

The Economic Performance of Great Religions

An Alternative to Weber's Rationalism

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Abstract: *Ultimately, institutions are opportunity cost patterns in terms of the all-inclusive mega-goods wealth and power, while cultural preferences are preference rankings of collectivities for the same mega-goods. It is this transcultural perspective on institutions and cultures which makes it possible to look at the consistency of a religion with economic performance by taking into account religious rules and values which directly characterize the mega-good power and only indirectly the mega-good wealth. Consequently, besides criteria which have a direct bearing on the easiness to produce wealth—the preference for absolute wealth, the type of asceticism, the encouragement of saving and productive investment, the level of prohibition of interest—more numerous and better depicted criteria related to power can be employed such as: the kind of divinity, the kind of salvation, the encouragement of obedience, the type of social justice which is encouraged, man's power over woman, the kind of ecclesiastical organization. All of the six religions and a religion substitute which are analyzed—Judaism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Islam, Confucianism and Buddhism—show almost the same rankings of consistency with economic performance for all direct and indirect criteria which are employed.*

Keywords: church, culture, economic growth, institutions

I. INTRODUCTION

Is religion determining economic performance, and if so, what is the mechanism of this causal determination? How are the great (most prevalent) religions ranked in terms of their consistency with economic performance? This paper presents a model that proves an intimate relationship between religion and economic performance. The model itself is based on a different fundamental perspective, the general power perspective, which allows a variation in fundamental human personalities and departs significantly from the invariable orthodox *homo oeconomicus*; in other words, it brings culture to the core of an economic theory. In Chapter II, I analyse Weber's rationalism as an orthodox way to approximate

the influence of religion on the choice of capitalism and economic performance. I also examine Weber's implicit fundamental assumption, then suggest in what way it is wrong and how it should be changed. In Chapter III, I introduce briefly my own model of analysing the consistency between a religion and economic performance and identify the consistency criteria. Chapters IV, V and VI contain a rather detailed analysis of the ranking of Judaism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodoxism, Confucianism, Islam and Buddhism by employing a direct consistency criterion—the preference for absolute wealth—and two indirect criteria: the kind of divinity and the kind of salvation. The final chapter, “Conclusions,” points out the similarity of consistency rankings derived based on all three consistency criteria.

II. WEBER'S RATIONALISM VERSUS THE GENERAL POWER PERSPECTIVE

If we accept that capitalism is an efficient institutional setting in terms of wealth, Weber's idea that its adoption by Western countries is due to a special Western rationalism allows us to embark on the same present course of Western economic (but not only economic) theory: The objective of wealth or economic performance is the only mega-objective of all cultures or is a transcultural objective and, consequently, the only possible way to learn something about why some countries are rich and most others have stayed poor for centuries is to look into the means of generating wealth. Let me pinpoint the difficulties of such a course by making special reference to Weber's rationalism.

In brief, the logic in Weber's idea of Western rationalism as a partial determinant of modern capitalism is that a certain type of religion—Protestantism, especially English Puritanism as derived from Calvinism—is based on a type of rational behaviour that favours the shaping of capitalistic spirit and the type of economic system which has prevailed in Western countries in the modern age. This effect of Protestant rationalism on “modern capitalistic culture” or “what today is called progress” was unintended, derived from “purely religious characteristics,” and must be based on some biological or anthropological feature of Westerners (Weber, 1985:30), because “we find again and again that, even in departments of life apparently mutually independent, certain types of rationalization have developed in the Occident, and only there” (Weber, 1985:30). Because the former terms I have employed for characterizing the role of Western rationalism—“determinant” and “shaping”—might suggest a too-rigid causal relation, I should add that, to Weber, in order for economic rationalism be adopted successfully, individuals

have to have “the ability and disposition...to adopt certain types of rational practical conduct” which depend heavily on “magical and religious forces” because they have been, especially in the past, “the most important formative influence on conduct” (Weber, 1985:26, 27). According to Weber, the cultural determination of capitalism is weak enough that it might have been very well developed in China, India or Islamic countries, in the modern era or also in antiquity.¹

The fundamental assumption in Weber’s model is the validity of a generally and uniquely desired human meta-objective which in this way becomes some kind of transcultural good: the mega-objective of wealth. If this was not the case, talking about the failure of some rich countries to develop capitalism would make no sense. Because it is the case of a single mega-objective, adopting the efficient institutional setting—capitalism—is not a problem of choice but a technical problem, or a problem of identifying and being able to adopt the proper means for a single human mega-goal. Thus when some collectivity appears to have failed to adopt the proper efficient setting of capitalism, one runs into a problem which cannot be solved except by a discipline such as “comparative racial neurology and psychology”; it is a direction which some economists like North (2005), who seemed to have followed Weber’s suggestion very closely, have taken—although again without much success.

In this paper I take a completely different stance, the analytical power of which will be tested in shaping a different model for measuring the consistency between economic performance and religion. But before presenting it in a more explicit form, let me first introduce it here in preliminary form by relating it to some components of Weber’s model. To assume only the mega-objective wealth and ignore the mega-objective power is tantamount to grossly ignoring the past and current experience of many cultures. Anyone living for some time in a culture other than a Western one could not help but observe that people are relatively very interested in the mega-good power, and trade power positions or status (which is a good derived from power) for wealth. This fact alone could recommend power as a good on equal footing with wealth, that is,

¹ “The Chinese would in all likelihood be just as capable as the Japanese, and probably more capable, of acquiring a capitalism which has reached full development both technically and economically in the modern culture area. It is clearly quite inconceivable that the Chinese should perhaps by nature ‘not be [sufficiently] talented’ to cope with such demands as this would make. However despite the variety of conditions which, in comparison with the West, were apparently conducive to the rise of capitalism, capitalism was not created in China any more than it was in antiquity (both oriental and occidental), or in India and the sphere of influence of Islam” (Weber, 1984:81).

independent of wealth. But well-known philosophers and economists also acknowledged power as the other fundamental human objective, such as just two of the social classics: Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill. There is no better defence of the idea of power as a human mega-objective than *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Leaving aside that the assumption of wealth as a unique human mega-objective put economic theory at odds with some other sound social disciplines, at least sociology² and political science, it also produced “theories” which replaced one unknown for another one and had basic internal inconsistencies.³

Dropping the assumption of the unique mega-objective of wealth and taking the stance of two all-inclusive mega-objectives—wealth and power—opens the door to very different definitions of rules and institutions and recommends a completely different relationship between a religion and an economic system. Within such a framework a rule instates a patterned behaviour because individuals face patterned opportunity costs for the relevant alternatives among which they choose. An institution is a set of rules for interacting individuals and, fundamentally, consists of patterned opportunity costs for the mega-objectives wealth and power. Each institution, irrespective of the particular field or sector to which it belongs, consists of a ranking in terms of opportunity costs for the two mega-objectives. Whatever the specific activity of a sector within the same collectivity, that is, within the same culture, all of that collectivity’s institutions have the same representative ranking of the two mega-objectives in terms of opportunity costs. The institutions of a church, an economic system and a school, for instance, which belong to the same collectivity, should have the same opportunity costs attached to the two mega-objectives.

