

CHAPTER IV THE WORLD RELIGIONS IN CONTROL TESTS

Basic Literature:

Weber, Max (2012) «Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences» part II in: *Collected Methodological Writings* London: Routledge pp 169-184

Kries, J. v. (1888) *Über den Begriff der objektiven Möglichkeit* Leipzig: Fues's

1. Elective Affinity and Causal Adequacy

When Max Weber wrote his essays on the «Economic Ethics of World Religions» and when he planned additional essays on Islam, early Christianity and Orthodox Christianity, he thought that capitalism in a general sense has existed in most advanced cultures. Certainly, when he talked of capitalism Weber did not mean the uncontrolled impulse to acquisition, the simple pursuit of gain or of money, for this pursuit has been common at all times and in most countries among coachmen, dishonest officials, crusaders and waiters, and, as Weber said, this naïve idea of capitalism should be given up once and for all. By capitalism in a general sense Weber meant the pursuit of profit by means of continuous rational enterprise and by formally peaceful exchange (PE: XXXII)⁹¹ which can exist among traders and moneylenders and can also take the form of political capitalism, for instance in colonial capitalism or tax-farming.

While being well aware of these different manifestations of capitalism in Western history as well as elsewhere, Weber was mainly interested in the particular kind of capitalism which developed in Western society in the last several centuries: modern Western capitalism. He described it as rational-capitalistic organization of formally free labour, based on free market exchange and on the separation of business from the household, for the satisfaction of the needs of the masses (PE: XXXV). Within this system may be found - at least at the time of its early development - the

91 A more complete definition would distinguish between the capitalistic enterprise and the capitalistic system which can only develop under the rule of law and when the administration of the monetary system has been monopolized by the State.

«spirit of capitalism», identified with the rational tempering of the irrational impulse of gain, based on calculations in terms of capital and resulting from the religious doctrine of proof (*Bewährung*). In his *Protestant Ethic* (PE) Weber mainly, although not exclusively, tried to understand (*verstehen*) this «spirit» of capitalism, a certain style and conduct of life which a century or two after the Reformation appeared to have a close elective affinity with the religiously oriented ethical rationalism of the Protestants.

Most present-day scholars of Weber's PE see the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism as one of elective affinity or of homologic structures and not of causality⁹². The theorem of elective affinity (*Wahlverwandtschaft*) originated in the natural sciences: The Swede Torbern Bergmann wrote *Disquisitio de attractionibus electivis* in 1782, referring to the fact that in anorganic chemistry elements may form combinations which can later be dissolved in favour of others. The German poet J. W. Goethe, who had his own view of the natural sciences, interpreted these phenomena of natural law described by Bergmann as resulting from inclination, affection or attraction, and he transferred these ideas and the German term which described them (*Wahlverwandtschaft*) to the realm of interhuman relationships.⁹³ Goethe's figurative use of the term was later adopted by Weber in two different contexts and he attached to it two different meanings. On the one hand, Weber used the term to indicate meaningful adequacy (*Sinnadäquanz*) or affinity of meaning of religious concepts and motives in relation to each other and in relation to the total construct of meaning to which they belong. For instance, ethical (emissary) prophecy had, according to him, a profound elective affinity to the conception of a transcendent personal God (FMW:285), the dogma of predestination combined with the doctrine of proof had an elective affinity with a systematic conduct of life as opposed to single good deeds, and the Protestant feeling of being a tool and not a vessel of God fitted well into the whole monotheistic world view although no causal relationships are implied here. Similarly, the devout Hindu was accused to remain within the structure (*Gehäuse*) of the karma doctrine (RI:121) which formed a

92 E. Fischoff (1968) «The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The History of a Controversy» in: S. N. Eisenstadt (ed.) *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization* New York: Basic Books 1968, p. 81

93 See Benno von Wiese's Editorial Note on Goethe's novel «Die Wahlverwandtschaften» in *Goethes Werke*, Hamburger Ausgabe, Vol VI, 1989, p. 675

meaningful whole resulting from the non-causal elective affinities of its parts. Elective affinity here points to an inner consistency of thought configurations as they develop in the theologies of major world religions, resulting from the fact often observed in the history of ideas that what is rational or logically consistent has some degree of «power» over humans and thereby tends to favor a coherent thought structure.

