

part 1

The Uniqueness of the West

Introduction

“Prefatory Remarks” (“PR”),¹ the major reading in this Part, demarcates succinctly and vividly the particularity of the West or, in Weber’s terms, “the characteristic uniqueness of modern Western rationalism.” Thus, this essay moves qualitatively beyond the focus of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (*PE*) upon the origin of a “spirit of capitalism” in the West. Moreover, unlike *PE*, it argues that a causal analysis of this particularity must focus not only upon orientations to salvation doctrines, but also upon economic, political, legal, and other patterns of action.

“PR” opens by noting the variety of ways in which the West proved distinct. A series of innovations in art, music, and architecture were unique, for example, as was a systematic science, a state based upon a “rationally enacted constitution and rationally enacted laws,” parliaments composed of elected representatives and ministers obligated to adhere to parliamentary procedures, and “modern capitalism.”

Weber’s crucial distinction in “PR” between “capitalism” and “modern capitalism” must be singled out. The former has existed universally while the latter appeared only in the modern West. A “rational-capitalist organization of (legally) *free labor*,” a relatively free market exchange, a “rational organization of industrial companies and their orientation to *market opportunities*,” a separation of the business from the household, sophisticated bookkeeping, formally free labor, and a specific economic ethos distinguishes this “middle-class industrial” capitalism. Finally, modern capitalism requires a stable and calculable law and administration that “functions according to formal rules,” hence enabling large-scale and future-oriented business transactions. The middle-class capitalist, unlike speculators, promoters, and financiers, or “adventure capitalists,” was oriented systematically to profit and the industrial organization of free labor.

“PR” takes a strong stand on causal analysis. Although Weber stresses, as he had in *PE*, that the ways in which belief influences economic activity should always be kept in mind, he now addresses the “other side” of the causal equation: *Economic Ethics of the World Religions* (EEWR; see note 1) examines the influence of interests (“external forces”) upon ideas (“internal forces”) *as well as* the influence of ideas upon interests (see also 1961, pp. 312–14). However, the frequent search for a quick-and-easy causal formula must be abandoned:

Religion nowhere creates certain economic conditions unless there are also present in the existing relationships and constellations of interests certain possibilities of, or even powerful drives toward, such an economic transformation. It is not possible to enunciate any general formula that will summarize the comparative substantive powers of the various factors involved in such a transformation or will summarize the manner of their accommodation to one another. (1968a, p. 577; see also p. 341; 1946d, pp. 267–70)

“PR” conveys EEWR’s fundamental broadening of the *PE* study in just this manner. For example, a variety of non-religious obstacles to economic development in China are charted in EEWR, such as extremely strong clan ties and an absence of “a formally guaranteed law and a rational administration and judiciary” (1951, p. 85; see pp. 91, 99–100), and in India, such as constraints placed by the caste system upon migration, the recruitment of labor, and credit (1958, pp. 52–3, 102–6, 111–17). Weber discovers as well, however, an entire host of conducive material forces that nonetheless failed to bring about modern capitalism – such as, in China, freedom of trade, an increase in precious metals, population growth, occupational mobility, and the presence of a money economy (1951, pp. 12, 54–5, 99–100, 243). In the end, the many clusters of social action supportive of modern capitalism in China and India were outweighed by a series of opposing patterns of meaningful action. Nonetheless, Weber remained convinced that modern capitalism could be *adopted* by, and would flourish in, a number of Eastern civilizations. He even identified the forces that would allow this to occur (on Japan, see 1958, p. 275). Yet he insisted that adoption involved different processes than *his* main concern: the *origin* in a specific region only of a *new* economic ethos and a *new* type of economy.

The EEWR studies offer complex, multidimensional causal arguments. “PR” draws particular attention to “the fundamental significance of economic factors,” but also to “the capacity and disposition of persons to organize their lives in a practical-rational manner” (pp. 62–3). In many societies magical and religious forces may have obstructed this mode of organizing life. Moreover, the origin of the stable legal framework and stratum of professionally-trained jurists required by modern Western capitalism, Weber contends, cannot be found exclusively in economic interests, for

“why then did capitalist interests not call forth this stratum of jurists and this type of law in China or India?” (p. 62). *Constellations* of forces must be scrutinized rather than single factors, “PR” asserts. In addition, their conjunctural interaction in delineated contexts must be charted out, as well as the ways in which, as a consequence, unique configurations are formulated (see Kalberg, 1994, pp. 98–102, 155–76, 189–92; 2002, pp. lix–lxi).