Assuming the maximand of general power or the amount of control one human being can exercise on his external reality, satisfaction becomes a signal for maximization success. In a consistent way, preferences are shaped inversely to the opportunity costs of alternative actions. Within the same perspective, the culture of one collectivity becomes for economists the representative preference ranking for that collectivity in terms of the same two mega-objectives

² All sociologists acknowledge the reality of very different cultures, but what is culture other than a preference ranking for the human mega-objectives, and so, implicitly, the ranking of wealth?

³ In his theory of failure to adopt efficient institutions, North (2005) substitutes the unknown of how ideologies are shaped for the unknown of why communities fail to adopt efficient institutions. In addition, he moves between a situation with just one mega-objective and a situation with more mega-objectives, within the same model, apparently without being aware of doing so (see Fudulu, 2003).

wealth and power, and institutions are chosen consistently with cultural preferences. There is no longer any difficulty in placing culture at the core of economic theory, and the relevant question becomes: What factor shaped the particular cultural preference ranking of the two mega-objectives? Whatever cultural determinants theory suggests, it is clear that they are not in the range of human choice. Taking into account that the wealth level is now a derived result of a more comprehensive maximization, the differences in economic performance are not a matter of rationality but a normal result of different constraints and preferences faced by individuals belonging to various collectivities.

Coming back to Weber, although he makes very clear and even emphasizes the fact that rationalism depends on the assumed end, one cannot find the least effort to try to link the different rationalisms which he identifies (although few in number) to the possible different ends. Of course, this is not surprising as long as he has in mind “the fundamental importance of the economic factor” or the general prevalence of the objective of wealth. Let us take the case of the Catholic believer, whom Weber does not appreciate very much because he did not carry so far “the rationalization of the world” (1985:117). Unlike the Catholic, the Puritan replaced the magician/priest who “dispensed atonement, hope of grace, certainty of forgiveness” and encouraged as such a life from hand-to-mouth with a conduct of having a planned and systematic character for his whole life. From the perspective I suggest here, Weber errs grossly. We have here two separate social realities which are guided by two different mega-objectives. In turn, these mega-objectives were shaped by characteristic human interactions and require different means and rationalizations. The Puritan is focused on the objective of *absolute* wealth (the kind of wealth that does not simultaneously carry power objectives as it usually does), which by its very nature imposes a certain type of very precise rationalism. This rationalism must bring about a very exact conduct which results in absolute wealth only. How could it be otherwise when even nowadays economists have serious difficulties in understanding this objective? The classical concept of productive labour, which is nothing more than labour generating absolute wealth, is even today, by a gross misunderstanding, considered “the most maligned concept in the history of economic doctrines” (Blaug, 1983:56). Lacking the deep understanding of (absolute) wealth as power over natural environment, and not being able to grasp the

grotesqueness of the logic, many economists even today identify resources as a determinant of economic growth.⁴

Unlike the Puritan, the Catholic of the Middle Ages invoked by Weber is a type of man focused to a higher degree on power or status and, as such, he should be modelled as acting within a society where power inequalities are comparatively much higher. Consequently, his salvation is based on the employment of a priest with a superior power and the rationalization of such a “means” does not require a very detailed or systematic description; what should be made clear is the specification of his superior power. Whenever there are great power inequalities or when the various decisions for all are shaped by those having a higher power, there is just one relevant rule: The individual having superior power decides, including whether or not to have any other rules. This case is not one in which rationalization is absent; it is a case where rationalization is adapted to the specific purpose of power; the type of rationalism is imposed by the nature of the end to be rationalized. Taking into account that the capitalistic system (as with any other economic system) consists of a specific opportunity costs ranking of the human mega-ends, it is not Western rationalism that determines capitalism but the other way around: capitalism determines Western rationalism. The Chinese society did not develop a capitalist system not because it was not able to develop a Western rationalism, but because it had a different ranking of the human mega-ends, wealth and power.

By not understanding that within each society the nature of rationalism which is developed depends on the nature of the ends shaped within its specific culture, Weber values the Chinese personality by Western standards and, of course, finds that the most well-adapted Chinese have a way of life which “is not a systematic, homogeneous entity”; instead, that way of life remains “a series of events, not a whole seen methodically in the light of a transcendent scope,” and it has to be “characterized by essentially negative elements” (Weber, 1984:75). In reality, within the Chinese cultural preference ranking, power is by far the most important mega-objective.

⁴ Apparently, non-economists have a much better understanding of the deep meaning or determinants of economic growth. Weber seems to be an early proof of such reality: “The question of the motive forces in the explanation of modern capitalism is not in the first instance a question of the origin of the capital sums which were available for capitalistic uses, but, above all, of the development of the spirit of capitalism. Where it appears and is able to work itself out, it produces its own capital and monetary supplies as the means to its ends, but the reverse is not true” (1985:68). Because “the spirit of capitalism” is nothing more than the purpose or the objective shaped by this system, it is the shaping of ends through values and institutions which determines economic growth.

Consequently, a way of life which is an adaptation to the things outside (i.e. to the various conditions of the land of the living or when faced with a whimsical absolute emperor) is the most rational way of life. It is not the degree of rationality separating the two ways of life, but the different nature of their main purposes as they have been shaped by the specific cultural determinants.

The same confusion affects Weber when he identifies the personalization of social relations by the Chinese as the relevant determinant for the lack of evolution towards an abstract or formal type of laws: “In China all communal activity remained enclosed in and conditioned by purely personal relations, above all those resulting from kinship...” (Weber, 1984:79). This personalization of social relations entailed the fact that “all these forms of political and economic organizations...are very conspicuously lacking in an ability to achieve rational objectivity...” (Weber, 1984:78). By the same token, a Chinese judge was a patrimonial judge and did not make his decisions based on formal rules “irrespective of the person,” but “in accordance with the concrete qualities of the people concerned and the concrete situation...” (Weber, 1984:49).

Leaving aside the Western instrumental perspective on rules and looking at rules as patterned opportunity costs for alternative individual actions, there is no fundamental difference between a Western judge acting based on formal laws and a Chinese judge ruling on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the person and concrete situation. As soon as one accepts that originally, rules stemmed from choices and not choices from rules, when an individual is looked at as being in a fundamental sense a chooser, then the stereotyped or ruled behaviour follows from stereotyped or ruled choice situations. The particular cases of Western society would lead to patterned or ruled decisions even if judged by a Chinese patrimonial judge on a case-by-case basis or without having predefined rules. The reason is that his cases would be very similar because of the individual power equality specific to Western society, or because of the very similar individuals and situations. The same holds for Chinese society. Even if a Chinese judge had to act based on previously conceived formal rules, he would have reached the same decisions because the Chinese rules would have to be conceived differently for each interaction having a different power level. In other words, the Chinese formal rules would be very different from the Western ones, because rules are a precise description of the power levels or distances characteristic to the

interacting individuals whose behaviour is ruled, and the two different cultures, Western and Chinese, belong to collectivities within which individuals have specific individual power levels. The patterned opportunity costs that make up the content of the rules cannot be generated except by interacting individuals impinging one upon another, constraining each other's behaviour; it is individuals' power that shapes the patterned opportunity costs. Within the same model, there is no enforcement of the rules other than the interacting individuals' actions.

