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0521413974 - *Virtuosity, Charisma, and Social Order: A Comparative Sociological Study of Monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Catholicism*

Ilana Friedrich Silber

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Introduction

Writing about the ascetic type, Nietzsche observed: “It must be a necessity of the first order that again and again promotes the growth and prosperity of this life-inimical species. It must indeed be in the interest of life itself that such a self-contradictory type does not die out. . . . ‘Triumph in the ultimate agony’: the ascetic ideal has always fought under this hyperbolic sign.”¹ It is the “triumph” of the ascetic that will form the main concern of this book.

Although the social bases and implications of religious ideals have been classic topics of sociological debate, one important and closely related theme has not received its due attention: that minority of “virtuosi,” as Max Weber called them, who gear their lives to a superior enactment of religious ideals. I propose to expand upon this neglected strand of Weberian sociology and examine the social position of these religious virtuosi from a comparative and macrosociological perspective. More specifically, I intend to focus on historical settings in which virtuoso elites achieved considerable prestige and ascendancy, or in Nietzsche’s apt metaphor, where they attained a paradoxical form of “triumph.”

The inquiry will concentrate on a distinct type of religious virtuosi – hermits and monks – in two civilizations in which they became especially prominent: traditional Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism. At one level, therefore, the present work may be read as a comparative sociological study of monasticism. Beyond this, however, it also aims at a more inclusive understanding of religious virtuosity (of which monasticism is only one, if a crucial, form of expression) in its historical interaction with different social orders. Although the notion of virtuosity itself, originally taken from the arts, is frequently encountered in Weber’s writings, it seems to have been read as no more than a suggestive metaphor and has been left largely unexplored. Weber’s work remains the only sociological treatment of the subject, and there has been little attempt – with the important exception of Michael Hill’s study of religious orders in nineteenth-century England² – to analyze religious virtuosi as a distinctive sociological type.

This neglect may seem surprising in light of the long-standing socio-

¹ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* translated and edited by W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969), pp. 117–18 (essay 3, section 2).

² M. Hill, *The Religious Order: A Study of Virtuoso Religion and its Legitimation in the Nineteenth Century Church of England* (London: Heineman, 1973).

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logical concern with religious phenomena in general, and religious specialists and institutions in particular.³ It is less surprising, however, given the natural tendency of social scientists to be drawn to religious figures of more obvious historical and social significance – such as priests, prophets, and charismatic leaders – who often enjoy a widespread appeal, and at times even possess a dramatic potential for effecting far-reaching social transformations. Although religious virtuosity is not without affinities to these forms of religious leadership, it clearly addresses itself only to a restricted minority, a “spiritual aristocracy” in Weber’s words. Furthermore, this aristocratic minority has often been associated with a tendency to spiritual inwardness and social withdrawal, seemingly of little interest to all but those specializing in the sociology of religion in the narrow sense of the word.

In this work, however, religious virtuosity will be shown to form not only a specific type of religious orientation – and not merely the characteristic of a religious minority – but also a cultural variable of far-reaching macrosociological significance. I shall first address the overall social position of religious virtuosi as closely related to and shaped by specific features of their macrosocietal context. A second, complementary focus will be the development of a whole cluster of processes – what I term a “virtuoso complex” – that came to form a macrostructure of central importance in traditional Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism, the two historical settings selected for comparison.

Analyzing this “complex,” I suggest, may add a new angle to the analysis of the part played by religious ideology and structures in the dynamics of macrosocietal formations. Although this is, of course, an old, classical sociological issue, it has been forcefully revived in a recent flurry of works that have all preoccupied themselves once again with the issue of the emergence of capitalism and the “rise of the West.”⁴ Symptomatic of a remarkable spurt of revival in historical macrocomparative sociology in which neo-Marxist, world-systemic, and state-theory approaches have been very influential during the last decade or so, these studies have also

³ In the humanities, in contrast, the search for religious rigor and spiritual perfection has received ample and distinguished treatment. For an unsurpassed overview, see J. Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (London: Duckworth, 1970).