It is widely argued that Weber’s research on China and India was oriented simply to the formulation of contrast cases to the West. However, these studies aim to accomplish much more. They investigate the *uniqueness* of “Chinese rationalism” and the “rationalism of India,” and pursue explanations for the particular developmental routes followed by *each* great civilization. Importantly, EEWR seeks to offer a sociological analysis of the manner in which meaning is formulated in non-Western civilizations.

This chapter’s second reading outlines, in abbreviated form, the distinctly Western “search for the individual self.” In the third and fourth selections Weber argues that political and economic forces unique to the West have played a crucial role in the development of modern Western law. (See also, in general, 1961, pp. 275–8.)

NOTE

1. After writing *PE* in 1904 and 1905, and the two “sect essays” (2002c, 1985), Weber’s research on the relationship between religious belief and economic activity became radically comparative. Around 1911 he began work on a series of studies on the economic ethics of Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and ancient Judaism. First published separately as articles in the journal *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, these investigations were prepared in 1919 and 1920 for publication in book form and were given the title *Economic Ethics of the World Religions*. The complete three-volume enterprise, which placed *PE* and “Sects” (2002c) at its beginning and included 1946c, 1946e, 1951, 1952, and 1958, was published after Weber’s death in 1920 under the title *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion* (1972). Written late in 1919, “PR” is the general introduction to these volumes. It conveys the other prominent path, in addition to *E&S*, taken by Weber’s sociology after *PE*.

chapter 1

The “Rationalism” of Western Civilization

From “Prefatory Remarks” to *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion* (1920/2002), in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 3rd edn., trans. Stephen Kalberg (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing, 2002), pp. 149–60.

Any heir of modern European culture will, unavoidably and justifiably, address universal-historical¹ themes with a particular question in mind: What combination of circumstances led in the West, and only in the West, to the appearance of a variety of cultural phenomena that stand – at least as we like to imagine – in a historical line of development with *universal* significance and empirical validity?

Science, developed to the stage that we today recognize as “valid,” exists only in the West. Empirical knowledge, reflection on the world and the problems of life, philosophical and theological wisdom of the deepest kind, extraordinarily refined knowledge and observation – all this has existed outside the West, above all in India, China, Babylon, and Egypt. Yet a fully developed systematic theology appeared only in Hellenic-influenced Christianity (even though some beginnings were apparent in Islam and a few sects in India). And despite empirical knowledge, Babylonian, and every other type of astronomy, lacked a mathematical foundation (rendering the development, in particular, of Babylonian astronomy all the more astonishing), which would be provided only later by the Greeks. A further product of the Hellenic mind, the idea of rational “proof,” was absent from geometry in India. This mind also first created mechanics and physics. Moreover, although the natural sciences in India were quite well developed as concerns observation, they lacked the rational experiment, which was essentially a product of the Renaissance (although beginnings can be found in the ancient world). The modern laboratory was also missing in the natural sciences developed in India. For this reason, medicine in India, which was highly developed in terms of empirical technique, never acquired a biological and, especially, a biochemical foundation. A rational chemistry was absent from all regions outside the West.

The scholarly writing of history in China, which was very advanced, lacked the rigor of Thucydides [*ca.* 460–400 BCE].² Precursors of Machiavelli [1489–1527] existed in India, yet all Asian theorizing on the state omitted a systematic approach comparable to Aristotle's [384–322 BCE], as well as rational³ concepts in general. A rational jurisprudence based on rigorous juridical models and modes of thinking of the type found in Roman law and the Western law indebted to it was absent outside the West, despite all beginnings in India (School of Mimamsa)⁴ and the comprehensive codification of law in the Near East especially – and in spite of all the books on law written in India and elsewhere. A form of law similar to canon law cannot be found outside the West.

Similar conclusions must be drawn for art. The musical ear, apparently, was developed to a more refined degree among peoples outside the West than in the West to this day; or, at any rate, not less so. The most diverse sorts of polyphonic music have expanded across the globe, as did also the simultaneous playing of a number of instruments and singing in the higher pitches. All of the West's rational tone intervals were also widely calculated and known elsewhere. However, unique to the West were many musical innovations. Among them were rational, harmonic music (both counterpoint and harmony); formation of tone on the basis of three triads and the major third;⁵ and the understanding of chromatics and enharmonics since the Renaissance harmonically and in rational form (rather than by reference to distance). Others were the orchestra with the string quartet as its core and the organization of ensembles of wind instruments; the bass accompaniment; and the system of musical notation (which made possible the composition and rehearsal of modern works of music and their very survival over time). Still other innovations were sonatas, symphonies, and operas (although organized music, onomatopoeia, chromatics, and alteration of tones have existed in the most diverse music as modes of expression). Finally, the West's basic instruments were the means for all this: the organ, piano, and violin.