III. THE CONSISTENCY CRITERIA

Because religious dogmas and the institution of a church consist of religious values and rules, identifying their consistency with economic performance requires decoding them in terms of preferences and opportunity costs for the mega-objectives wealth and power. The level of consistency will be ultimately determined in terms of the preference for wealth based mainly on the following correlations: (1) the inverse correlation between the preference and the opportunity costs for each of the two mega-objectives, (2) the inverse correlation between the preferences for the two mega-objectives, and (3) the inverse correlation between the opportunity costs of the two mega-objectives. Although I identified criteria which have direct reference to wealth, the most important ones are those depicting in an encoded manner the preferences or opportunity costs for power. It is mainly this difficulty, among others, which made the idea of describing the preference for wealth within a religious dogma so unthinkable. Even when references to wealth are very direct, without keeping separate the two fundamental aspects of the ordinary term "wealth"—absolute wealth and relative wealth—measuring the consistency level between a religious dogma and economic performance is very misleading (I shall deal with that problem in the next chapter).

Consequently, I classified the criteria of consistency in two sets. The first set consists of criteria which have a somewhat direct reference to wealth: the preference for absolute wealth, the type of asceticism, the level of encouragement of productive saving and the level of prohibition of interest. The second set consists of criteria which contain encoded references to the preference or the opportunity cost for power. Studying these criteria aims to identify the preference for power or its opportunity costs and then, through employing the correlations mentioned above, of

the preference for wealth. The indirect criteria are: the kind of divinity, the kind of salvation, the encouragement of obedience to earthly authorities, the power of men over women, the type of social justice which is encouraged, the level of separation of religious authorities from earthly ones and the type of organization of the church. This study is limited to just three of those indirect criteria: the preference for absolute wealth, the kind of divinity and the kind of salvation.

IV. THE PREFERENCE FOR ABSOLUTE WEALTH

Describing the reality of very different levels of consistency between religious dogmas and economic performance is an impossible task when man is modelled as being exclusively interested in “wealth.” Laudable references to “wealth” can be found in most of cultures and religions. It is no wonder that wealth and riches, as well as wealthy and rich, are very misleading words because they refer simultaneously to two magnitudes: absolute and relative, or two objectives: absolute wealth and power. In other words, wealth is simultaneously absolute wealth and relative wealth. Based on models in which the two aspects are not kept separate, it is impossible to trace down any valid correlation between references to the desire for “wealth” as an ordinary term and economic performance. It is the desire for *absolute* wealth which is conducive to economic growth and not the desire for wealth as an indicator of relative position or power level. For this reason, any statement about the desire for ordinary “wealth” should be supplemented by additional information about the preference for power or other suggestive phenomena or processes that are characteristic to that specific religious dogma.

For instance, absolute wealth is associated with the encouragement of activities like maximizing profit as an end in itself, functional asceticism (a level of asceticism which is compatible with absolute wealth growth), rejection of consumerism, encouragement of standardizing life (which is compatible with standardizing production and efficiency), and labour as calling and specialization in one field. Relative wealth or the power aspect of wealth is associated with a high preference for leisure, sociability, idle talk, luxury consumption, ostentatious consumption, sports, hunting and all-round education.

Let me present a comparative analysis of Protestantism and Confucianism in this respect. Apparently, both perspectives contain a high desire for economic performance. For Protestants, “To wish to be poor was...the same as wishing to be unhealthy” (Weber, 1985:163) and regarding Confucianists Weber thinks in about the same terms: However in the whole orthodox literature a high regard for economic activity is notably conspicuous. Even Confucius would strive after riches...” (Weber, 1984:52). Things are not quite so, however. The types of wealth suggested by the two statements are very different and the distance in their consistency with economic performance is great. In Calvinist Protestantism, the certainty of salvation is achieved by proficiency in a calling, which is performed not for reward or merit but because it is pleasing to God. Consequently, it is very likely that the result in terms of economic performance will be very good because labour as a calling is generating absolute wealth. Everyone’s labour has to be integrated within a division of labour which is not part of some divine scheme but is dependent on its efficiency in terms of absolute wealth (this is not the case in Catholicism, not even in Lutheranism). Labour as a calling was also for the rich and the businessman and, in a consistent way, the acquisition of wealth was encouraged, not just legalized. Correspondingly, the type of businessman shaped by Protestantism, however indirectly in Weber’s view, has no interest in power that could be derived from wealth: “He avoids ostentation and unnecessary expenditure, as well as conscious enjoyment of his power, and is embarrassed by the outward signs of the social recognition which he receives” (Weber, 1985:71).

Regarding Confucianism there are only arguments to conclude that wealth was status dependent and a signal for relative position or power. Weber’s whole quotation which was presented before is a good proof: “Even Confucius would strive after riches, though it might be as a servant, whip in hand” (Weber, 1984:53). In other words, Confucius desired wealth as a second or derived objective. For Confucius the position of a servant to the emperor was preferred over any activity covered by Protestant’s labour as a calling. As Weber makes very clear, “Profit-making through husbandry, medicine, or being a priest is regarded as the lesser (i.e. inferior) way” (1984:53). The other accompanying conditions of wealth suggest the same derived character of wealth. Because the risks of the business enterprise can disturb the equilibrium and harmony of the soul, an official position is considered to be superior. Also, along the same lines, for a Confucianist,

an all-round education⁵ was better than expertise in a single thing (Weber, 1984:53), which is accompanying the objective of absolute wealth.

How misleading statements about the desire for wealth can be is proved once again by Weber's other evaluation, this time relative to India: "From the standpoint of possible capitalistic development, the acquisitiveness of Indians of all strata left little to be desired and nowhere is to be found so little antichrematism and such high evaluation of wealth" (Weber, 1958:4). From a general power perspective this evaluation is strange. First of all, India is a country of castes, which constitutes a very strong proof for high power inequalities and, correspondingly, high preference for power and low preference for wealth. Another proof against Weber's evaluation is the fact that India had Buddhism, although only temporarily, as the prevalent religion, and this is one of the least consistent religions with economic performance. In Buddhism the root of all rebirths and sufferings consists in craving, so it is craving that individuals should stop first of all. But stopping a craving must be followed by stopping any effort to control the external reality, nature included. This is consistent at best with a rather "balanced" position between riches and poverty and most likely with all kind of behavioural rules that heavily discourage the production of wealth. The idea of "kindness and non-violence towards all forms of life" because "Humans are part of the same cycle of lives as other beings" (Harvey, 1990:38) and the idea of avoiding farming as it might harm worms and insects (Harvey, 1990:204) should have had a very strong discouraging effect on one of the most important wealth production sectors for millennia.

