distinct civilization, with distinct institutional and cultural characteristics. Or, in contrast to the view of modern societies – as the natural culmination of at least hitherto evolution of human society, this view assumes that modernity constitutes a distinct civilization – which originated in the West and then expanded throughout the world, in some ways similar to the crystallization and expansion of the Great Religions – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and even Confucianism (Eisenstadt 2002; 2005).

The second such assumption is that this civilization, the distinct cultural program with its institutional implications, which crystallized first in Western Europe and then expanded to other parts of Europe, to the Americas and later on throughout the world, gave rise to continually changing cultural and institutional patterns that constituted different responses to the challenges and possibilities inherent in the core characteristics of the distinct civilizational premises of modernity, i.e. that it gave rise not to a relatively uniform and homogeneous civilization but, indeed, to multiple modernities.

According to this view, the core of modernity is the crystallization and development of mode or modes of interpretation of the world, or, to follow Cornelius Castoriadis' terminology, of a distinct social »imaginaire«, a combination of distinct ontological vision, of a distinct cultural program, combined with the development of a set or sets of new institutional formations – the central core of both being, an unprecedented openness and uncertainty (Castoriadis 1987).

This central core of the cultural program of modernity has been indeed possibly most succinctly formulated by Weber. To follow James D. Faubian's exposition of Weber's conception of modernity: »Weber finds the existential threshold of modernity in a certain deconstruction: of what he speaks of as the ›ethical postulate‹ that the world is a God-ordained, and hence somehow meaningfully and ethically oriented cosmos.«

What he asserts – what in any event might be extrapolated from his assertions – is that the threshold of modernity has its epiphany precisely as the legitimacy of the postulate of a divinely preordained and fated cosmos has its decline; that modernity emerges, that one or another modernity can emerge, only as the legitimacy of the postulated cosmos ceases to be taken for granted and beyond reproach. Countermoderns reject that reproach, believe in spite of it.

»(…) One can extract two theses: Whatever else they may be, modernities in all their variety are responses to the same existential problematic. The second: whatever else they may be, modernities in all their variety are precisely those responses that leave the problematic in question intact, that formulate visions of life and practice neither beyond nor in denial of it but rather within it, even in deference to it. (…)« (Faubian 1993)

All such responses leave the basic problematic of modernity intact, the reflexivity which developed in the program of modernity went beyond those that crystallized in the Axial Civilizations. The reflexivity that developed in the modern program focused not only on the possibility of different interpretations of the transcendental visions and basic ontological conceptions prevalent in a society or societies but came to question the very givenness of such visions and of the institutional patterns related to them. It gave rise to the awareness of the existence of multiplicity of such visions and patterns and of the possibility that such visions and conceptions can indeed be contested.

The major recurpersion of this program was first that the premises and legitimation of the social, ontological and political order were no longer taken for granted; and that concomitantly there developed within this program of a very intensive reflexivity around the basic ontological premises as well as around the bases of social and political order of authority of society – a reflexivity which was shared even by the most radical critics of this program, who in principle denied the legitimacy of such reflexivity.

The possibility of such contestation was intensified by the fact that the cultural and political programme of modernity, was from its very beginning be set by internal antinomies and contradictions, which constituted a radical transformation of those that were inherent in Axial civilizations. The transformation of the Axial antinomies in the cultural program of modernity was closely related as they were to the various metanarratives of modernity – to follow E. Tiryakian (1996) – the Christian, the Gnostic and the chthonic, came to question some of its basic premises. The most important among these antinomies focused first on the evaluation of major dimensions of human experience, and especially on the place of reason and as against the more expressionist dimensions of human nature, society and history; second, on the concomitant problem of the nature of bases of true morality and autonomy; third, on the tension between reflexivity and active construction of nature and society; fourth, between totalizing and pluralistic approaches to human life and the constitution of society; and fourth, between control and autonomy, or discipline and freedom, giving rise to continual critical discourse and contestations which focused on the relations, tensions and contradictions between its premises. Beyond these tensions between the different premises of the modern cultural and political programme of modernity there developed those which focused on the contradiction between the basic premises and antinomies of the cultural and political programs of

modernity and the institutional development of modern societies – and which have indeed been most successfully analyzed by Weber – especially in his discourse of »Entzauberung« and the Iron Cage (Mitzman 1969).