[The situation is similar in architecture.] As a means of decoration, pointed arches existed outside the West, both in the ancient world and in Asia. Presumably, the juxtaposition of pointed arches and cross-arched vaults was not unknown in the Middle East. However, the rational utilization of the Gothic vault as a means to distribute thrust and to arch over variously formed spaces and, above all, as a principle of construction for large monumental buildings and as the foundation for a *style* that incorporated sculpture and painting, as was created in the Middle Ages – all this was missing outside the West. A solution to the weight problem introduced by domes was also lacking outside the West, even though the technical basis for its solution was taken from the Middle East. Every type of "classical" rationalization⁶ of the entire art world – as occurred in painting through the rational use of both linear

and spatial perspective – was also lacking outside the West, where it began with the Renaissance.

Printing existed in China. Yet a printed literature intended *only* to be printed and made possible exclusively through printing – “daily newspapers” and “periodicals,” mainly – originated only in the West.

Universities of all possible types existed also outside the West (China and the Islamic world), even universities that look externally similar to those in the West, especially to Western academics. A rational and systematic organization into scientific disciplines, however, with trained and specialized professionals (*Fachmenschentum*), existed only in the West. This becomes especially evident if these disciplines are viewed from the vantage point of whether they attained the culturally dominant significance they have achieved in the West today.

Above all, the cornerstone of the modern state and modern economy – specialized *civil servants* – arose only in the West. Only precursors of this stratum appeared outside the West. It never became, in any sense, as constitutive for the social order as occurred in the West. The “civil servant,” of course, even the civil servant who performs specialized tasks, appeared in various societies, even in ancient times. However, only in the modern West is our entire existence – the foundational political, technical, and economic conditions of our being – absolutely and inescapably bound up in the casing (*Gehäuse*) of an *organization* of specially trained civil servants. No nation and no epoch has come to know state civil servants in the way that they are known in the modern West, namely, as persons trained in technical, commercial, and above all, legal areas of knowledge who are the social carriers of the most important everyday functions of social life.

[And what about the state?] The organization of political and social groups on the basis of *status* has existed historically on a broad scale. Yet the *Ständestaat* in the Western sense – *rex et regnum* – has appeared only in the West.⁷ Moreover, parliaments of periodically elected “representatives,” with demagogues and party leaders held responsible as “ministers” to parliamentary procedures, have come into existence only in the West. This remains the case even though “political parties,” of course, in the sense of organizations oriented to the acquisition of political power and the exercise of influence on political policy, can be found throughout the world. The “state,” in fact, as a political institution (*Anstalt*) operated according to a rationally enacted “constitution” and rationally enacted laws, and administered by civil servants possessing *specialized* arenas of competence and oriented to rules and “laws,” has existed with these distinguishing features only in the West, even though rudimentary developments in these directions have crystallized elsewhere.

The same may be said of that most fateful power of our modern life: *capitalism*.

A “drive to acquire goods” has actually nothing whatsoever to do with capitalism, as little as has the “pursuit of profit,” money, and the greatest possible gain. Such striving has been found, and is to this day, among waiters, physicians, chauffeurs, artists, prostitutes, corrupt civil servants, soldiers, thieves, crusaders, gambling casino customers, and beggars. One can say that this pursuit of profit exists among “all sorts and conditions of men” [Sir Walter Besant],⁸ in all epochs and in all countries of the globe. It can be seen both in the past and in the present wherever the objective possibility for it somehow exists.

This naive manner of conceptualizing capitalism by reference to a “pursuit of gain” must be relegated to the kindergarten of cultural history methodology and abandoned once and for all. A fully unconstrained compulsion to acquire goods cannot be understood as synonymous with capitalism, and even less as its “spirit.” On the contrary, capitalism *can* be identical with the *taming* of this irrational motivation, or at least with its rational tempering. Nonetheless, capitalism is distinguished by the striving for *profit*, indeed, profit is pursued in a rational, continuous manner in companies and firms, and then pursued *again and again*, as is *profitability*. There are no choices. If the entire economy is organized according to the rules of the open market, any company that fails to orient its activities toward the chance of attaining profit is condemned to bankruptcy.

Let us begin by *defining terms* in a manner more precise than often occurs. For us, a “capitalist” economic act involves first of all an expectation of profit based on the utilization of opportunities for *exchange*; that is, of (formally) *peaceful* opportunities for acquisition. Formal and actual acquisition through violence follows its own special laws and hence should best be placed, as much as one may recommend doing so, in a different category. Wherever capitalist acquisition is rationally pursued, action is oriented to *calculation* in terms of capital. What does this mean?