On the other hand, Weber wished to place his methodology beyond the one-sided alternatives of materialism and idealism so that when he spoke, for instance, of an elective affinity between the spirit and the form or system of capitalism (AC: 75) or between Calvinism and capitalism (ibid.: 107), he wanted to reject any type of reductionism and generalization about causality between religion and economy and he also wished to imply that any assertion about the manner and the general direction of causal relationships, while not excluding reciprocal influences, must be the result of further historical research, not just a methodological one. At the same time, Weber suggested that the elective affinity of the spirit of capitalism with its social structure, or form, can produce a mutually favorable relationship or even a reciprocal intensification (*Steigerung*) and a development of unbroken uniformity. In this case, spirit and form do not stand in each other's way, as would be the case if capitalism were imposed on a social environment which contains a different spirit.

It is in this second sense which does not exclude causal relationships if they can be established by historical research that Weber used the term *Wahlverwandtschaft* in the PE. He knew that for the historian the method of *verstehen* provides no guarantee of empirical truth, if it is not complemented by a method which can establish causal relationships.

It may be useful here to refer briefly to Weber's methodology which has as a starting point the logical distinction between natural science and cultural science. As a cultural scientist Weber was concerned with the interpretative understanding (*verstehen*) of social phenomena. Religions, he thought, provide human actors with categories and with an intelligible context of meaning which can be ideal-typically reconstructed (as Weber did with regard to the meaning contexts provided by the world religions). Scholars are then able to understand social actions which are related to such ideal-typical meaning contexts and which are in this sense rational and adequate on the level of meaning. In fact, such rationally interpretable meaningful behaviour often constitutes the most appropriate ideal-type for sociological analysis, for it permits to become aware of irrational or emotional influences. Such understanding is, according to Weber's interpreter

Henrich⁹⁴, the result of the anthropological characteristic of human beings to take position in relation to meaning contexts.

But understanding on the level of meaning is never sufficient, it must be verified by causal adequacy. Weber stressed the complementarity of *verstehen* (understanding) and causal explanation (CMW: 273/4), the necessity to control any interpretation by the methods of causal imputation if it wants to be more than a plausible hypothesis; in fact, sociology is concerned with the understanding of social action and *thereby* with a causal explanation of its course and consequences (ES: 4), as subjective meaning, understandable by the observer, is often but one element in the causal process.

The essays on «The Economic Ethics of World Religions» (EEWR) were used by Weber as control tests to establish the causal adequacy of religion and thus of the validity of his PE thesis, and they could possibly also have been used to establish the validity of the projected thesis of his planned essay on Occidental Christianity. While Weber's wife Marianne⁹⁵ wrote that the essays on the EEWR contribute to the characterization of Western man and his culture, and while it may also be true that before the publication of his essays on India and China there lay Weber's discovery, as Schluchter⁹⁶ puts it, that the whole of Western culture - not only its economic aspects, but also its law, its organizational aspects and even its music - is permeated by a specific mode of rationalism which needed to be characterized further by contrasting it with the different modes of rationalism in non-Western cultures, it should nevertheless not be forgotten that these essays also constituted an attempt to verify and to validate the PE-thesis within the context of a universal history of capitalism. In fact, it was one of Weber's main historical and sociological interests, particularly in his studies on the «Economic Ethics of World Religions», to establish the cause or the causes of those particular aspects of modern Western capitalism which distinguish it from all other forms and manifestations of capitalism.

As Weber talked of the causal imputation of the «spirit» of modern Western capitalism to the religious ethic of Protestantism, or more generally of the attribution of a concrete effect to a concrete cause, it may not

94 D. Henrich 1952: 50

95 Marianne Weber 1975, *Max Weber. A Biography*. New York: John Wiley, p. 333

96 Wolfgang Schluchter 1989 *Rationalism, Religion and Domination*. University of California Press p. 45

be superfluous to ask ourselves how he thought to achieve this causal imputation and what he meant by the terms cause or causation in a socio-historical context. For an answer, we shall go back to the work of the «outstanding physiologist» v. Kries⁹⁷ on which Weber heavily relied⁹⁸ and then to the essays on «The Economic Ethics of World Religions» which can serve to apply v. Kries' theory.