X.

These characteristics of the modern program entailed a radical transformation of the conceptions and premises of the social and political order, of the constitution and definition of the political arena, of collectivities and of human personality. The core of the new conceptions was, first of all, the breakdown of traditional legitimation of the political order, the concomitant opening up of different possibilities for the constitution of such order, and the consequent contestation about how political order was to be constituted to no small extent by human actors.

The same basic dynamics developed also with respect to the distinctive mode of constitution of the boundaries of collectivities and collective identities that developed in modern societies. The most distinct characteristic thereof, very much in line with the general core characteristics of modernity, was that such constitution was continually problematized. Collective identities were no longer taken as given or as preordained by some transcendental vision and authority, or by perennial customs. A central component in the constitution of modern collective identities was the self-perception of a society and its perception by other societies as »modern«, as the bearer of the distinct modern cultural and political program – and its relations from this point of view to other societies – be it those societies which claim also to be – or are seen as – bearers of this program, and various »others« (Eisenstadt 1999a, b).

Parallel tendencies developed within the modern program with respect to the promulgation first of very distinctive conceptions of the formation of human personality, of the civilized person, emphasizing the autonomy of man and of the importance of the self – of its autonomy and self-regulation, and second with respect to the symbolic definitions, usually couched in highly ideological terms, of the relations between different arenas of life such as a family and occupation, work, and culture; between public and private realms; between different life-spaces; between different age-spans; between the sexes; between different social classes and of the different spaces of social and cultural life.

All these characteristics of the cultural program of modernity entailed to follow Claude Leforte's terminology, »the loss of the markers of certainty« (Lefort 1988). Such loss of markers of certainty inherent in the modern political and cultural program and – to go beyond Leforte – search for their restoration in the major institutional arenas of modern societies and in the constitution of human personality.

XI.

These basic characteristics of modernity, the loss of markers of certainty and the search for their reconstitution was common to all modern societies – the concrete ways in which they crystallize differed greatly between different modern societies, giving rise to different orders of modernity, to multiple modernities.

Most of these variations and changes of the institutional and cultural contours of modernity were closely related to the continual expansion thereof – an expansion which went far beyond the expansion of Axial civilizations. This expansion spawned a tendency – rather new and practically unique in the history of mankind – to the development not only visions of universal rule but also of universal, world-wide institutional and symbolic frameworks and systems (Wallerstein 1974; Tiryakian 1985). The expansion of modern civilization which took place first in Europe and then beyond it continually combined economic, political, and ideological aspects and forces, and its impact on the societies to which it expanded was much more extensive and intensive alike than in most historical cases. Above all it spawned a tendency – rather new and practically unique in the history of mankind – to the development of worldwide institutional, cultural and ideological frameworks and systems each based on some of the basic premises of this civilization, and each rooted in one of its basic cultural and institutional dimensions. All of these frameworks were multi-centered and heterogenous, each generating its own dynamics, in constant mutual interrelations to others. The interrelations among them have never been »static« or unchanging, and the dynamics of these international frameworks or settings gave rise to continuous changes in various modern societies. Of special importance in the shaping of these dynamics was that the expansion of modenity and constitution of the multiple international, world systems took place above all through imperial and colonial expansion. The experience of colonialization, of being colonialized and of the confrontation with colonial powers and with colonialism constituted a continual component of the collective identities of many the modern, of the different modernities that developed attendant on the expansion of modernity.

It was within these different historical contexts that there developed the great variety of modern or modernizing societies, sharing many common characteristics but also evincing great differences among themselves, the variety of multiple modernities.

XII.

Or, in other words, these different cultural programs and institutional patterns of modernity were not shaped, as was assumed in some of the earlier studies of modernization as natural evolutionary potentialities of these societies – indeed, potentially of all human societies; or, as in the earlier criticisms thereof, by the natural unfolding of their respective traditions; or just by their placement in the new international settings. Rather they were shaped by the continuous interaction between several factors, indeed by those factors which have been, as we have already indicated above, exphasized by Weber in his historical analysis, but which have acquired distinct characteristics in the modern scene.