Such action is here oriented to a systematic utilization of skills or personal capacities on behalf of earnings in such a manner that, at the close of business transactions, the company’s money *balances*, or “capital” (its earnings through transactions), exceed the estimated value of all production costs (and, in the case of a longer lasting company, *again and again* exceed costs). It is all the same whether goods entrusted to a traveling salesman are involved and he receives payment through barter, so that the closing calculation takes place in goods, or whether the assets of a large manufacturing corporation (such as buildings, machines, cash, basic materials, and partly or entirely manufactured goods) are weighed against its production costs. Decisive in both situations is that a *calculation* of earnings in money terms takes place, regardless of whether it is made on the basis of modern accounting methods or primitive, superficial procedures. Both

at the beginning of the project and at the end there are specific calculations of balances. A starting balance is established and calculations are carried out before each separate transaction takes place; at every stage an instrumental assessment of the utility of potential transactions is calculated; and, finally, a concluding balance is calculated and the origin of "the profit" ascertained.

The beginning balance of the *commenda* transaction involves, for example, a designation of the amount of money agreed upon by both parties regarding what the relevant goods *should* be worth (assuming they have not already been given a monetary value). A final balance forms the estimate on the basis of which a distribution of profit and loss takes place. Calculation lies (as long as each case is rational) at the foundation of every single activity of the *commenda* partners. However, an actual exact accounting and appraisal may not exist, for on some occasions the transaction proceeds purely by reference to estimates or even on the basis of traditions and conventions. Indeed, such estimation appears in every form of capitalist enterprise even today wherever circumstances do not require more exact calculation. These points, however, relate only to the *degree* of rationality of capitalist acquisition.

Important for the formation of the *concept* of capitalism is only that economic action is decisively influenced by the *actual* orientation to a comparison of estimated monetary expenses with estimated monetary income, however primitive in form the comparison may be. Now in this sense we can see that, insofar as our documents on economies have reached into the distant past, "capitalism" and "capitalist" enterprises, at times with only a moderate degree of rationalization of capital accounting, have existed in *all* the world's civilizations. In other words, "capitalism" and "capitalist" enterprises have been found in China, India, Babylon, Egypt, the ancient Mediterranean, and medieval Europe, as well as in the modern West. Not only entirely isolated enterprises existed in these civilizations; rather, also businesses are found completely oriented to the continuous appearance of new companies and to a continuity of "operations." This remained the situation even though trade, over long periods, did not become perpetual, as it did in the West; instead, it assumed the character of a series of separate enterprises. A business context – the development of different "branches" for business – congealed only gradually and only slowly influenced the behavior of the *largescale* commercial traders. At any rate, the capitalist enterprise has been an enduring, highly universal, and ancient organization. Also capitalist businessmen, not only as occasional entrepreneurs but as persons oriented permanently to business, have been ancient, enduring, and highly universal figures.

The West, however, has given birth to types and forms of capitalism (as well as to directions for its unfolding) that have provided the foundation

for the development of capitalism to an extent and significance unknown outside the West. Merchants have engaged in wholesale and retail trade, on a local as well as international scale, throughout the world. Businesses offering loans of every sort have existed widely, as have banks with the most diverse functions (although for the most part functions essentially similar to those of Western banks of the sixteenth century). Sea loans,⁹ *commenda*, and *kommandit*¹⁰ types of businesses and formal associations have been widespread. Wherever the financing of public institutions through *currency* has occurred,¹¹ financiers have appeared – in Babylon, ancient Greece, India, China, and ancient Rome. They have financed above all wars, piracy, and all types of shipping and construction projects; as entrepreneurs in colonies they have served the international policy goals of nations. In addition, these *adventure* capitalists have acquired plantations and operated them using slaves or (directly or indirectly) forced labor; they have leased land and the rights to use honorific titles; they have financed both the leaders of political parties standing for re-election and mercenaries for civil wars; and, finally, as “speculators” they have been involved in all sorts of money-raising opportunities.

This type of entrepreneur – the adventure capitalist – has existed throughout the world. With the exception of trade, credit, and banking businesses, his money-making endeavors have been mainly either of a purely irrational and speculative nature or of a violent character, such as the capture of booty. This has taken place either through warfare or the continuous fiscal exploitation of subjugated populations.

Promoter, adventure, colonial, and, as it exists in the West, modern finance capitalism can be characterized often, even today, in terms of these features. This becomes especially apparent whenever capitalism is oriented to warfare, although it holds even in periods of peace. Single (and only single) components of large-scale international commerce today, as in the past, approximate adventure capitalism.