2. Adequate Causation according to v. Kries

It is an axiom, said v. Kries, that every event which actually occurs, was necessarily produced by the totality of all previously existing circumstances many of which are often unknown to us. But if this is so, what do we mean when we attribute a concrete event to a single cause? In order to show this, we must first clarify the notion of objective possibility.

If we say that an event is objectively possible, we mean that we are uncertain about its occurrence or non-occurrence because we do not know all its conditions and all the surrounding circumstances, for under clearly defined conditions the notion of objective possibility cannot be applied. But the same notion imposes itself when the conditions and circumstances of an event are only partially or generally known and when we wish to consider the relationship of an effect to these general or partial conditions. For instance, it is indeed objectively possible that, while playing at dice, the six comes up ten times in a row, for there is nothing in the general conditions and circumstances of playing at dice which might necessarily prevent this particular outcome. But it is also objectively possible that the six never comes up.⁹⁹

We also say occasionally that a certain person could have done or known this or that. In such cases we abstract from the given particular thoughts and preoccupations which existed at the time of the event in question, as well as from the psychological make-up of the person under consideration, and refer only to that part of the circumstances which is of particular interest to us, namely the physical or intellectual capacities or the social position of that person. We thus assert the compatibility of a

97 J. von Kries 1888 *Über den Begriff der objektiven Möglichkeit*. Leipzig : Fues 's

98 Max Weber «Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences» in : CMW, p. 171

99 von Kries 1888 : p. 5

certain action with a part of the total conditions involved. It might be argued, for instance, that Chamberlain could have stopped Hitler by not accepting the Munich agreement, if one abstracts from the political situation in Europe at the time and from his personal characteristics and refers only to his position as prime minister of Britain. On the whole, therefore, we may talk of the objective possibility of an event under generally or partially defined conditions, if such determinations of the conditions are conceivable which would, according to our experience and nomological knowledge, produce the event.

This notion of objective possibility will now be used in the context of causal relationships. Without any doubt, only the total complex of all conditions which produced a result may be called its cause in the strict sense of the term. But sometimes another sense of the terms cause and causation plays an important role, and this was particularly so in German legal thought which in Weber's time was much concerned with the problem of causality. We might say, for instance, that certain generally defined conditions or circumstances represent a larger or smaller possibility of bringing about a given result (e.g.: driving under the influence of alcohol increases the possibility of an accident). The question is, then, how such general statements about causal relationships might influence the evaluation of concrete cases.¹⁰⁰

Before we return to this question, some preliminary remarks are necessary. According to v. Kries, the question regarding the causality of a certain circumstance or factor is equivalent to the question of what would have happened in a particular case if from the total context of conditions this circumstance or factor had been absent while all others had remained unchanged. Therefore, we shall say that a circumstance may be considered to have caused an effect if it can be shown that the same effect would probably not have occurred without it. But what do we mean when we talk about the *same* effect?

To be sure, we deny the causality of any factor not only if without it the effect would have occurred in the same way, but also if its absence would have produced only an unimportant modification of the effect. It is clear, therefore, that we are not interested in the effect with all its concrete details, but rather in a generalized idea of it. For instance, if we ask whether a certain medication has caused somebody's death, we want to know

100 Ibid. p. 20

whether he would also have died without taking this medication but not whether he would have died in exactly the same position or in the same corner of his room.

Finally, the following distinction needs to be made: if a given factor has caused an effect, the causal nexus may be either general or a peculiarity of the given case. The following example taken from v. Kries will clarify this.