While "Christians stood in the way of their economic activities...Jews were never faced with this hindrance" (Sombart, 1913:210). Sombart accepts that the Holy Writ and Talmud contains a few passages wherein poverty is lauded, but it contains "hundreds of passages in which riches are called the blessing of the Lord" (1913:208). Correspondingly, in Judaism poverty is a curse (Sombart, 1913:212). But what is most important, and also an argument to rank Judaism even higher than Protestantism, by its precedence in time, is the fact that for the Jews possessions and

⁵ The emphasis on education by the Confucianist Chinese is not derived, as a Westerner would tend to think, from the objective of wealth growth. The kind of knowledge sought by a *literati* was status oriented: "Neither mathematics, nor natural sciences, nor geography, nor grammar were taught by schools" (Weber, 1984:40). In fact, the whole class of *literati* was conceived to support the absolute power of the emperor; education was functioning as a barrier to the transfer of positions of power within the system by inheritance, and as such as a barrier to power concentrations dangerous to the emperor.

their enjoyment were seen “not as an end in themselves but as a means to do God’s Will on earth” (1913:205). The proper translation of this idea, from the perspective of my model, is that wealth was in no way a means to other earthly objectives like power, but it was an end in itself; in other words, it was absolute wealth. Production and the continuous increase of the production of wealth was an end beyond any other end; it was given by God.

Consequently, the consistency ranking is:

- *High*: Judaism, Protestantism
- *Low*: Catholicism, Orthodoxism, Confucianism, Buddhism
- *Not ranked*: Islam.

V. THE KIND OF DIVINITY

VI. Having or Not a Divinity or a Religion

Before starting to analyse the different components of the different religions in order to characterize the ranking of the mega-objective of power based on the religious values and rules, I would note that even the presence or absence of a religion within some societies can tell something about how important power is for that society and how unimportant wealth is.⁶ To have a religion and accept divine beings implies the existence of someone who sets limits on any earthly authority by his very existence. China is a good example of such a situation. It is true that a great religion having its own eschatology and soteriology have never emerged in China, but even Taoism, considered by Weber as “no more as [than an] organization of the magicians” (1984:72), was repressed and replaced by a doctrine of the philosophers. The Confucianist bureaucrats must have been an excellent tool for serving the power of an absolute emperor because they not only replaced a potential independent priesthood but kept the hereditary nobility away from the power structure. By having a selection based on exams, the emperor was assured that the intermediary class he needed so much for the administration of the vast territory and large population had a brake on the potential concentration and consolidation of power by heredity. Confucianist bureaucrats added to the power superiority of the emperor and set a large

⁶ The reverse is not true. Two religions claiming the ruling of all human conduct can have very different consistencies with wealth production. The best examples for this situation are Judaism and Islam. While the former competes for the highest consistency, Islam will show a very low level of consistency.

gulf between educated and uneducated, between *literati*⁷ and “the stupid people” (Weber, 1984:48). It ensured that the Chinese culture remained a culture centred on a high preference for power and, against the prevalent Western prejudice, hostile to economic growth—indeed, one of the cultures least consistent to production of wealth.

While in the case of China the “no religion” situation was the outgrowth of the earthly authority, in Asia or, more precisely, India, this was a direct result of the Buddhist religion itself. Concerned with salvation of a small group of very spiritual and able monks, Buddhism sets a very large distance in power between the elite and the inferior potential laity. From the perspective I am following here, there is no inconsistency between its internal logic and the renunciation of this material world because near-to-absolute power is consistent with near-to-absolute inexistence of wealth.⁸ To become consistent even with a very high preference for power, as is the case with the Asian cultures, the ancient Buddhism had been diluted to a considerable extent.⁹ By this sub-criterion, Buddhism and Confucianism are for sure ranked less consistent in comparison to other religions.

The entailed consistency ranking is:

- *Relatively higher*: Judaism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodoxism and Islam
- *Relatively lower*: Buddhism, Confucianism.

V2. Monotheism, Polytheism and All-Soul

The notion of a god or an absolute and transcendent being means at minimum that no human earthly being is going to be a god; even the most privileged prophet remains a human being, that is, less than a god. The entailed consequence for my model is that infinite power is not attainable for a human being and, as such, near-to-absolute disinterest in the material world or wealth is

⁷ The *literati* lacked an education conducive to wealth growth (such as natural science, grammar, math, geography) and retained in their education only learning components supporting status. Referring to their training, Weber noted: “Neither mathematics, nor natural sciences, nor geography nor grammar were taught by schools” (1984:40).

⁸ The near-to-absolute power concentration in Buddhism is confirmed by Herberg who, referring to the idea of self-salvation in Greco-Oriental religions, states: “...such confident claims to self-salvation are nothing short of blasphemy. They amount to *self-absolutisation* [emphasis added] in its most presumptuous form. For man is thus held to be entirely self-sufficient; he does not need God, not even for his own salvation” (1961:52).

⁹ Before being exported from India to other Asian countries, ancient Buddhism had to be reformed along the lines of the needs of less-educated laity who needed a priesthood and religious institutions like a temple as helpers to salvation.

ruled out. There is a large variation in the possible power level between less-than-infinite power and zero power or power equality, and there is a difference between a situation with just one god and a situation with more gods. Monotheism not only excludes infinite power but makes equality more likely. It is only monotheism that makes possible the highest consistency with economic performance, and it is no accident that it was refined by none other than Jews after many centuries.

Monotheism—a single creator for all human beings—underlies a fundamental equality: A father should view his sons as equals. Polytheism implies different simultaneous rankings of the mega-goods wealth and power and, as such, the idea of inequality is intrinsic; there may be different favourite gods, different rankings of power or wealth and, consequently, different economic performances. Polytheism ensures that a single human interest in just wealth is not possible. When the absolute reality is impersonal, impassive, and does not transcend the world but pervades or it is the very universe, the human being tends, finally, to reunite with that absolute reality as, for instance, in the case of the All-Soul in Buddhism. Instead of a fellowship with God, although never God, the individual becomes part of the absolute, part of the divinity. With absolute or infinite power entailed, it should be no surprise that there is no interest in this world and its material aspects.

Because all religions covered by this study are monotheist except Buddhism, the entailed consistency ranking is:

- *Relatively higher*: Judaism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodoxism and Islam
- *Close to zero*: Buddhism
- *Not ranked*: Confucianism.

V3. Transcendence

Transcendence suggests a significant limitation of an individual's power; an individual can never become God because “union with a transcendental God...could not be possible to a finite creature” (Jacobs, 2005:44). Lack of transcendence opens the gate to intermediaries, saviours and mysticism and allows a considerable degree of earthly power concentration. The higher the

degree of transcendence, the higher the consistency with economic performance. While Judaism stays firm in defending transcendence, Christianity potentially dilutes it by a three-person God, which facilitates, at least by Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ as Saviour, the role of earthly intermediaries such as priests and the institution of a church.¹⁰ While Protestantism, especially Puritanism, to a considerable degree shuts the door to intermediaries by the ideas of predestination and salvation by faith,¹¹ which is equivalent to a higher transcendence, Catholicism and Orthodoxism allow a considerable degree of intermediation. The charge made by Catholics against the Orthodox for the confession that the Holy Spirit proceeds “from the Father by the Son” instead of “from the Father and the Son” is, in fact, about the degree of transcendence and it is the Catholics defending a higher degree.¹²

A transcendent God entails divine standards for an imperfect earthly world and logically matches the Jewish idea of sin. Because Confucianism’s ethic was an “accommodation to the world” rather than the other way around and “quite intentionally left man as he was in his personal relationships, not only those borne of nature, but also those resulting from social relations between superior and inferior” (Weber, 1984:78), it is equivalent to a low or close-to-zero transcendence degree. Regarding Buddhism, it is clear that it completely rejects transcendence by accepting the possibility that an individual’s soul reunites with the absolute or divine reality of All-Soul. Unlike Weber (and the other criteria will show the same situation), my model recommends Buddhism as the religion opposite of Judaism and Protestantism and close to Confucianism and Islam.¹³

¹⁰ It is by these two components that an earthly institution like a church becomes closely related to divinity: “Since the Lord did not merely approach humanity but became one with it, Himself becoming man, the Church is the Body of Christ...” (Bulgakov, 1988:1), or “the life of the Holy Spirit in humanity” (Bulgakov, 1988:3).