⁴ See in particular D. Chirot, “The Rise of the West,” *American Sociological Review* 56 (1985): 181–95; J. Baechler, “Aux origines de la modernité: castes et féodalités: Europe, Inde, Japon,” *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 27 (1986): 31–57; idem, *The Origins of Capitalism* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1975); M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1986); J. Hall, *Powers and Liberties: The Causes and Consequences of the Rise of the West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985); idem, “Religion and the Rise of Capitalism,” *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 26 (1985): 193–223; R. Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), chs. 3 and 9 especially.

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all explicitly oriented themselves, in one way or another, to Weber.⁵ The Weber invoked, however, is the one who emphasized status groups, bureaucratic structures, and patterns of domination – that is, that side of Weber most compatible with conflict theory.⁶ Relatedly, it is not the Weber of the *Protestant Ethic* with its well-known (if never exclusive) emphasis on the importance of religious orientations, but rather the one who underscored the role of a specific constellation of economic and institutional conditions (such as markets, bureaucracies, legal systems, and state administrations) in favoring the emergence and expansion of capitalism.⁷

Most relevant to my present purpose is the tendency common to this cluster of works, not so much to overlook religion – which, in fact, is discussed extensively by all and whose role is well emphasized – but rather to systematically bracket out its ideological contents. In this perspective, religious institutions are either addressed as yet another form of economic organization or interest group, or assessed in terms of their contribution to the expansion of economic activity and state structures – be it through some form of social control or the more “Durkheimian” functions of normative integration and the enhancement of social solidarity.⁸ (The selective way in which only certain aspects of Durkheim are made use of is here itself significant.)⁹ Even

⁵ See T. Skocpol (ed.), *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge University Press, 1984); D. Smith, *The Rise of Historical Sociology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); R. Collins, “Maturation of the State-Centered Theory of Revolution and Ideology,” *Sociological Theory* 11(1993): 117–28.

⁶ There are of course differences between these various authors; the overlap and convergence, however, seem to me the more striking and significant.

⁷ See especially Max Weber, *General Economic History*, translated by F. H. Knight (New York, Collier-Macmillan, 1961 [1922]), pp. 207 ff. The conditions listed are technological advance, rational bookkeeping, a rationalized and predictable law system, rationalized modern state structures, a pool of free manpower, and the development of unified, unrestricted markets. The last chapters of the same volume, however, also reassert the importance of Protestantism in a way that does not deviate from his earlier thesis on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Although this is not a topic I can expand upon here, these scholars do not entirely ignore the possible part of Protestantism in early Western modernity, but again, relate to it in ways that underplay Protestantism’s doctrinal contents and soteriological orientations.

⁸ The word “functions” is used here devoid of its systemic, functionalistic charge. These scholars also share indeed a common opposition to Parsonian functionalism. Paradoxically, however, they do represent a form of functional, if not functionalist, approach to religion.

⁹ Durkheim, after all, has also initiated a rich tradition of cultural analysis among symbolic anthropologists in particular. There is a vast development between Durkheim’s relative insensitivity to religious contents in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1961), where the emphasis is indeed on the normative and solidary implications or “functions” of religion in general, and his later work on collective systems of classification (in collaboration with Marcel Mauss), predicated on a much more systematic attention to collective representations and the symbolic contents of cultural structures.

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when duly noting the importance of monasteries, the analysis is restricted to viewing them as economic, protocapitalistic enterprises, or as crucial links in the economic and bureaucratic statelike network of the medieval Church, furthering the latter's intensive exploitation and extensive canvassing of material and human resources.¹⁰

Perhaps one way to break out of the endless circle of controversies concerning the social bases and implications of religious–ideological orientations – or more broadly, the perennial culture versus social-structure debate – is simply to acknowledge that the answer to this ever-vexing issue might not always be the same everywhere, at all times, and in all aspects or spheres of social life.¹¹ Religious–ideological orientations, in short, may be more influential in some contexts or situations than in others, and may even vary in the specific way in which they exert their influence in different circumstances and environments.

In the specific case of virtuosity and the virtuoso “macrocomplex,” I shall argue that a failure to give appropriate weight to religious–ideological orientations would deprive the phenomenon of a most essential and necessary dimension. Recognizing the importance of religious orientations does not mean, of course, excluding the impact of other variables. In true Weberian spirit, religious orientations will be considered here as only one – albeit essential – variable, interacting and combining with a range of institutional and structural factors in the process of religious virtuosity's historical development and institutionalization.¹²

Both Buddhism and Christianity belong to that category of great-salvation religions, designated by Karl Jaspers as the “Axial Age” reli-

¹⁰ See especially Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory*, pp. 52 ff.; Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, p. 37; F. Hall, *Powers and Liberties*.