However, in the *modern* era the West came to know an entirely different type of capitalism. Absent from all other regions of the globe, or existing only in preliminary developmental stages, this capitalism appeared side-by-side with adventure capitalism and took as its foundation the rational-capitalist¹² organization of (legally) *free labor*. With *coerced* labor, a certain degree of rational organization had been attained only on the plantations of antiquity and, to a very limited extent, on the ancient world's *ergasteria*.¹³ An even lesser degree of rationality was reached in agricultural forced-labor enterprises generally, the workshops of medieval manors, and in manor-based cottage industries utilizing the labor of serfs at the dawning of the modern era. Outside the West, free labor has been found only occasionally. Even the existence of actual “cottage industries” has been documented with certainty only rarely outside the West. And the use of day laborers, which naturally can be found everywhere, did not

lead to manufacturing and not at all to a rational, apprenticeship-style organization of skilled labor of the type practiced in the West's Middle Ages. This must be said despite a very few, very unusual exceptions, and even these diverged significantly from the modern Western organization of industrial work in companies (especially from those companies that, through support from the state, held market monopolies).

However, the rational organization of industrial companies and their orientation to *market* opportunities, rather than to political violence or to irrational speculation, does not constitute the only distinguishing mark of Western capitalism. The modern, rational organization of the capitalist industrial firm would not have been possible without two prior important developments: (1) the *separation of the household from the industrial company*, which absolutely dominates economic life today, and, connected closely to this development, (2) the appearance of rational *accounting*.

The spatial separation of the place of labor or sales from the place of residence can be also found elsewhere (in the Oriental bazaar and in the *ergasteria* of other cultures). Capitalist associations with accounting procedures separate from personal accounts existed in East Asia as well as in the Middle East and the ancient world. Nonetheless, compared to the modern situation in which company operations are fully independent, these examples show only very limited beginnings. This remained the case above all because the *internal* preconditions for independent business operation – rational *accounting* methods and a *legal* separation of company wealth from personal wealth – were either entirely absent or developed only to preliminary stages.¹⁴ Instead, outside the West, industry-oriented endeavors tended to become simply one component of the feudal manor's *household* activities (the *oikos*). [Karl Johann] Rodbertus [1805–65] has already noted that all developments toward the *oikos* deviated distinctly from the route taken by capitalist activity in the West. Indeed, as he argues, and despite a number of apparent similarities, the *oikos* stood starkly in opposition to the Western pathway.

All these particular aspects of Western capitalism, however, in the end acquired their present-day significance as a result of their connection to the capitalist organization of *work*. Even what one is inclined to call "commercialization" – the development of stocks and bonds and the systematization, through stock markets, of speculation – must be seen as taking place in the context of a capitalist organization of labor. All this, even the development toward "commercialization," if it had been possible at all, would never have unfolded to anywhere near the same proportion and dimension if a capitalist-rational organization of work had been lacking. Hence, all of these new factors would never have significantly influenced the social structure and all those problems associated

with it specific to the modern West. Exact calculation, the foundation for everything else, is possible only on the basis of *free* labor.

And as the world outside the modern West has not known the rational organization of work, it has also not known, and for this reason, rational *socialism*. Now, of course, just as history has experienced a full spectrum of types of economies, ranging from those, on the one hand, oriented to city development and city-organized food supply policies, mercantilism, the social welfare policies instituted by princes, the rationing of goods, a thorough regulation of the economy, and protectionism, and on the other hand to *laissez-faire* theories (also in China), the world has also known socialist and communist economies of the most diverse sorts. State socialist (in [ancient] Egypt) and cartel-monopolistic versions of socialism can be found, as can types of communism more rooted in (a) heterogeneous consumer organizations, (b) private sphere values of intimacy and the family, (c) religious values, and (d) military values. However (despite the existence everywhere at one time or another of guilds and brotherhood corporations, various legal distinctions between cities and provinces in the most diverse form, and cities that granted specific market advantages to particular groups), just as the concept of "citizen" is entirely missing except in the West and the concept of "bourgeoisie" is completely absent outside the modern West, so also the notion of a "proletariat" as a *class* is absent. Indeed, it could not appear outside the West precisely because a rational organization of *free labor* in *industrial enterprises* was lacking. "Class struggles" between strata of creditors and debtors, between those who owned land and those who did not (whether serfs or tenant sharecroppers), between persons with economic interests in commerce and consumers or owners of land – all these conflicts have existed for centuries in various constellations. Yet even the struggles typical in the West's medieval period between domestic industry entrepreneurs and their wage workers [the putting-out system] are found elsewhere only in a rudimentary form. The modern opposition between large-scale industrialists, as employers, and free workers paid a wage is completely lacking outside the West. And thus a situation of the type known to modern socialism also could not exist.

