A Critique of *Occidental Geist*: Embedded Historical Culturalism in the Works of Hegel, Weber and Huntington

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Abstract The comparative studies of world religions have been a distinctive part of Western thought. Hegel’s contribution to the philosophy of history is most clearly seen where he introduces a theory of historical development based on the secularisation of Christian cosmology. With Hegel, the Spirit (*Geist*), previously theologically understood, gradually becomes the embodiment of historical development. In the Hegelian vocabulary, the phenomenology of religion is formulated along with the theory of historical progress. In this article, I will argue that the question of historical development has been continuously elaborated in a culturalist fashion in works of Friedrich Hegel, Max Weber and Samuel Huntington as those scholars, through different intellectual traditions, essentialises the spiritual backgrounds of world religions and ties the phenomenology of religion with the philosophy of history in their historical analyses. This paper will argue that these scholars, by relying on the idealised images of religions and particularly of the Occidental Spirit, subtly elaborate the historical culturalist notion of development within Western thought. By arguing for an inherent link between religion and development, these scholars implicitly institutionalize a Eurocentric understanding of Western Christianity and the Occidental path of development within mainstream social theory. Be they philosophical (Hegel), sociological (Weber) or political (Huntington), the historical culturalism of these approaches shape our understanding of historical change, and ironically, instead of countering the excesses of crude materialism, they lead social theory into a form of Eurocentric historical culturalism.

I. Occidental Geist as Historical Dynamic

The category of change has a positive side. [...] The Orientals have understood this idea; it is perhaps the greatest idea they have ever produced, and it is possibly the most sublime of their metaphysical doctrines. [...] This, however, is only an image of the East; it applies to the body, but not to the spirit. Its Western counterpart is the realisation that the spirit too rises up again, not only rejuvenated, but also enhanced and transfigured (Hegel 1993: 32).

In this article, I would like to examine three different historical paradigms that theorise the phenomenon of historical development in predominantly cultural terms with the help of comparative analyses of world religions, civilizations, belief systems and cultures. From a critical viewpoint I will label them as the leading representatives of “historical culturalism” as they regard religio-cultural domains as “transhistorical constants” (Amin 1989: 5, McLennan 2000). I argue that historical culturalism seeks strong a strong
causal relationship between philosophical traditions, the ration-
ality of economic institutions and political formations on the one
hand, and the cultural features of religions on the other. Histori-
culturalism, as opposed to economistic analyses, prioritises the
unique traits of culture(s) rather than the ordinariness of nature.
Interestingly enough like her twin sister historical materialism,
she produces a one-dimensional picture of social phenomena,
adopting a culturally essentialistic perception of world history. As
opposed to the privileging of modes of relation and relations of pro-
duction in historical materialism, historical culturalism focuses on
the role of modes of belief, types of religion and images of God(s) in
shaping the economic and political aspects of social change. Thus
through a culturalist version of the longue durée, it establishes a
strong link between “the history of religions”, “the philosophy of
history” and “the sociology of development”.

I will examine the works of G. W. Friedrich Hegel, Max Weber and
Samuel Huntington in terms of their problematization of historical
development in the shadow of the Occidental Spirit. These thinkers
occupy distinctive places in their own ways as paradigm-setting
figures, but they also contribute to the consolidation of a Euro-
centric bias within social sciences in a routinely-to-be-expected
sense. The Eurocentrism that these figures subtly elaborate attrib-
utes specificity to the cultural and religious traditions of the
Occident, and perceive Christianity in particular as the foremost
spiritual/cultural cause of the superiority of the West. It is my
argument that despite the considerable extent of secularisation
within the social sciences and of de-spiritualization in Western
thought, historical culturalism perceives world history in semi-
spiritual terms, a type of semi-spirituality that attributes genealog-
ical significance to religions in shaping the trajectory of mundane
historical change. Historical culturalism, by theorising world
religions as intrinsically authentic entities comprising distinctive
modes of consciousness, worldly ethos and political cultures – not
only indicates different potentials for development, but implicitly
institutionalised the very logic of Eurocentric thought (McLennan
2000). Reducing the dynamics of historical development to the
inherent characteristics of religions or to presumably omnipresent
cultural-spiritual dynamics, I will argue, constitutes the main
feature of historical culturalism. Like its paradigmatic counterpart,
i.e. historical materialism, the culturalist paradigm perceives “his-
torical change” or “inability to change” predominantly through one
aspect of social phenomena, that is the religious-cultural traditions
of a given society. But even in the last resort, such a longue durée
prioritization of the spiritual-ethical dimension is a reductionist
and essentialist venture, as it conceptualizes the process of
historical development mono-causally. As a distinctly Eurocentric approach emphasizing the superiority of Occidental culture, historical culturalism constructs transhistorical causes to explain the trajectory of social development. In doing that it subtly continues to affect the ways in which we perceive social and historical phenomena.