¹¹ This brings me rather close, I believe, to the (eclectic) position held by Ernst Gellner. See E. Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History* (London: Paladin, 1991), p. 15. Gellner is also interestingly eclectic in combining a concern with the impact of religious breakthroughs and ideological–cognitive megatrends or mutations in the history of civilization (elaborating, for example, on Karl Jaspers's notion of the Axial Age, also adopted by Bellah and Eisenstadt), with a heavy emphasis on the role of religious specialists in the control of material and ideal resources (such as literacy and symbols of legitimacy) and the enforcement of social control. Also arguing that the relation between culture and social structure may vary across time and situations, see A. Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies.” *American Sociological Review* 5 (1986): 273–86. Within this more flexible and differentiated approach, however, one should recognize the existence of periods and situations where cultural orientations or value ends *do* have a direct and straightforward influence upon action.

¹² The commitment to a form of multicausality acknowledging the impact of religious beliefs and values as part of a full spectrum of patterned action orientations has been most recently and systematically explored as a characteristic of Weber's approach distinguishing it from other schools of comparative-historical sociology, in S. Kalberg, *Max Weber's Comparative-Historical Sociology* (Cambridge, Eng.: Polity, 1994).

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gions, that propound the idea of a radical breach between a transcendent ultimate reality and the world of given, mundane reality.¹³ As underscored by Ernst Gellner in particular, an important feature of these great scripturalist religions is that they offer a universal and individual, theoretically “context-free” conception of salvation, in sharp contrast with “communal religions,” that is, community-oriented and nonscriptural religions primarily concerned with underwriting and fortifying communal organization and the rhythm of communal life.¹⁴ Religions of salvation, however, are not only and purely salvational, and may be expected to display a specific combination of communal and salvational orientations.¹⁵ This underscores the need (as rightly felt indeed by some of the recent macrocomparative approaches already mentioned), to complement Weber’s well-known attention to the salvational contents and meaning of religious orientations with a more “Durkheimian” or even “Parsonian” concern with the role of religion (and ritual practices)¹⁶ in the consolidation of communal integration and solidarity.¹⁷

Conversely, however, the specific nature and context of a religion’s “communal” orientations (such as its capacity for normative integration and large-scale solidarity) should also be understood as largely dependent upon its specific doctrinal and salvational contents. Analyzing the virtuosic “complex,” I submit, will precisely require that we pay attention to religious virtuosity both as a form of religious salvational orientation and as the nexus of a complex type of “communal” integrative processes. The

¹³ See R. Bellah, “Religious Evolution,” *American Sociological Review* 29 (1964), 358–74; S. N. Eisenstadt, “The Axial Age: The Emergence of Transcendental Visions and the Rise of Clerics,” *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 23 (1982): 294–314; Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book*, p.81; B. J. Schwartz, “The Age of Transcendence,” *Daedalus* 104, no. 2 (1975), 1–7.

¹⁴ Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book*, p. 91.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 92. Gellner, however, bases the persistence of communal orientations on the fact that those processes by which he also explained the success of a message of individual and universal salvation – namely social trends such as accelerated urbanization, which uprooted individuals and dismantled communal frameworks – were never total and pervasive. My emphasis, rather, is on “communal” dimensions related to the emergence of large-scale and differentiated religious and political collectivities, and to the fact that these religions have also become part of collective belief systems and the ideological core of entire civilizations.

¹⁶ On Weber’s general insensitivity to ritual (in contrast, of course, to Durkheim), associated by him with either the “passivity” of contemplative mysticism, the sacramental traditionalism of Catholicism, or simply primitive “magic,” see R. Robertson, “On the Analysis of Mysticism: Pre-Weberian and Post-Weberian Perspectives,” *Sociological Analysis* 36, no. 3 (1975): 248.

¹⁷ Weber, of course, was also well aware of the conservative potential of religious ideology, but addressed it rather in terms of legitimization of economic and political inequality than in terms of collective integration and solidarity. As for Durkheim, he was not unaware, of course, of the need to study religious symbolic contents as such, although this has not been the distinctive strength and emphasis of his approach taken as a whole.