¹¹ Salvation by faith and not by works as patented by Luther leaves an important role for a Redeemer or a mediator; in Calvinism even such a unique mediator is made impossible by the idea of predestination.

¹² An equal degree of divinity suggested by Catholic wording leaves less room for intermediation as compared with the Orthodox wording which suggests that the Son has a somehow lower degree of divinity and is better fit to intermediate.

¹³ Weber holds the contrary opinion: “Ancient Buddhism represents in almost all practically decisive points the characteristic polar opposite of Confucianism as well as of Islam” (1958:206).

My model seems to have a problem with Islam because its Allah has a very high formal transcendence but does not contain the idea of sin¹⁴ and, as such, has the permanent impossibility for human beings to attain standards which only a transcendent God could set. On the contrary, it seems that Muslim ethic rules come very close to the world, resembling more a Confucian ethic rather than a Protestant or even less a Judaic one, based on a steadfast transcendence. And this inconsistency seems to be confirmed again by the facts that the Muslim believer's relation with Allah is a direct one or knows no intermediary, and the great equality expressed by some aspects of Islamic practice (such as all Muslims praying at the same time, with the same position and direction of the body, the annual *hajj*, etc.).

To overcome the fact that Islam does not have a strong logical or internal consistency (Grieve, 2006)¹⁵, I am going to confront its formal statements with its practice and, any time a certain aspect of practice seems to reveal preferences which contradict the formal statements, I am going to take the revealed preferences as the true Islam values. Based on this assumption, one could note that transcendence and the entailed rule of a direct relation between a Muslim believer and Allah is contradicted by the reality of the Muslim commonwealth or *ummah*¹⁶ which had at the top an absolute ruler who ran, on the basis of *Shariah*,¹⁷ earthly and heavenly affairs, impinging heavily on believers' freedom. In a formal act such as a prayer, a Muslim believer is left alone with God, but in all other actions of his real life, which should be guided by God's rules, he is closely watched by an absolute earthly boss.

¹⁴ In the Qur'an Adam regrets his sins and is forgiven by God. Consequently, there is no need for a Redeemer and man can live happily in this life and in the paradise in the next (Grieve, 2006:35).

¹⁵ Grieve (2006:98) makes the point that a "detailed dogma," an "all-embracing Muslim code" based on which the moral concept of Islam is to be definitively listed and "that matches the catechisms of Christian churches" does not exist. One reason might be that the logical consistency of the Qur'an had been eroded right at the time of its revelation by the practical problems face by Muhammad as a real leader of the *ummah*. He mentions "the fortuitous arrival of certain surahs" and "the abrogation of earlier verses by later revelations" (2006:69). Other possible reasons might be that the whole system of rules which makes up Islam is based on the Qur'an and, even more importantly, on Hadith, the life of the Prophet, and it seems that Muhammad did not in all instances follow the rules of the Qur'an. For instance, Grieve points out that despite the many issues which are "legislated" in the Qur'an, "in practice Muhammad treated legal issues on the merits of each individual case" (2006:66).

¹⁶ Grieve writes: "The combination of parity and solidarity is expressed through all aspects of the practice of Islam and is emphasized frequently in the Qur'an" (2006:19).

¹⁷ The system of rules which makes up Islam covers all aspects of life, even those which cannot be regulated without affecting individuals' freedom. It is for this reason that "Islam can therefore appear to be 'intolerant' in imposing restrictions that Westerners would find unconscionable in their own lives" (Grieve, 2006:22).

This is a negation of transcendence, and because it is derived from a comprehensive practice I assume it to prevail over formal transcendence. Summing up, the real Islamic transcendence is certainly higher than the Buddhist, but lower than the transcendence of Judaic and Christian religions. This ranking is even more likely for Shi'a Muslims, wherein the six ranks of clerics that intermediate between God and believers are so strong that "obedience to guidance given from above, in both religious matters and politics, provides a pure and certain course of action, almost absolving the faithful from personal responsibility" (Grieve, 2006:275).

The entailed consistency ranking is:

- *Listed in descending order:* Judaism, Protestantism (Puritanism, Lutheranism), Catholicism, Orthodoxism, Islam (Sunnis, Shi'a), Buddhism
- *Not ranked:* Confucianism.

VI. THE KIND OF SALVATION

VI.1 Salvation and Human Power. Taking into account that salvation seems to be the most important purpose of a religious life, it is here where we seem to have the best description of the ranking of mega-objectives that is contained by some religions. Consequently, it is exactly here where the likelihood of having direct reference to wealth or economic performance is the lowest and the difficulty of decoding the preference for wealth is the most difficult. Before entering the salvation specifics of different great religions, I am going to suggest how the different ways of salvation could be looked at in order to understand the indirect economic meaning of the encoded description of the mega-objective power.

Salvation, most generally, means salvation from death, which is a direct consequence of man turning from God and approaching a sinful behaviour. Leaving behind this very general meaning of salvation, there are differences in the specific meanings given by the various religions. This fact suggests very different power levels or power preferences and, implicitly, very different wealth levels and wealth preferences encouraged by those religions. If for Orthodoxism "The salvation of all is, then, the deification of human nature" (Bulgakov, 1988:106), then for Judaism, "Man's proper condition is fellowship with God in faith and

obedience” (Herberg, 1951:51), in other words, close to God but never God. The closer the individual’s identification with God within some religions, the greater the power level and power preference encouraged by that religion. Between the Orthodox stance and the Jewish one there is a subtle difference, but this signals an important difference in terms of power preference: It is for certain that the Orthodox religion justifies a greater preference for power in comparison to the Jewish religion. Also under this criterion, the ancient Buddhism falls again at the extreme: The ancient Buddhist strives to become more than God because he aims at liberation from the rebirth cycles, and gods themselves are to be reincarnated after some more time spent in Paradise; the power level and the preference for power encouraged by Buddhism are the highest.