Following these considerations, the relation of Axial civilizations to modernity should be reconsidered, the emergence of modernity should not be seen as a natural outflow or outgrowth of the potentialities inherent especially in European Axiality, but indeed following Weber's general insights into comparative history, of very much indeed in line Weber's analysis of different historical formations – which first by basic premises of cosmic and social order, the basic »cosmologies« that were prevalent in these societies in their »orthodox« and »heterodox« formulations alike as they have crystallized in these societies throughout their histories. A second shaping factor was the pattern of institutional formations that developed within these civilizations through their historical experience especially in their encounter with other societies or civilizations.

The third set of factors shaping such program was the internal tensions, dynamics and contradictions that developed in these societies in conjunction with the structural-demographic, economic, and political changes attendant on the institutionalization of modern frameworks, and between these processes and the basic premises of the modern civilizations, of the modern cultural and political program.

Fourth, the different – continually changing – programs of modernity were shaped by the encounter and continual interaction between the processes mentioned above, and the ways in which the different societies and civilizations were incorporated into the new international systems – the ways in which they were placed or were able to place themselves, in these systems, to insert or become inserted into the global system.

Fifth, such continually changing contours were shaped by the political struggles and confrontations between different states, and between different centers of political and economic power. Such confrontations developed within Europe with the crystallization of the modern European state system and became further intensified with the crystallization of »world systems« from the sixteenth or seventeenth century on.

Sixth, these contours changed in tandem with the shifting hegemonies in the different international systems that developed concomitantly with economic, political, technological, and cultural changes.

Seventh, such contours were shaped by the continual confrontation attendant on the expansion of modernity between the basic premises of this program and the institutional formations that developed in Western and Northern Europe and other parts of Europe and later in the Americas and Asia: in the Islamic, Hinduist, Buddhist, Confucian and Japanese civilizations.

It is in the nature of these factors that they have been continually changing – thus also giving rise to continual changes in the institutional and cultural contours of modernity. These institutional contours of modernities have been changing, first as a result of the internal dynamics of the technological, economic, political and cultural arenas as they developed in different societies and expanded beyond them. Second, these contours changed with the political struggles and confrontations between different states, and between different international centers of political and economic power. Third, these contours changed in tandem with the shifting hegemonies in the different international systems that developed concomitantly with economic, political, technological, and cultural changes. Fourth, such changes were rooted in the continual confrontations between on the one hand different interpretations of the basic premises of modernity as promulgated by different elites and as institutionalized in different societies, and on the other hand the concrete developments, conflicts, and displacements that accompanied the institutionalization of these premises. These confrontations activated the consciousness of the contradictions inherent in the cultural program of modernity and the potentialities conferred by its openness and reflexivity; and gave rise to the continual reinterpretation by different social actors of the major themes of this program, and of the basic premises of their civilizational visions, and of the concomitant grand narratives and myths of modernity. Such confrontations developed within Europe with the crystallization of the modern European state system and became further intensified with the crystallization of »world systems« from the sixteenth or seventeenth century on.

XIII.

It was above all multiple social movements which developed within these societies and across them and which constituted to some extent transformations of Axial heterodoxies – that constituted – together, of course, with other social forces, above all the different elites; economic cultural and political activists – the most important actors in these changes of the contours of modernity.

The most important of such movements in the classical period of modernity, and which were of great importance in Weber's analysis thereof were, of course, the socialist and national movements. These movements were indeed deeply rooted in the European tradition and in the colonial expansion of modernity, often becoming in totally transformed ways, constitutive elements of the crystallization of multiple modernities in the »classical« period of modernity, in the period of the constitution of nation and revolutionary states.

One of the most radical changes in the contemporary historical context, in the context of multiple modernities and intensified globalization has been the development and predominance of new types of social movements – such, on the one hand, various »post-modern« ones, such as among other ecological, women's movements – and second, above all fundamentalist and communal-religious ones (Eisenstadt 1999a).