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precise nature of these communal processes, moreover, cannot be understood independently of the salvational orientations involved in and affecting their institutionalization and historical deployment.

To that extent, the present study pursues the trend represented by an older generation of macrosociologists such as Robert Bellah, Peter Berger, S. N. Eisenstadt, Roland Robertson, and Edward Shils, all of whom stressed religious and ideological orientations as *both* structures of meaning and an all-important, constitutive dimension of the social order.¹⁸ In rather eclectic fashion, however, I shall also borrow theoretical insights and concepts from a variety of additional directions, ranging from the Maussian tradition of gift exchange, to Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration, and Michaël Mann's macrohistory of sources of power. As such, I also see my work as coinciding with the emergence of an eclectic and alternative current of historical and theoretical sociologists interested in the autonomous contents, forms, and impact of culture in various senses of that term, while also searching for new and interdisciplinary modes of cultural analysis.¹⁹

Focusing on Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism has a number of substantive and methodological advantages. In both civilizations, religious virtuosity has given rise to extensive and historically enduring monastic networks. There is indeed a vast difference between virtuosity as a purely individual, occasional, and localized phenomenon, and those few historical instances in which virtuosity became institutionally sustained and reinforced to the point of engendering a specialized "virtuoso institution." Furthermore, as will be explained in Chapter 2, monasticism is a rather complex and precarious institution, predicated on some form of withdrawal from and reversal of ordinary patterns of

¹⁸ This group of scholars are all rather systematically shunned (because perceived as overly "Parsonian" and "idealist") in many of the more "materialist" and institutionalist or conflict-theory works in historical macrosociology.

¹⁹ See J. C. Alexander (ed.), *Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); C. Calhoun, "Beyond the Problem of Meaning: Robert Wuthnow's Historical Sociology of Culture," *Theory and Society* 21, no. 3 (1992): 419–44; J. A. Goldstone, "Ideology, Cultural Frameworks, and the Process of Revolution," *Theory and Society* 20 (1991): 405–54; L. Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); S. Kalberg, "The Origin and Expansion of Kulturpessimismus: The Relationship between Public and Private Spheres in Early Twentieth-Century Germany," *Sociological Theory* 5, no. 2 (1987): 150–64; idem, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History," *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 5 (1980): 1145–80; A. Kane, "Cultural Analysis in Historical Sociology: The Analytic and Concrete Forms of the Autonomy of Culture," *Sociological Theory* 53 (1990): 53–70; L. Roniger, *Hierarchy and Trust in Modern Mexico and Brazil* (New York: Praeger, 1990); Swidler, "Culture in Action"; D. Zaret, "Religion, Science and Printing in the Public Spheres in Seventeenth-Century England," in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 212–36.

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social life. The powerful emergence and historical resilience of this peculiar type of virtuoso institution in these two settings, therefore, formed a major consideration in their selection for comparative study.

The emphasis, however, will be not so much on the monastic institution per se but rather, as already suggested, on the relationship between monasticism and society, and on the location of this relationship within the social structure at large. An important feature was the development of a network of material and symbolic exchange between the virtuoso and other social sectors, epitomized in a gift relationship between monks and laymen that resulted in a massive pouring of wealth into the monastic sector. In both civilizations, monasticism was thus able to establish itself in a position of cultural centrality and relative ascendancy over a nonmonastic audience willing to grant it a status of intrinsic spiritual superiority, as well as to provide it with uncoerced material support. At the same time, though – and in striking contrast to Tibetan monasticism in particular – monks in these two traditions also maintained a distance (both theoretically and practically) from the exercise of political power as commonly understood. Indeed, an essential feature of the gift relationship is that, however well established and routinized it became, it also remained fundamentally voluntary on both sides and supported, at most, by informal sanctions only.²⁰ In both settings, therefore, we see the case of a virtuoso elite ideologically self-defined as marginal and even opposed to extant forms of social life, and yet sustaining a position of cultural prestige and corporate wealth all the more noteworthy because devoid of the ordinary paraphernalia of political control and power. The result is a kind of “decentered centrality” not found in this precise configuration in any other civilizational setting.²¹ Ideologically, the monastic sector exemplified the single-minded dedication to otherworldly ideals that were of central significance for society at large, and yet by definition could apply only to a minority living on the margins of social life. Institutionally, ascetic virtuosi were always defined as withdrawn from the center of secular rule and control, even though they were to become vital, at times, to the center’s spiritual concerns, symbolic legitimacy, and even political expansion.