Hence, for us, as we investigate the universal history of civilizations, and even if we proceed by reference exclusively to issues directly related to the economy, the central problem in the end *cannot* be the unfolding of capitalist activity everywhere and the various forms it took. That is, our concern cannot be whether it appeared more as adventure capitalism, commercial capitalism, or a capitalism oriented to the opportunities for profit offered by war, politics, and state administration. Rather, the central problem must ultimately involve the origin of *middle class industrial*

capitalism with its rational organization of *free labor*. Or, rendered in the terms of cultural history: The central problem must ultimately concern the origin of the Western middle class and its particular features. Of course, this theme is closely interwoven with the question of the origin of the capitalist organization of labor. Yet it is naturally not exactly the same – for the simple reason that a "middle class," in the sense of a stratum of people, existed before the development of this specifically Western capitalism anchored in the capitalist organization of labor. However, obviously this was the case *only* in the West.

Now evidently the capitalism specific to the modern West has been strongly influenced above all by advances in the realm of *technology*. The nature of the rationality of modern Western capitalism is today determined by the calculability of factors that are technically decisive. Indeed, these factors are the foundation for all more exact calculation. In turn this calculability is rooted fundamentally in the characteristic uniqueness of Western science, and especially in the natural sciences grounded in the exactness of mathematics and the controlled experiment.

The development of these sciences, and the technology that is based upon them, acquired – and continues to acquire – pivotal invigorating impulses from opportunities offered by capitalism. Market opportunities, that is, as rewards, are connected to the economic applications of these technologies. However, it must also be emphasized that the origin of Western science cannot be explained by the availability of such economic opportunities. Calculation, even with decimals, existed also in the algebra of India, where the decimal system was discovered. Yet in India it never led to modern calculation and accounting methods; this mode of calculation was first placed into *operation* only in the West's developing capitalism. Similarly, the origin of mathematics and physics was not determined by economic interests, yet the *technical* application of scientific knowledge was. Important for the quality of life of the broad population, this application was conditioned by economic rewards – and these crystallized precisely in the West. These rewards, however, flowed out of the particular character of the West's *social* order. It must then be asked: From *which* components of this unique social order did these rewards derive? Surely not all of its features have been of equal importance.

The rational structure of *law* and administration has undoubtedly been among the most central elements of this social order. This is the case for the simple reason that modern-rational industrial capitalism, just as it requires calculable technical means in order to organize work, also needs a calculable law and administration that function according to formal rules. Of course adventure capitalism and a trade-based capitalism oriented to speculation, as well as all types of capitalism determined by political considerations, can well exist without calculable law and administration.

However, a rational industrial firm – with fixed capital and reliable *calculation*, and operating in a private economy – is not possible without this type of law and administration.

Yet this type of law and administration, in *this* degree of legal-technical and formal perfection, was placed at the disposal of the economy and its development *only* in the West. Hence, one must ask: What was the source of this type of law in the West? Undoubtedly, in addition to other circumstances, *also* economic interests paved the way for the rule of a stratum of jurists who were professionally trained in rational law and who, in a disciplined and regular manner, practiced and administered law. This is evident from every investigation. Yet these economic interests were not the exclusive, or even the primary, causal forces in the rise of this stratum to importance. Moreover, economic interests did not of themselves *create* this type of law. Rather, entirely different powers were active in respect to this development. And why then did capitalist interests not call forth this stratum of jurists and this type of law in China or India? How did it happen that scientific, artistic, and economic development, as well as state-building, were not directed in China and India into those tracks of *rationalization* specific to the West?

The issue in all of the cases mentioned above evidently involves a characteristic aspect of a specifically formed “rationalism” of Western civilization. Now this word can be understood as implying a vast spectrum of matters. There is, for example, “rationalization” of mystical contemplation, that is, of a type of behavior that is specifically “irrational” if viewed from the perspective of other realms of life.¹⁵ Similarly, there may be rationalization of the economy, technology, scientific work, education, warfare, administration, and the practice of law. One may further “rationalize” each one of these arenas from vantage points and goals of the most diverse sort and ultimate orientations. What may appear “rational” viewed from one angle may appear “irrational” when viewed from another.

Hence, we must note that rationalizations have occurred in the various arenas of life in highly varying ways and in all circles of cultural life.¹⁶ It is necessary, in order to identify the ways in which the multiple rationalization paths have characteristically varied according to cultural and historical factors, to assess *which* arenas have been rationalized and in what directions. Again, important here above all are the special *characteristic features* of Western rationalism and, within this particular type of rationalism,¹⁷ the characteristic features of modern Western rationalism. Our concern is to identify this uniqueness and to explain its origin.