If a coachman who is driving a passenger is drunk or falls asleep and thus misses his way, and if then the passenger is killed by lightning, it may be said that the sleep (or drunkenness) of the coachman has caused the death of the passenger. For if the coach had been on the right way, it would without a doubt have been at a different location at the time of the thunderstorm and the passenger would probably not have been hurt. But one can perhaps say that there is here no general connection between the above-mentioned cause and the effect in all cases of drunkenness, although a causal connection is undeniable in this particular case. Moreover, in general, a traveller can also be hit by lightning, if the coachman is awake.¹⁰¹

Matters are quite different if, in the same example, instead of being hit by lightning, the coach had been overturned and the traveller had in this way been hurt or killed. In this case one would have to assume not only an individual but a general causal relationship between the sleeping of the coachman and the accident; one might say that in our experience the sleeping of a coachman, although it does not necessarily always cause an accident, generally does increase the possibility and probability of an accident.¹⁰²

The purpose of these reflections will become clear with the help of the notion of objective possibility as it permits a general or abstract consideration of a causal relationship between a single factor and an effect. A theory which knows of no other causal relationship than that B always is the effect of A and which thus asserts the regularity of an effect without any exception, often appears to be fruitless, for the relationship between a single factor and an effect often is not of such nature. But, as opposed to a causal theory which assumes an absolute regularity of the causal relationship, it is often possible to say that a causal element augments the objec-

101 Ibid.: p. 25/26

102 Ibid. :p. 26

tive possibility of an effect or that the presence of a causal element produces a certain effect in a much larger variety of circumstances.

In order to have short terms to designate the two variations in the example of the sleeping coachman, v. Kries talks of adequate and of «chance» causation. A is called the adequate cause of B, and B the adequate effect of A, if generally (in the large majority of possible circumstances) A may be seen to favour B; in the opposite case he talks of «chance» causation. In the above example the drunkenness of the coachman was the «chance» cause of the effect that the traveller was killed by lightning; it would, however, have to be considered as the adequate cause in the modified example where the overturn of the coach resulted in the death of the traveller.¹⁰³

It is perhaps useful to point to a frequently occurring confusion which tends to result from the misunderstanding of the fact that there is a basic difference between an event which is considered to be the «chance» cause of an effect and an insignificant event. Weber (CMW: 179) used the example of the two shots fired in Berlin in March 1848 which were, according to him, causally insignificant. One would speak of «chance» causation and impute the March Revolution to those two shots only if it could be argued convincingly that without them the social and political circumstances would not have produced a revolution. In fact, though, it is only conceivable that the two shots have had an influence on the precise moment of the outbreak.

It must be stressed that the distinction between an adequate cause and a «chance» cause does not refer to the manner in which in a concrete case a causal factor produces an effect, but that it has an abstract meaning. It is assumed that the causal factor is a behaviour or an event which can be added in the scientist's mind to a manifold variety of circumstances. Equally, the effect which may or may not have been favoured by the cause, remains generally defined and not described in all its details. The distinction between adequate and «chance» causation is always based on a generalized consideration of a particular case, the result of mental manipulations and comparisons, by which the degree of objective possibility is intended to be grasped, not, however, on the objective causality of the events.¹⁰⁴

103 Ibid. : p. 27

104 Ibid. : p. 27

It should also be noted that in v. Kries' theory of causality, which, as has been seen, is based on the notion of objective possibility, a clear dividing line between adequate and «chance» causality cannot be drawn. The steady transition follows from the fact that the general causal conditions for any effect may take any value between 0 and 1. If, for instance, a train accident forces a traveller to spend a few hours at an unexpected location where he catches an infectious disease and dies, we might say that the train accident was a chance cause of his death. We would, however, be inclined to consider the death to be slightly more adequately caused, if the accident had happened in an area which is known to be disease-ridden. In fact, in this particular case the increase in the risk may be great though the resultant probability is still small. It should perhaps be mentioned in passing here that, as Hart & Honoré have noted¹⁰⁵, there is a standing danger of confusion, if adequacy theory is misunderstood, between the notion of a substantial increase of a risk and that of increasing the risk to a substantial one.

If one wanted to characterize the theory of adequate causation, one would have to view it at some distance from many modern scientific outlooks. Platonic thinking is nowadays rather rare, and yet one misunderstands the term «adequate causation» if one thinks of it in any but a Platonic sense – i.e. that «true» adequate causation is an ideal to which real life situations approximate more or less. Weber (CMW:180) said that it admits gradations but that one cannot arrive at numerical estimates. When Turner & Factor¹⁰⁶ who have tried to fit adequate causation theory into the Procrustean bed of modern probability theory criticize the concept by suggesting that its only requirement for a claim of causal connection was a plausible claim of a relationship of conditionality and a dependent probability of greater than zero – and that it is difficult to see what «proof» means here, they think in the more modern terms of true/false which apply to propositions, rather than in the terms of less true/more true which apply to types or ideal types of reality itself.