Emphasizing the similarity of the Theravada and Catholic configura-

²⁰ In both cases, admittedly, there is evidence for the occasional use of, if not actual coercion, at least “coercive persuasion,” that is, monks inducing laymen to provide them with specific services or “donations” by threatening to prevent lay access to some crucial economic good – such as irrigation water in the Theravada context, or monastic mills in the Christian one. Such instances do appear, though, as occasional deviations from the dominant pattern of uncoerced donations.

²¹ Although monasticism itself is present in Mahayana Buddhism, Tantric Buddhism, Jainism, and Eastern Christianity, it did not become the nexus of a full-fledged virtuoso–society complex in the sense that will be elaborated here (see Chapter 9 especially).

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tions in such broad terms obviously poses the risk of oversimplifying what was in fact a rather complex and tension-ridden situation. In each case, the cultural status of the virtuoso sector, however prestigious and central, was rife with ambiguities. Furthermore, there were important fluctuations in the relationship between monasticism and the laity in general, and political centers in particular. Finally, although there were important similarities in the overall power and significance of monasticism in these two settings, there were basic differences as well. Christian monasticism took shape as part of a wider Church, and in subordination to a secular clergy in relation to which it was a controversial and competing historical development. In contrast, the Buddhist monastic order, the Sangha – sometimes said to have acquired “churchlike” characteristics over time – never had to come to terms with a wider ecclesiastical institution. Moreover, although monasticism achieved a pivotal social position in both cases, it also developed very different organizational characteristics and patterns of interaction with society at large. It is precisely these differences that this book describes and analyzes, albeit against the backdrop of an essential similarity that helps throw the differences into relief. Both similarities and differences will be stressed as equally essential to an adequate understanding of the virtuoso phenomenon in its interaction with different sociohistorical contexts.

The Theravada Buddhism–medieval Catholicism axis of comparison has a special and hitherto untapped interest for comparative sociology. Weber himself left us only scattered and unsystematic remarks on medieval Catholicism, to which he meant to devote a full-fledged study on a par with his detailed interpretations of other great traditions.²² To the extent that Weber did discuss medieval Catholicism, he was rather interested in comparing it with India – mostly, it seems, because of what he saw as a somewhat similar combination of religious otherworldliness with a high degree of stratification and an organic conception of the social order²³ – than with Buddhism, which he tended to treat as merely a heterodox offshoot of Brahmanism. Moreover, whenever he did compare Buddhism to Western religions, he referred to Protestantism rather than to medieval Catholicism.

The Buddhism–Catholicism comparison has also been overlooked in a more recent body of comparative work, that of Louis Dumont, which focuses on the contrast between Indian “hierarchy” and Western “equality,” and, more recently, on the “otherworldly” origins of Western indi-

²² See the important collection of essays reexamining Weber’s (incomplete) interpretation of Western Christendom by W. Schluchter (ed.), *Max Webers Sicht des okzidentalen Christentums* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988).

²³ See W. Schluchter (ed.), *Max Webers Studie über Hinduismus und Buddhismus: Interpretation und Kritik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), pp. 45 ff.

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vidualism and the analogy with the Indian renunciate as an individual out of the world.²⁴ Whereas Dumont's work loomed large in the genesis of this study, it often tends to conflate Indian and Buddhist renunciation and does not deal with corporate (as distinct from individual) renunciation.²⁵ Consequently, although his work is undoubtedly a monumental landmark in the comparative study of asceticism and renunciation, it does not really address monasticism proper – the core of our comparison.