These movements have reconstituted in new ways the problematic of modernity in new historical contexts and in new arenas. First among these new ways is the worldwide reach and diffusion (especially through the various media) of such movements and of the confrontations they entail; second their politicization and their continual interweaving with fierce contestations formulated in highly political ideologies and terms; and third, a crucial component of these reinterpretations and appropriations of modernity is the continual reconstruction of collective identities in reference to the new global context and contestations between them. This shift was connected with increasing confrontations in many societies, in local and global scenes and arenas, between the original Western conceptions of modernity as embodied in the modern nation-state or revolutionary state, and the newly emerging local, regional, and transnational conceptions of collective identity.

As against the seeming acceptance and of the premises of these programs, or at least a highly ambivalent attitude to them combined with the continual reinterpretation thereof, that was characteristic of the earlier – such as the various socialist, communist and national movements and regimes – the contemporary fundamentalist and most communal religious movements promulgate a seeming negation of at least some of these premises, as well as a markedly confrontational attitude to the West, sharing in a mirror way many themes with the post-modern ones.

This highly confrontational attitude to the West, to what is conceived as Western, is very often in these movements closely related to their attempts to appropriate modernity and the global system on their own, non-Western, often anti-Western, modern terms, closely related to either attempts to decouple radically modernity from Westernization and to take away from the West the monopoly of modernity. Indeed this highly confrontational attitude to the West, to what is conceived as Western, is in these movements closely related to their attempts to appropriate modernity and the global system on their own non-Western, often anti-Western, modern terms.

Between these movements and between these different centers of power there developed central contestations. Such contestations may indeed be couched in »civilizational« terms – but these very terms are already formulated in terms of the discourse of modernity, defined in totalistic and absolutizing terms derived from the basic premises of this discourse, and they entail a continual transformation of these identities. Indeed the very pluralization of life spaces in the global framework may easily endow them with highly ideological absolutizing orientations, and at the same time brings them into the central political arena. When such clashes or contestations are combined with political, military or economic struggles and conflicts they can indeed become very violent.

XIV.

These continual reinterpretations of modernity and contestations about them have been not static. In all these movements there developed a continuous reconstruction of various themes and tropes, attesting to the fact that the cultural program of modernity, constituted a common positive or negative reference point for all of them. In all societies these attempts at interpretation of modernity were continually changing under the impact of emerging historical forces. They changed from the major social movements that were predominant in long period of the predominance of the models of the Western and revolutionary states to the »post-modern« ones in the contemporary scene. In each of these periods there developed not just one model of modernity – but multiple models in the shaping of which the historical experiences and civilizational cultural heritage of their respective societies played a very important role as was the case already in Europe.

All these developments do indeed attest to continual development of multiple modernities, or of multiple interpretations of modernity.

Within all these movements the aggressive and destructive potentialities – manifest in very strong aggressive and exclusivist tendencies and orientations; in the designation or naming of groups as the »enemies«, often to be excluded from the respective collectivities, even to their dehumanisation, and in strong anti-rational orientations and symbolism, and in the concomitant tendencies to the sanctification of violence, have become closely interwoven with the processes of dislocation, of contestation between interpretations of modernity, and with geopolitical struggles – making them more dangerous.

XV.

The preceeding analysis of Axial civilizations and of multiple modernities went beyond the concrete concern of Weber's analysis, but at the same time, however, it built on Weber in several distinct closely related ways. First they built on some of the basic components of his approach, especially on the emphasis on the importance of sectarian groups and heterodoxies in the constitution of such dynamics, and of contingent historical circumstances in the concretization of institutional patterns. Second, it built also on his general visions of constitution of civilizations, including the civilizational of modernity.