The following could be ways to salvation: works, faith, meditation and divine Grace. To each of these is attached an actor: the individual believer seeking salvation, the intermediary who could be a priest, a magician or a redeemer, and God. The divine Grace does not bring any danger; because the individual is saved by only God’s will there is no earthly actor involved and as such no earthly power, individual or institutional, that has to be encouraged to develop or to be justified. God’s grace is a safe defender of men’s equality and the degree to which it is employed; the entailed preference for power is low or zero, and wealth can grow unhampered by religious motives. When works enter the scene of salvation, the divine Grace ceases proportionally to play a role and the danger of sinful human pride, tendency to absolutization or becoming God is real. When Luther rejected works as a way to salvation he was worried about “laws,” “teachings of men,” a “perverse leviathan” and the fact that “freedom and faith are destroyed” (M. Luther, as cited in Hillerbrand, 1968:19). In other words, he was concerned that works would encourage human power and earthly authority.

While by faith the role of the believer in salvation is somehow diluted, another danger no less important than that posed by works emerges: the role and, consequently, the power of the intermediaries, whether individual or institutional. The magician, the priest and the church pretend to have the monopoly of “mysteries” that can help an individual to reunite with God. All these are earthly holders of power and they encourage the preference for power and as such will discourage concentration of human energies on the production of wealth. There is no more important role for the individual seeking salvation than when he employs meditation. Salvation

in this case is wholly the individual's performance, without redeemers, God, priests, magicians or other individuals. It is for this reason that the Buddhist monk can propel himself even beyond the station of gods; there cannot be a higher level of power attained by a human being and no greater inconsistency with economic performance.

VI.2 Orthodoxism and Catholicism. The main conclusion of the former analysis is that the ranking of the mega-objective power (implicitly, the mega-objective wealth) is done by different salvation dogmas through variations in the weights attached to two different in kind actors: the human and divine or the individual and magicians, priests, church, on one side, and God on the other side. The greater the role for human actors, the greater the weight attached to power and the lower the consistency with economic performance. Let me start with the Orthodox religion and employ Bulgakov (1988), an authority in the field. Salvation can be appropriated "by a personal effort" (1988:106), "through the action of faith," but "the striving for salvation is also expressed by works," because "Faith without works is dead" (1988:107). Bulgakov does not see the danger Luther saw in works or active faith. If he would accept any danger, it would consist of the fact that by having no part in the realization of our salvation it could be implied that "we are incapable of anything else" (1988:108).

The eagerness to prove our human abilities is tantamount to eagerness to prove our own human power, our ability to save ourselves, and the idea that "By doing so we do not become our own co-redeemer and co-saviour with Christ" (Bulgakov, 1988:108) ceases to be so convincing. A few lines further Bulgakov accepts that there is room for merit in the Orthodox dogma and this confirms that his statements are contradictory; when one accepts works or active faith, he necessarily accepts the idea of merit and diminishes in direct relation the role of God. In his own view, the juridical or the idea of merit "plays a minor part in the Orthodox idea of salvation, while in other confessions, it occupies a much larger place" (1988:108). Taking into account that he is hinting at Jews and maybe Catholics, let me elaborate a little bit. Within Judaism, man's deeds are very important, but this does not entail the danger of human power concentration for two reasons. First, within Judaism, there is no intermediary in salvation, no priests, and no redeemers. Consequently, there is no danger that a human authority might take advantage and gather power. Second, the individual believer accepts wholly that the judge of his

deeds is God and only God; he does not claim to play his part in the realization of his salvation; what he is doing consists of presenting his deeds in a most humble way in front of God. Salvation is through God's ways, laid down in the Torah and by God. We are here at the other extreme in relation to the individual Buddhist who seeks salvation completely independent of God. The great Protestant reformers and all individuals seeking salvation as free individuals should not be worried about our ability to perform works or deeds, but about the possibility that works or human deeds favour power inequalities, and the possibility of a man being employed as an instrument by other men. In this regard there is no religion more clear-cut than Judaism. For Jews the only King is God, which means there is no other earthly King; Jews should be absolutely free of any earthly power. To a Christian this might be hard to understand, but Jesus' statement about being the King of Jews might have been in the Jews' eyes a sin enough to entail death on a cross.

However small the real role of the Orthodox believer in the realization of his salvation, it does not lead us very far from a situation which is equivalent to a very important or exclusive role. If one seeks to find in what way God accomplishes salvation of the Orthodox believer, what he finds out is that important human intermediaries are projected in very high power positions. When the Orthodox believer wishes to walk in the ways of God and tries to read the Holy Scripture, he discovers very soon that the personal reception of "the truth of the Word of God" is possible "only if one is in spiritual union with the Church" (Bulgakov, 1988:13). For the "reception of the Grace of the Holy Spirit," which, of course, abides in the Church, God also "has been pleased to establish a definite way...in the holy mysteries" or sacraments (Bulgakov, 1988:111), which, of course, are made available only by Orthodox priests. There must be a huge difference in power between a believer who cannot reach to God but by the mysteries of a saint or church, and priests of that church holding the power to deliver the holy sacraments.

Now that I have stripped down the Orthodox specific wording in respect to salvation, it seems that it is hard to find under this criterion a difference between Orthodoxy and Catholicism and to rank them decisively. The Catholic doctrine of justification also contains two components: One that emphasizes the role of divine grace and another that allows "man's religious and moral powers to play their part in the work of grace" (Adam, 1954:195). In a similar way with

Orthodoxism, “The decisive word of sanctification is not spoken by man, but by God, in the sacrament’s visible sign of grace” (Adam, 1954:195) such as “there is no salvation outside the Church” (174). One way to trace down the subtle differences between Orthodoxism and Catholicism would be to follow descriptions of the two main actors—individual believer and church—which could point out differences in their “personalities” and, consequently, their values or preferences. Bulgakov is very supportive in this regard too. Although receiving the unmerited part of the Holy Grace is for both religions impossible outside the church, there is much more stress on mysticism within the Orthodox Church and this is proof enough to safely draw the conclusion that Orthodoxism encourages higher levels of power and higher preferences for power in comparison to Catholicism.

Two other differences lead to the same conclusion. The first, “The West is more practical, the East more contemplative” (Bulgakov, 1988:151). Taking into account the context, Bulgakov wanted to say that the Western Church or the Catholic is more inclined to fight for its cause in the real world, while the Eastern or the Orthodox is more on a defensive stance. These are in fact the different attitudes of the more powerful and the weaker of the party, which is almost in a situation of equality relative to its opponent, and the party with relatively much lower capabilities. Speaking about the representative Apostles of the two churches, Bulgakov mentions John, the Apostle of Love, for Orthodoxism and Peter for Catholicism. What a clear difference in attitude and, consequently, power: “John wished to rest on the Master’s breast, while Peter asked if two swords were enough and concerned himself with the organization of the Church” (Bulgakov, 1988:151). The second, the “people of God” so characteristic of Orthodoxy are “the poor and simple,” “outwardly powerless” or those who “are without defence” (Bulgakov, 1988:151). It is no surprise that such a group of believers are going to make possible higher power levels and to cherish higher preferences for power in comparison to the Catholic believers, about whom such a description is not likely to be found.