Every such attempt at explanation, recognizing the fundamental significance of economic factors, must above all take account of these factors. However, the opposite line of causation should not be neglected if only

because the origin of economic rationalism depends not only on an advanced development of technology and law but also on the capacity and disposition of persons to organize their lives in a practical-rational manner. Wherever magical and religious forces have inhibited the unfolding of this organized life, the development of an organized life oriented systematically toward *economic* activity has confronted broad-ranging internal resistance. Magical and religious powers, and the ethical notions of duty based on them, have been in the past among the most important formative influences upon the way life has been organized.

NOTES

1. Stemming originally from the German polymath Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), "universal history" (*Universalgeschichte*) came to refer in the nineteenth century to a mode of German historiography that avoided specialist studies and instead attempted to offer a synthesizing portrait of an entire historical epoch or area of culture. The term does not imply "world history" [sk].
 2. Thucydides of ancient Greece is best known for his history of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE). Weber refers to his attempt to record events and occurrences as they empirically took place; hence he interviewed direct observers, avoided speculative interpretations and reference to supernatural forces ("the will of the gods"), and sought to offer an "objective" account. He was the first historian to do so [sk].
 3. "Rational" here implies to Weber "rigor" and a "systematic aspect" (as also in the next paragraph and throughout). The term does not imply "better." See Kalberg, 1980, pp. 1145–79 [sk].
 4. A religious-philosophical school in India that developed out of the pre-Hindu Vedas (seventh century BCE). It emphasized that salvation could be attained through the performance of certain ritualized good works [sk].
 5. "Major third" (*harmonische Terz*) refers to the distance on the piano keyboard from note "c" to "e." Use of these notes together formed a harmonious sound that was used frequently in classical composition [sk].
 6. "Rationalization" can be equated with "systematization." See the article cited in note 3 [sk].
 7. The Western *Ständestaat* involved, uniquely, a precarious balancing of powers between the ruler, a cohesive aristocracy, and powerful municipally-based political actors. Hence, it implied temporary alliances and a rudimentary division of powers, an arrangement that was a precursor to the division of powers in the modern constitutional state. See *E&S*, pp. 1085–87 [sk].
 8. Perhaps from the progressive English social critic, novelist, biographer, urban historian, and philanthropist, Sir Walter Besant (1836–1901) [sk].
 9. The sea loan, which originated in Mediterranean antiquity and became used widely in the Western Middle Ages, was a response to the unusually high danger of shipping by sea and the attempt by borrowers (who had purchased the goods on credit) and creditors to distribute the risk of total loss: the
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- borrower agreed to pay to the creditor an extremely high interest rate (perhaps 30 percent) in exchange for which the creditor assumed liability for the goods in the event of loss. See Weber, 1927, pp. 204–06 [sk].
10. A type of company that limits liability for owners in respect to both damage caused by faulty products and injuries suffered by employees [sk].
 11. In contrast to barter [sk].
 12. Again, Weber is using “rational” in the sense of a systematic, organized, disciplined, and economically-efficient manner of organizing work [sk].
 13. *Ergasteria* are shops, separate from the private residence, where workers perform their labor. They vary widely, from the bazaar, which combines the place of work and the place of sale, to the factory. Central in all cases is that an entrepreneur prescribes the conditions of work and pays wages. See Weber, 1927, pp. 119, 162 [sk].
 14. Of course the contrast should not be understood as absolute. . . . [Weber notes several examples.]
 15. By “other realms of life” Weber has in mind, for example, the arenas of the economy or politics. Because “activity in the world” is valued as worthwhile and meaningful in these realms, the mystic’s withdrawal through contemplation is seen as meaningless, or “irrational.” See *E&S*, pp. 541–51 [sk].
 16. Weber’s use of the expression “circles of cultural life” is not intended to refer to “high,” “low,” or “popular” culture. Instead, this term (*Kulturkreisen*) in his time refers to various arenas of life, such as the political, economic, religious, scientific, artistic, etc. [sk].
 17. In the volumes that follow in the German edition, Weber will refer repeatedly to, for example, “Chinese rationalism,” “the rationalism of India,” and “the rationalism of the Middle Ages” [sk].

Protection against the Western Search for the Individual Self

From *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, eds and trans.
Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale, slightly revised by Stephen Kalberg (New York:
The Free Press of Glencoe, 1958), pp. 342–3.

Wherever an intellectual stratum attempted to establish the meaning of the world and the character of life and – after the failure of this unmediated rationalistic effort – to comprehend experience in its own terms, indirect rationalistic elements were taken into consideration. It was led in some manner to the style of the trans-worldly field of formless Indian mysticism. And where, on the other side, a status group of intellectuals rejected such world-fleeing efforts and, instead, consciously and intentionally pursued the charm and worth of the elegant gesture as the highest possible goal

of inner-worldly consummation, it moved, in some manner, toward the Confucian ideal of cultivation.