Moreover this analysis bears also very closely on the analytical problem of the relations between »culture« and social structure – on the allegation of Weber as a culturologist, reinforcing all the refutations of such allegations. Weber did not conflate as was the case with many Marxists and with Foucault power and culture; rather throughout his works he attempted to specify how the basic ontological premises, especially conceptions of salvation and the like, prevalent in a society, influence – but do not determine the contours of specific institutional patterns – such as the structure of rulership or configurations of strata – as well as the mechanism through which such influence is exerted. He did not assume that these conceptions and premises directly shape institutional patterns, but rather that they open up specific ranges of institutional possibilities, and that the concrete institutional patterns which develop within these ranges crystallize through human agency, through the inter-relation between these premises as promulgated by their different carriers, and the different »real material« forces as they come together – in different historical contexts in the constitution of which contingency plays a central role. His strong emphasis on the importance among such carriers of heterodoxies indicates that such challenges are influenced not only by pure »power« contestation but also by the basic premises of the different religions or systems of belief and knowledge that became hegemonic in their respective societies, and that such premises, especially when institutionalized, contain within them seeds of potential challenge – and transformation.

Accordingly, this analysis also indicates the relations between culture and social structure, history and structure, human agency and structure, as well as between order-maintaining versus order-transforming dimensions of culture.

Beliefs and cultural visions are basic elements of the social orders, of crucial importance in shaping their institutional dynamics. Beliefs or visions become such elements by the assimilation and transformation of their content into the basic premises of patterns of social interaction, that is, into clusters of regulative principles governing the major dimensions of social roles.

One of the most important processes through which beliefs or visions are transformed into such regulative principles is the crystallization of models of cultural and social order and of codes. This closely resembles Weber's concept of »economic ethics« which specify how to regulate the frameworks of concrete social organizations and institutional settings, the patterns of behavior and the range of major strategies of action appropriate to different arenas.

Such transformations of religious and cultural beliefs into »codes« or »ethics«, into models for a social order is effected through the activities of visionaries, themselves transformed into elites exercising different modes of control and who then form coalitions and counter-coalitions with other elites. Such dynamics are not limited to the exercise of power in the narrow political or coercive sense. As even the more sophisticated Marxists, especially Gramsci, have stressed, they are pervasive and include many relatively autonomous symbolic aspects; they represent different combinations of »ideal« and »material« interests. Such measures of control, as well as the challenges to them among elites and broader strata, shaped class relations and modes of production.

The institutionalization of such cultural visions, social processes and mechanisms of control, as well as their »reproduction« in space and time, necessarily generate tensions and conflicts, movements of protest and processes of change which offer certain opportunities to reconstruct the premises themselves.

The potential of change and transformation is not accidental or external to the realm of culture. It is inherent in the basic interweaving of culture and social structure as twin elements of the construction of social order. Precisely because the symbolic components are inherent in the construction and maintenance of social order they also bear the seeds of social transformation.

Such seeds are indeed common to all societies. Yet the actual ways in which they work out, the configurations of liminal situations, of different orientations and movements of protest, of modes of collective behavior and their impact on societies within which they develop, vary greatly between societies giving rise to contrasting social and cultural dynamics. But new civilizational settings and social organizations, whether the Axial civilizations, those that ushered in modern order in the West, or the great revolutions, are not »naturally« brought about by the basic tenets of a religion. Rather, they arise out of a variety of economic and political trends, as well as ecological conditions, all interrelated with the basic civilizational premises and with specific institutions.

Many general historical changes, especially the constructions of novel institutional orders, were probably the outcome of factors listed by James G. March and John Olsen (1989). These are the combination of basic institutional and normative forms; processes of learning and accommodation and types of decision-making by

individuals in appropriate arenas of action in response to a great variety of historical events.

As Said Arjomand has pointed out, the crystallization of any pattern of change is the result of history, structure and culture, with human agency bringing them together. It is also human agency, as manifested in the activities of institutional and cultural entrepreneurs, and their influences on different sectors of society, that shapes actual institutional formations. The potential for the crystallization of such formations is rooted in certain general societal conditions, such as degrees of structural differentiation or types of political economy. But these are only potentials, the concretization of which is effected through human agency.

It is the different constellations or configurations of these factors that are the major objects of comparative historico-sociological analysis and discourse.

Thus, as the concrete contours of the contemporary situation naturally differs greatly from those of the societies Weber studied – as do also these specific dynamics – yet this analysis, while going beyond Weber, builds very much on his vision and insights.

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