VI.3 Protestantism. Contrary to Weber’s opinion, according to which Protestant ideas have an indirect or derived effect on the development of capitalism and the impossibility that the

representatives of Protestant ideas can directly promote “the spirit of capitalism,”¹⁸ the Protestant dogma of salvation is a strong proof that religious ideas (as part of cultural values of some collectivities) are a specific description of the ranking of the two human mega-objectives: power and absolute wealth. What Weber did not dare to even think about becomes clear-cut: “the spirit of capitalism” and the concept of calling are specific descriptions, fuzzy and sometime even dangerous, of the same exclusive preference for the mega-objective absolute wealth. It is simultaneously a ranking defining a situation of liberty, a situation of power dissipation or power equality. Power equality and absolute wealth are two facets of the same social reality, and Weber did not have that understanding of human social life. Both Luther and Calvin’s works contain descriptions of power equality or the corresponding revealed zero preference for power and the exclusive preference for wealth. Although their salvation dogmas are centered on the encoded description of the preference for power equality, they could not avoid making clear the entailed exclusive preference for absolute wealth within a culture where the interest in economic affairs had already started to gain weight.

When Luther started to think about faith as the right way for salvation he was possessed by a feeling of revulsion against God,¹⁹ ecclesiastical and civil authorities, all threatening and asking for works²⁰ (entailing punishments and rewards), putting coercive pressure on his satisfaction and liberty and adding pain to pain to “miserable sinners.”²¹ By rejecting a “righteous God who punishes sinners” and projecting a “passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith” (Luther, as cited in Hillerbrand, 1968:2), Luther implicitly rejected all earthly authorities or all human power objectives. By logical elaboration he must then have tried to

¹⁸ With reference to the investigation of the relationship between the old Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, Weber writes: “But it is not to be understood that we expect to find any of the founders or representatives of this religious movement considering the promotion of what we have called the spirit of capitalism in any sense the end of his life-work” (1985:89).

¹⁹ “Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that He was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners...” (Luther, as cited in Hillerbrand, 1968:2).

²⁰ “The ignorance and suppression of liberty very many blind pastors take pain to encourage. They stir up and urge on their people in these practices by praising such works, puffing them up with their indulgences, and never teaching faith” (Luther, as cited in Hillerbrand, 1968:24).

²¹ These do not at all fit Weber’s suggestion regarding a detachment on behalf of the great Protestant reformers from the problems of practical ethics or worldly interests like political, social or earthly happiness. Also, as Hillerbrand points out, “Calvin conceived his reformatory work in a broad political setting... [H]e set out not only to reform the faith of the Genevan citizens but also to transform the city itself” (1968:XVIII).

project the other single human objective available: absolute wealth. And here is absolute wealth and the logic leading to it with Luther's available religious concepts. "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works" (Luther, as cited in Hillerbrand, 1968:17). If a man could be justified by works he would not need the word of God so he would not need faith. He does works out of "brotherly love," as a good example and not as a commandment because the Christian man is a free man. A Christian man does good works as a calling, which is a necessary result of the state of freedom. Consequently, he does not seek merits, rewards and, as such, he does not need authorities and coercive power of whatever source. "The righteous man of his own accord does all and more than the law demands. But the unrighteous do nothing that law demands, therefore they need the law to instruct, constrain, and compel them to do good" (Luther, as cited in Hillerbrand, 1968:47).

A calling is performed by a free man, which means a calling has to be a work that generates absolute wealth. This concept is going to be much better depicted as the Protestant dogma moves toward Calvinism and other branches of the Reformed Church. Going all the way with the idea of a calling as work wholly freed of coercive power was too much for Luther's German society and he had to accept that doing "this and that as men command" might imply suffering "just as Christ did and suffered" (Luther, as cited in Hillerbrand, 1968:24). Accepting some coercive aspect of works, Luther decreases somewhat the specificity of a calling as wholly freed of non-coerced labour but much less than what Weber thought to be a "traditionalistic interpretation." Weber's relatively much greater emphasis on Luther's traditionalist perspective on calling stems from Luther's rejection of gain or profit as work motive and its replacement by brotherly love. But what Weber seems to have not understood very well is that gain and profit are getting a capitalist specific content to the degree that they are freed of any relative or power aspects, which is tantamount to saying that they are generated within a situation of freedom.²² Adam Smith's self-interest as an explanation for the division of labour is itself a result of power

²² Although Weber takes much pain to make clear the difference between the kind of profit making up "the capitalist spirit" and a different kind of profit as was conceived in the Middle Ages and ancient times, he finds no connection to the difference between labour in a traditional sense and a modern or capitalist sense. Now the latter can no longer be related to the difference between an absolute and, respectively, a relative magnitude, but consists of the difference between reacting to an opportunity to make more money and the tendency that "Everyone should abide by his living and let the godless run after gain" (Weber, 1984: 83). This is not at all the proper way to understand Luther's contribution.

equality and there is not at all a grotesque²³ contrast to Luther's brotherly love, as Weber points out; rather, from the perspective I am taking in this study, there is a strikingly similar position with respect to their basic determinant²⁴: power equality. In Luther's perspective it is exactly the free Christian man who is working in a calling and this aspect is completely overlooked by Weber. Weber's own definition of calling also lacks any reference to the required state of freedom and the result of absolute wealth.²⁵

As Luther could not go all the way with the idea of a calling, he could also not abandon completely the mega-objective of power. The remnant power objective can be perceived in the way the idea of salvation by faith was implemented by Luther. Forced into practical politics by his position as responsible head of his Church, "God's secret decrees as ultimate source of his state of grace receded more and more into the background" (Weber, 1984:102) and elements of ecclesiastical authority and mystical technique were preserved. According to the Lutheran Church "grace was revocable and could be won again by penitent humility and faithful trust in the word of God and in the sacraments" (Weber, 1984:102). What Luther did not finish was thoroughly achieved by Calvinism, especially English Puritanism. Once again, it is a matter of a simultaneous change in the weights for the two mega-goods and, unlike Weber's opinion, it is intimately connected with the English "character" or culture. Calvin's dogma, with its highest possible preference for absolute wealth, could have been conceived by someone belonging to a non-English collectivity, but could not be adopted by a non-English culture of that time.²⁶

²³ Smith had an excellent understanding of power as a human mega-objective and his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is a solid proof in this respect. His great economic book *Wealth of Nations* has power equality as its fundamental normative stance and without this understanding Weber would, this time, find Smith's defence of public financing of education within this very economic book, in order to build up the courage and martial spirit of the population, equally grotesque.

²⁴ In this respect Weber lacks any deep understanding and writes: "This he [Luther] proves by the observation that the division of labour forces every individual to work for others, but his view point is highly naïve, forming an almost grotesque contrast to Adam Smith's well-known statements on the same subject" (Weber, 1984:81).

²⁵ With reference to one's duty in a calling Weber writes: "It is an obligation which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity, *no matter in what it consists* [emphasis added]..." (Weber, 1985:54).

²⁶ Weber rejects any differences between English and German "characters" at the end of the Middle Ages (1984:88-89). But if we take character as consisting of cultural preferences in terms of the two mega-goods, absolute wealth and power, a difference however small is not surprising. As early as Hobbes' *Leviathan*, power equality was a basic feature of the English culture (and unfortunately it was considered general), while for Germans, even at the time Hegel was conceiving his writings, the social progress had begun with a slave and a master, that is, with a high power inequality. This fundamental difference in the assumptions about individuals' power must have stemmed from real individual power differences within the two societies.