A similar preference for a comparison of medieval Europe with India rather than with Southeast Asian Buddhism is to be found in S. N. Eisenstadt's corpus of work on the comparative study of civilizations. On the background of apparent sociostructural similarities (such as a high degree of political pluralism and decentralization), Eisenstadt's dominant concern is to bring into relief some essential differences between medieval Europe and India with regard to their evaluation and construction of the political sphere.²⁶ To the extent that Eisenstadt did dwell on Buddhism, moreover, he is mostly engaged in assessing, in this specific case as in many others, the overall potential for transformation resulting from a specific configuration of religious orientations and socio-political structures. Although religious orientations and religious elites are given systematic weight in this perspective (in this respect probably the most systematic elaboration of the Weberian tradition in historical sociology), monasticism is addressed only with regard to its contributions to religious protest and political change, and is not otherwise given any sustained or distinctive attention.

An important implication of this focus on monasticism and the relationship between monasticism and society is the challenge it poses to the

²⁴ L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); idem, *From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); idem, "A Modified View of our Origins: The Christian Origins of Modern Individualism," *Religion* 12 (1982): 1–27.

²⁵ Corporate renunciation was not to flourish, indeed, within the confines of the Brahmanic tradition. It is significant that otherworldliness was able to give rise to various forms of renunciation, and even to maintain elements of renunciation in the conception of the Brahmin priest – as emphasized in J. C. Heesterman, "Brahmin, Ritual and Renouncer," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens* 8 (1964): 1–31 – but did not receive monastic institutionalization.

²⁶ See especially S. N. Eisenstadt, "The Protestant Ethic Thesis in an Analytical and Comparative Framework," in *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization: A Comparative View* (New York: Basic, 1968), pp. 3–45; idem, *European Civilization in Comparative Perspective* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1987); idem, "The Expansion of Religions: Some Comparative Observations on Different Modes," *Comparative Social Research*, 13 (1991): 45–70; idem, "Die Paradoxie von Zivilisationen mit ausserwertlichen Orientierungen: Überlungen zu Max Webers Studie über Hinduismus und Buddhismus," in Schluchter (ed.), *Max Webers Studie*, pp. 333–62.

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common contrast of Buddhist otherworldly “weakness” with Western “power” and “dynamism” in matters of institution building and worldly involvement. This contrast is heavily emphasized in Weber’s own work, where it seems to have been rooted, ultimately, in his overriding concern with the unique features of Western rationality. For Weber, only religious orientations inductive of what he designated as active, inner-worldly asceticism could have encouraged a sustained, rationalized involvement in the world of the type which was to become so crucial, in his eyes, to the development of Western modernity. As is more fully developed in Chapter 1, the importance he gave to Protestantism – and more specifically, Puritan Calvinism – in this respect was accompanied by a relative neglect and somewhat ambiguous assessment of medieval monasticism. Although underscoring the latter’s conservative implications, he also emphasized it as the ideological matrix from which Protestantism fatefully emerged, and was bent on giving it a part in his overall interpretation of the unique features of Western civilization.

Weber’s overall vision of history, in any case, is now easily criticized for its “Western” and even more specifically “Calvinist” bias. As has now been argued by many, Buddhism’s potential for economic rationalization and worldly involvement may have been much greater than Weber granted.²⁷ I shall not deal here, however, with the issue of the differential potential of Christianity and Buddhism for economic dynamism and “modernity,” which is now becoming a focus of renewed interest as the leading edge of economic expansion is understood by many to be moving away from the West and into (or even to some minds, back into)²⁸ the East. Neither do I wish to address the meaningful issue – so salient to Dumont’s work and recently insightfully reassessed by Steven Collins – of the legacy of “outworldly” asceticism to the development of individualism and/or Western egalitarianism and other social utopias, all undoubtedly central to our understanding of Western moder-

²⁷ For example, H. S. Alatas, “The Protestant Ethic and Southeast Asia,” *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 15 (1963): 21–34; R. N. Bellah (ed.), *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia* (New York: Free Press, 1965); Eisenstadt, “Protestant Ethic”; idem, “Some Reflections on the Significance of Max Weber’s Sociology of Religion for the Analysis of Non-European Modernity,” *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 32 (1971): 29–52; S. J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against Historical Background* (Cambridge University Press, 1973); idem, “Buddhism and This-Worldly Activity,” *Modern Asian Studies* 7 (1973): 1–20. Tambiah has especially brought into relief Buddhism’s worldly potential in the political sphere.

²⁸ See the analysis of the rise and temporary nature of Western economic hegemony as building upon a preceding system of world economy in which the “Oriental” powers eventually lost their commercial leadership, in Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250–1350*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).