The distinction between an adequate cause and a «chance» cause can, according to v. Kries, easily be used in criminal law where it has to be decided whether someone is responsible for a criminal act. Our sense of jus-

105 Hart, H. L. A. and Honoré, T. 1985 *Causation in the Law* Oxford : Clarendon p. 493

106 Turner, S. and Factor, R. 1981 «Objective Possibility and Adequate Causation in Weber's Methodological Writings» *Sociological Review* 29 (1) p. 25

tice seems to suggest that a person is responsible only for the adequate consequences of his actions. If, for instance, someone who in a street fight was slightly injured by a knife later died of tetanus, one would normally say that the fight was the «chance» cause and not the adequate cause of his death, because in general experience superficial knife wounds do not result in death. In a legal system which accepts the notion of adequate causation, the opponent would then not be held responsible for the death.

3. Weber's Use of the Concept of Adequate Causation

Max Weber had been trained as a lawyer and was quite familiar with legal theory. Having seen the fruitfulness of v. Kries' work in German legal theory, especially in the work of Gustav Radbruch, he applied it to the historical and cultural sciences. Like v. Kries, Weber thought that reality is a «heterogeneous continuum», a stream of immeasurable events which, because of the interdependence of all events, is infinitely complex. But scientific investigation can only grasp a finite and ever changing portion of this infinite reality and of the causal connections within it by concentrating on those aspects which acquire meaning and cultural significance for us or for the historian, i.e., which become «historical individuals». Weber went beyond v. Kries in concentrating on those aspects of «the infinite web of reality» which acquire meaning and cultural significance for us, i.e., which become «historical individuals», and then in perceiving these historical individuals as genetic ideal types which the scientist constructs in order to clarify reality and in the expectation of a possible causal relationship, and which he then uses as hypotheses for causal imputations.

It seemed to Max Weber that - apart from the question of subjective guilt - the legal expert and the historian or social scientist ask exactly the same question: under what circumstances and in what sense can it be asserted that an event or a person has caused a certain effect - and therefore that the ideas developed by v. Kries can and should be applied to the study of universal history. Both the judge and the historian do not explain causally the total course of events as that would be impossible and meaningless. While the judge's deliberations take into account those components of the events which are pertinent for the subsumption under the legal norms, the historian is exclusively concerned with the causal explanation of those elements of the events in question which are of «general significance» and hence of historical interest (CMW: 173).

The battle of Marathon serves as an example. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Greek victory in the battle of Marathon of 490 BC between the Athenian army under Miltiades and the Persian army of King Darios the Great was considered to have been of such importance for the subsequent development not only of Greek culture but of Western culture in general that the Baron de Coubertin did not hesitate to add the Marathon run of approximately 42 km to the list of Olympic competitions, in memory of the Athenian soldier who had run the same distance from Marathon to Athens in order to announce the victory – and had then died of exhaustion. If the Persians had been victorious – so it was thought – they would probably have imposed a theocratic regime in Greece as they had done in Israel and Egypt a few decades earlier; the providers of oracles and mystery cults would have dominated the *polis*, and Greek culture with its philosophy, tragedy, sculpture, etc., the seedbed of Western civilization, would never have blossomed. In Weber's formulation we attempt to grasp the real causal interconnection by constructing unreal ones. (CMW: 182)

In Weber's words, the battle «decided» between the independence of Greek culture and a Persian-dominated theocracy which, in the case of a Persian victory, would have been objectively possible (although we cannot state the degree, between 0 and 1, of this objective possibility), for, according to our general knowledge of the Persians, the course of events would have been different in its general outlines and in those features – the cultural values which depended on the Athenian victory – which are significant for Western man. (It should be added in passing that this is the reason why Western man, according to Weber, rates Marathon higher than a battle between two African tribes). Weber concludes that it is not the case that a Persian victory *must* have led to a quite different development of Hellenic culture – but a different development would have been the adequate effect of a Persian victory.