Calvin's vehicle for the change in the preference for power is the idea of predestination, while the idea of a pure calling—labour producing only absolute wealth—is promoted by Calvinist worldly asceticism. In Calvinism, by God's sovereign decrees part of humanity is saved, the rest damned. To assume that human merit or guilt can change something is an impossible contradiction. Grace is impossible to be lost because it is impossible to be attained by those to whom God has denied it. No priest, no church, no sacraments can help an individual to change what God has decreed. The transcendental God cannot be moved by anything, no more by private confessions than by songs and rituals at the grave when the dearest are buried. The direct result of such a new radical situation is an individual believer who is not, as in Weber, "in deep spiritual isolation," but in deep independence of any exercise of earthly power. This believer is not torn away "from the closed ties with which he is bound to this world," while a Calvinist group has paradoxically a superior social organization (Weber, 1985:108), but is one to whom is offered an unrestrained liberty to shape social organization independent of any power constraints or power objectives. There is no greater power equality imaginable guarded by religious arrangements and no lower preference for power and, implicitly, higher preference for wealth, cherished by the same arrangements. The Puritan worldly asceticism entailed by later Calvinism development is nothing more than a consumption and general behaviour, which is wholly derived from the corresponding single available objective of absolute wealth.

VI.4 Judaism. If one could take Herberg's *Judaism and Modern Man* as an accurate description of Judaism, then in no other religion one can find an earlier and clearer description of salvation as salvation from the sin of self-absolutization, making man the instrument of other men or from the exercise of coercive power. For the Jewish, salvation is not like in the Christian religion, that is, salvation from death, because salvation is in this world as well. Early on Jews came to cherish the idea of liberty and to relate it to the idea of sin.²⁷ The struggle with Hellenism produced Pharisaism, that is, essentially, monotheism, and the struggle with Pauline Christianity produced the righteousness by the law of Talmud (Sombart, 1913), that is by complete

²⁷ This does not seem to be at all an accident. After wandering 40 years in the desert, the survivors could not have been other than the strongest (physically and mentally) or a collectivity of the strongest and most equal individuals. The commandments received by Moses on Mount Sinai, which contain an intrinsic strong preference for equality, could not but fit a people like the people of Israel after facing a very harsh natural climate for a long time.

rationality, without priests, church and mysticism. About one and a half millennia will be needed to get about the same kind of salvation through the evolution of Christianity towards Protestantism.

For the Jews, allegiance to God involves allegiance to no earthly power²⁸ and, respectively, allegiance to some earthly power would mean no allegiance to God. Consequently, faith in God is attachment to an earthly power equality or a rejection of coercive human power²⁹ and it is mirrored by the fact that “Hebraic religion proclaims the law of love to be the final rule of life” (Herberg, 1961:141). The Jewish fundamental commandment of equal love of one’s fellow man is nothing more than the principle of equal worth and, as such, of the fundamental equality of men. It is this normative perfect equality of Jews which produced their zero preference for power and exclusive preference for (absolute) wealth. It is for this same reason that “In all ages and in all lands Jews’ riches were proverbial” (Sombart, 1913:293).

By what I have already said, Judaism’s single rival for the highest degree of consistency by this criterion is Protestantism or more precisely Calvinism. There are two points which seem to suggest a slightly different ranking for the two religions. First, salvation in Judaism is done by God and thorough human works, and because each way has its own dangers “The Pharisaic position tried to hold the balance between man’s duty to strive to earn pardon and his inability to attain it without God’s gracious gift of it” (Abrahams, as cited in Herberg, 1961:123). Because salvation through works was so dangerous for Protestants that they did their best to get rid of it, it might seem that Judaism is below the level of consistency attained by Calvinism. Although this is only apparent because while Protestants had to fight against the reality of a strong ecclesiastical power concentration—and works did pose a real danger, very early on the Jews did away with priests, mysticism and the institution of a church; in Judaism works as a means to salvation did not possess a real danger of promoting earthly authority. The second point might very well put Calvinism on defence. If sin consists of the tendency to sufficiency, autonomy and, finally, self-absolutization, then this tendency should be discouraged in relation to God and

²⁸ Herberg writes: “Wellhausen has aptly described the Israelite ideal as a ‘commonwealth without [earthly] authorities’ in which all men are subject directly to God and his law” (1961:170).

²⁹ “The radical libertarian attitude remains a vital force in the rabbinic tradition, despite all vicissitudes of politics and history” (Herberg, 1961:170).

also in relation to the other human beings. This is the more valid when it is understood that the individual is not in fact a completely separate identity, but rather his own individual identity is in different degrees copies of the other individuals' identities, cultural and biological. It is for this reason that in Judaism salvation is through existential identification (Herberg, 1961:287), as a process which unfolds within a larger context. The Jew seeking salvation is fundamentally a member of a community and a "Son of the Covenant"; he is not the totally "isolated" Calvinist. At this single point, Calvinism seems to have a somehow lower consistency level in comparison with Judaism.

The entailed consistency ranking:

- *Listed in descending order:* Judaism, Protestantism (Calvinism, Lutheranism), Catholicism, Orthodoxism, Buddhism
- *Not ranked:* Islam, Confucianism.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

This paper presents an alternative to Weber's rationalism as a way to analyse how religion might determine economic performance. From the wrong orientation to the realm of means, the general power perspective shifts the locus of causal determination to variation in human mega-ends. The entailed change in the maximand produces a series of specific correlations which proves fundamental in identifying a direct and powerful relation between a religion and economic performance. In order to determine the specific level of consistency between a religion and economic performance, I have identified a number of criteria which consist of ideas or components of religious dogmas. They contain in different degrees encoded information about the preferences or opportunity costs for the all-inclusive human mega-ends wealth and power. Some of them contain information which makes direct reference to ordinary wealth or variables which are more directly related to absolute wealth: interest, saving, investment and consumption. Even these direct references can be very misleading if one does not keep separate the absolute and relative aspects of ordinary "wealth" and concentrates only on the control of nature or absolute wealth.

The richest information about the preference for absolute wealth is indirect or contained in fundamental components of religious dogmas. To reach the preference for absolute wealth based on these components, one has to first decode that information into preferences about power or opportunity costs of power. Finally, based on the preference for absolute wealth of a religion, one can pinpoint its level of consistency with economic performance.

I have identified four direct consistency criteria (the preference for absolute wealth, the type of asceticism, the level of encouragement for productive saving and the level of prohibition of interest) and seven indirect ones (the kind of divinity, the kind of salvation, the encouragement of obedience, the power of men over women, the type of social justice which is encouraged, the level of separation of religious authorities from earthly ones and the type of organization of the church). This study is limited to the analysis of only one direct criterion, the preference for absolute wealth, and two indirect criteria, the kind of divinity and the kind of salvation. Although the literature I covered did not allow a ranking of all religions for each of the three criteria, none of the rankings for each criterion seems to contradict the following general consistency ranking (in descending order): Judaism, Protestantism (Calvinism, Lutheranism), Catholicism, Orthodoxism, Islam (Sunnis, Shi'a), Confucianism and Buddhism.

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