Out of both these components, crossing and jostling one another, however, an essential part of all Asiatic intellectual culture was determined. The conception that through simple behavior addressed to the "demands of the day," one may achieve salvation – which lies at the basis of all the specifically Occidental significance of "personality" – is alien to Asia. This is as excluded from Asiatic thought as the pure factual rationalism of the West, which practically tries to discover the impersonal laws of the world.

They were, indeed, protected by the rigid ceremonial and hieratic stylization of their life conduct from the modern Occidental search for the individual self in contrast to all others – the attempt to take the self by the forelock and pull it out of the mud, forming it into a "personality." To Asia this was an effort as fruitless as the planned discovery of a particular artistic form of "style." Asia's partly purely mystical, partly purely inner-worldly aesthetic goal of self-discipline could take no other form than an emptying of experience of the real forces of experience. As a consequence of the fact that this lay remote from the interests and practical behavior of the "masses," they were left in undisturbed magical bondage.

. . . The appearance of [an ethic of everyday life] in the Occident, however – above all, in the Near East – with the extensive consequences borne with it, was conditioned by highly particular historical constellations without which, despite differences of natural conditions, development there could easily have taken the course typical of Asia, particularly of India.

Western Law and the Modern Capitalist Enterprise

From *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds and trans. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 1394–5.

The "progress" toward the bureaucratic state, adjudicating and administering according to rationally established law and regulation, is nowadays very closely related to the modern capitalist development. The modern capitalist enterprise rests primarily on *calculation* and presupposes a legal and administrative system, whose functioning can be rationally predicted, at least in principle, by virtue of its fixed general norms, just like the

expected performance of a machine. The modern capitalist enterprise cannot accept what is popularly called “*kadi-justice*”: adjudication according to the judge’s sense of equity in a given case or according to the other irrational means of law-finding that existed everywhere in the past and still exist in the Orient. The modern enterprise also finds incompatible the theocratic or patrimonial governments of Asia and of our own past, whose administrations operated in a patriarchal manner according to their own discretion and, for the rest, according to inviolably sacred but irrational tradition.

The fact that *kadi-justice* and the corresponding administration are so often venal, precisely because of their irrational character, permitted the development, and often the exuberant prosperity, of the capitalism of traders and government purveyors and of all the pre-rational types known for four thousand years, especially the capitalism of the adventurer and booty-seeker, who lived from politics, war and administration. However, the specific features of modern capitalism, in contrast to these ancient forms of capitalist acquisition, the strictly rational organization of work embedded in rational technology, nowhere developed in such irrationally constructed states, and could never have arisen within them because these modern organizations, with their fixed capital and precise calculations, are much too vulnerable to irrationalities of law and administration. They could arise only in such circumstances as: 1) In England, where the development of the law was practically in the hands of the lawyers who, in the service of their capitalist clients, invented suitable forms for the transaction of business, and from whose midst the judges were recruited who were strictly bound to precedent, that means, to calculable schemes; or 2) where the judge, as in the bureaucratic state with its rational laws, is more or less an automaton of paragraphs: the legal documents, together with the costs and fees, are dropped in at the top with the expectation that the judgment will emerge at the bottom together with more or less sound arguments – an apparatus, that is, whose functioning is by and large *calculable* or predictable.

From *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Max Rheinstein (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), p. 883.

Only the Occident has witnessed the fully developed administration of justice of the folk-community (*Dinggenossenschaft*) and the status-stereotyped form of patrimonialism; and only the Occident has witnessed the rise of the national economic system, whose agents first allied themselves with the princely powers to overcome the estates and then turned against them in revolution; and only the West has known “Natural Law,” and with it the complete elimination of the system of

personal laws and of the ancient maxim that special law prevails over general law. Nowhere else, finally, has there occurred any phenomenon resembling Roman law and anything like its reception. All these events have to a very large extent been caused by concrete political factors, which have only the remotest analogies elsewhere in the world. For this reason, the stage of law decisively shaped by trained legal specialists has not been fully reached anywhere outside of the Occident. Economic conditions have, as we have seen, everywhere played an important role, but they have nowhere been decisive alone and by themselves. To the extent that they contributed to the formation of the specifically modern features of present-day occidental law, the direction in which they worked has been by and large the following: To those who had interests in the commodity market, the rationalization and systematization of the law in general and, with certain reservations to be stated later, the increasing calculability of the functioning of the legal process in particular, constituted one of the most important conditions for the existence of economic enterprise intended to function with stability and, especially, of capitalistic enterprise, which cannot do without legal security. Special forms of transactions and special procedures, like the bill of exchange and the special procedure for its speedy collection, serve this need for the purely formal certainty of the guaranty of legal enforcement.