4. Adequate Causation and «The Economic Ethics of World Religions»

The notions of objective possibility and of adequate and «chance» causation are equally useful in the interpretation of Weber's investigation of the causes of the spirit of modern capitalism. The thesis of the causal relevance of the Protestant ethic meant for him that modern capitalism, with

its unchanged general characteristics, and quite apart from all its concrete details, probably would not have appeared without this causal element.

This thesis, namely that the Protestant ethic is an adequate cause – and not simply a cause and definitely not the only cause and probably not even the only adequate cause and perhaps not the most important adequate cause – of the modern capitalist spirit, is at the centre of Weber's comparative sociology of religions. Within the field of the cultural sciences, according to Weber, we can only have knowledge of adequate causes, and to say that an event was necessarily caused by previous conditions, would be a pure *a priori*. A thesis about adequate causation presupposes, as has been shown, a judgement of objective possibility; in Weber's case it presupposes a judgement on what we can imagine to be the effect, according to the rules of experience, if in the total complex of the historical conditions of modern capitalism we assume the Protestant ethic to be either absent or modified. A judgement about what might have happened under different circumstances would at first sight perhaps be called irrational, but Weber does not simply rely on the imagination of what might have happened.

In order to be able to arrive at a reasoned judgement, Weber turns towards historical analogies of the most different time periods and cultural areas. Ideally he would like to find a historical course of events which coincides with the development towards modern capitalism in all economically relevant respects except for the Protestant ethic. Weber does not find this logical ideal but he can show that, in spite of conditions in India and especially China which were at times and as a rule favourable for the development of capitalism (high esteem for wealth, significant technological knowledge, wars between competing states, etc.), capitalism of the modern occidental kind was not born there (although political capitalism did exist), while in the occidental cultural area, wherever the Protestant ethic took root, modern capitalism developed, even sometimes under the most unfavourable and miserable conditions, for example among the Puritans of New England. Weber, therefore, draws the conclusion that the objective possibility of the independent emergence of modern capitalism, when the Protestant ethic is absent, must be considered as small, for, in the absence of this causal factor, the other existing conditions and circumstances lead us to expect a high degree of possibility of another development.

It is possible to go one step beyond this argument. Weber was not only able to show, by means of intercultural comparison that, when the Protestant ethic was absent, modern capitalism as a rule did not arise (although,

obviously, it could be imported from outside), but he also indicated that similar rational-ethical influences among certain other sects in other cultural areas (e.g. some Russian Old-Believers and sects or the Jains and Vallabhacarins of India), although they did not produce capitalism of the modern Western kind, nevertheless resulted in economic rationalization and success (PE:145 fn 12;) compared with the surrounding population of the same cultural area. This seems to indicate an adequate causal relationship between the ethics of certain kinds of sects and a generalized concept of capitalism. It is the paradox of all rational-ethical asceticism – as can be seen in the history of many monasteries – that it itself produces the wealth which it rejects. Not only ascetic Protestantism but also certain other religious communities characterized by a religiously oriented asceticism and rationalism of the conduct of life have had a revolutionizing effect on economic activity and pushed it in the same direction – and the realization of this fact in turn strengthens the Protestant ethic thesis, if one wishes to interpret it not only as a thesis about elective affinity of meaning, as most scholars who know only the *PE* and not the *EEWR* do, but also as a thesis about adequate causation. It is true, though, that the religious communities in question (some ascetic sects before the Reformation, some monastic orders, some Russian and Indian sects) have not been closely studied by Weber – with the partial exception perhaps of the Jains, about whom he wrote a few pages in his essay on India. The apparent positive relationship between religion and economic success in the case of the Vallabhacarins in India and of some Russian sects and Old Believers has been studied more recently.¹⁰⁷

Some other possible explanations of the development of modern capitalism were rejected by Weber. Technical advances, for instance, can certainly favour capitalist growth, but historical experience teaches that they alone are not generally able to overcome traditionalism and to contribute to the formation of a new economic structure. In ancient Rome the capitalistic development was highest when the technological development had ended and the technical knowledge of the Chinese remained without practical applications (ASS: 451 and RC:243). Similarly, the increase of the reserves of precious metals can accelerate an already existing economic

107 Jürgen Lütt, «The Doctrine of the Vallabhacarya Sect and the Economic Performance of its Followers» *International Sociology* 2 (3) 1987; Andreas Buss «The Economic Ethics of Russian-Orthodox Christianity», Part 1 & 2 in : *International Sociology* 4 (3 and 4) 1989

development, but historical experience (for instance in Ptolemaic Egypt) shows that precious metals alone do not create a new economic structure. It should also be remembered that after the discovery of America, the flow of gold and silver to Spain produced a recession and not an increase of capitalistic development (GEH:353). And, finally, the existence of rational law cannot generally, out of itself, change the prevailing circumstances in the direction of more modern capitalism. In Rome, for instance, the highest degree of rationality in the legal system was attained only after the conclusion of the capitalistic development.¹⁰⁸

Technical advances, precious metal-resources and rational law, therefore, although not irrelevant, cannot alone be held to be adequate causes of modern capitalism. Other possible causes mentioned by Weber, e.g. population increase, the development of autonomous cities or commercial routes, etc., would perhaps merit some consideration but have not been studied comparatively as causes of capitalism by Weber.

The low degree of the objective possibility of the independent development of modern capitalism without the Protestant ethic, the development of modern capitalism even under otherwise unfavourable circumstances where the Protestant ethic predominated, further the high degree of objective possibility of rational economic activity within the sphere of influence of rational-ethical sects in non-western cultural areas, and finally his rejection of other, though less investigated, possible causes of modern capitalism have led Weber to the conclusion that the causal influence of the Protestant ethic was very high (Weber AC:120), that it was the adequate cause of modern capitalism, although, obviously, it is never possible, in the historical imputation of an effect to a cause, to arrive at a numerical ratio.

It has thus perhaps been shown that «The Economic Ethics of World Religions» must not only be interpreted in relation to Weber's discovery of a specific mode of rationalism in Western culture, but also as the methodologically necessary consequence of his discovery in the PE that there is an elective affinity between certain aspects of Protestantism and the spirit of capitalism. In the EEWR Weber proceeded to establish a relationship of adequate causation – assuming the precise understanding of this delicate notion as formulated by v. Kries – between certain idealtypes

108 Schelting, Alexander v., 1934, *Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre* Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1934, p 113

cally refined phenomena, while in the PE he had, to a large extent, only established elective affinity. Weber had perhaps referred to a yet undefined plan of this kind in the sibylline remark, made in 1908 in response to one of his critics, that the *Gegenprobe* of his PE, although promised, was still lacking.¹⁰⁹

The interpretation of the term *Gegenprobe*, apparently used by Weber only once, is not without difficulties, but it probably refers to what in the older anglosaxon literature on Weber is termed «control-test» and what the French interpreters call, much more clearly, «validation causale indirecte»¹¹⁰ or «l'expérimentation causale par comparaison historique» (Raymond Aron¹¹¹).

This leads to a final point. When H. Tyrell¹¹² sums up the premises and intentions of the PE-essay and then declares that Weber never plausibly or systematically explicated the power and efficacy of religion which he rather took, in the wake of Nietzsche, to be self-evident, he simply ignores all the *Gegenproben* of the EEW^R which Weber had undertaken in his later years. By revealing relationships of adequate causation, Weber indeed also established the efficacy of religion, at least the «adequate» efficacy.

109 Max Weber *Kritiken und Antikritiken. Die protestantische Ethik II* (edited by J. Winckelmann) Gütersloh: Mohn 1978 p. 54. The term *Gegenprobe* is found in a footnote and refers to Weber's statement that he had promised further studies as supplements, interpretations and further testing of his PE thesis (AC : 45). Recent translations as «converse causal relationship» (AC : 49) or simply as «counterargument» (*The Protestant Ethic and the «Spirit» of Capitalism and Other Writings*, P. Baehr & G. Wells ed. and transl.) London : Penguin 2002, p. 240) do not seem quite adequate.

110 Philippe Besnard *Protestantisme et Capitalisme* Paris: Armand Colin 1970, p. 19

111 Raymond Aron 1967, p. 543

112 H. Tyrell, 1990, «Worum geht es in der «Protestantischen Ethik?»» *Saeculum*, vol 41, no. 2, 130 sqq.