Although these paradigms, i.e. Hegel’s historical-philosophical, Weber’s developmental-sociological and Huntington’s political-civilizational approaches, spring from different intellectual traditions, this paper will outline the commonalities between them. In all three cases, I will argue that, besides attributing cultural essences to *modes of belief*, the shared methodology consists in indexing “the question of development” to “the phenomenology of world-religions”. Although it is beyond the scope of our study to discuss in detail the ethnocentric traits of the Hegelian philosophy of history and philosophy of religion (Hegel 1956, 1987, 1993; Bernasconi 2000: 171–201) or to reveal the Orientalist tones of Weber’s developmental sociology (Turner 1974, 1984: 30–43; 1994: 1–50), or the relativist assumptions of Huntington’s thesis of civilizational clash (Esposito 1995:188–253), it suffices to say here that their accounts of the Occidental Spirit and Christianity consolidate the ethno-centric character of their approaches. I must also add that to criticise the essentialist aspects of culturalism does not necessarily mean that I fail to acknowledge the role played by religions/belief systems in affecting the political and legal institutions as well as mass psychological dynamics of societies. On the contrary, by criticising historical culturalism, I reject the one-dimensional and Eurocentric conceptualisation of “religious spirit” as *the major cause* in history. I will argue that historical explanations derived from the phenomenology of world religions, whether they serve the logic of Occidentalism or Orientalism, are not only mono-dimensional, but also historicist as they stress the peculiar contribution of a certain religion as the cause of development. In that regard the major unifying theme is that these figures, taken together, idealise the Occidental Spirit *in the last instance* at the expense of a multi-causal and multi-cultural approach. Therefore my critique’s foremost aim is to show that the Occidental ethnocentrism leads not only to a peculiar form of cultural reductionism, but also undermines the very logic of social sciences which is supposed to subscribe to an objective and cosmopolitan ideal.

Contrary to common belief, what predominates today within our understanding of historicity is no longer economic reductionism but historical culturalism. By critically examining the Hegelian, Weberian and Huntingtonian traditions, I aim to show how the questions of “philosophical”, “economic” and “political”
development are addressed in strongly religious/spiritual terms at the expense of a subtle move towards cultural reductionism. Although for culturalist analyses, the phenomenon of religion is no longer a purely metaphysical issue because it is theorised as the manifestation of certain types of consciousness, economic codes and political systems, nevertheless for these thinkers the Spirit does not fully leave the scene and makes its scholarly debut this time under the guise of historical developmentalism. The Geist, therefore, is no longer a divine or theological one, but social and historical. This can be clearly seen whether we are speaking of the philosophy of Spirit (Hegel), or the ascetic world-views of Protestant sects (Weber), or the liberal-democratic values of Western Civilization (Huntington). Below, starting with the Hegelian tradition, I will examine the adventure of the Occidental spirit in Weber’s developmental sociology and Huntington’s thesis of civilizational clash.

II. Hegel’s Owl Flies Westwards: the Occidental Geist ist Zeit

[The] development of the[re] spiritual world begins when the spiritual principle translates itself into a concrete world (Hegel 1993: 206).

The Spirit of a People is a determinate and particular Spirit, and is further modified by the degree of its historical development. This Spirit constitutes [...] the nation’s consciousness, [...] It is One Individuality [...] presented in its essence [...] in Religion; [...] in Art; and [...] in Philosophy (Hegel 1956: 53).

Friedrich Hegel derives his theory of historical progress from the phenomenology of spirit as one of the forerunners of modern philosophical thought. Hegel’s foremost salience, perhaps, lies in the fact that he systematically introduces a new theory of historical development by replacing the Christian cosmology with a relatively secularised notion of history. In the Hegelian lexicon, the Spirit (Geist) is gradually transformed into world history as the Spirit is considered embedded in societies’ modes of thought, political systems and economic rationality (Hegel 1956, 1987, 1993). Thus the Spirit (Geist) becomes socio-culturally embedded in the history of societies. For Hegel, like many other philosophers of the Enlightenment, the question of how to explain historical progress emerges as one of the most significant issues. From Giambattista Vico to the Marquis de Condorcet, from Henri de Saint Simon to Auguste Comte, the periodization of human progress had been the main concern for the philosophy of history. Hegel’s foremost contribution comes to the fore where the Spirit and religion lose their metaphysical-theological contents and turn into secular variables to measure the extent of historical development.

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Hegel, by introducing a worldly interpretation of the Spirit as the agent of historical progress/regress, reveals the phases of the actualisation of the Spirit in world history. The adventure of the Spirit becomes the full embodiment of social-historical transformation, an adventure that can be traced back only via a phenomenology of world religions. This approach, by secularising “the divine image of God”, does not simply rule out the role of God as the spiritual dynamic of history, but it lets the Spirit take the form of the major historical cause in all aspects of social life:

The Spirit of God lives in the Church; it is the inward impelling Spirit. But it is in the World that Spirit is to be realized – in a material not yet brought into harmony with it. […] In the World, secular business cannot be thus repudiated; it demands accomplishment, […] that secular pursuits are a spiritual occupation (Hegel 1956: 355).

Hegel thus considers world history as “an expression of spirit in time” (Hegel 1993: 128), the spirit that gradually turns into the substance of world history (Hegel 1993: 51). With Hegel, the Spirit – initially an unworldly entity – is transformed into the total embodiment of time (Kojeve 1986: 139) as it commences to represent the collective self-consciousness of a given society. To the extent that the Spirit and religion cease to be merely metaphysical elements, they translate themselves into the socio-historical domain as the major determinants. In this formulation, religion is no longer about the abstract perception of God, nor the abstract ethical principle attached to reality, but it is about a socio-spiritual dynamic that transforms the real world from within. Hegel, in a quite deterministic way, relates the spirit with world history as follows:

The spirit, […] is not something which drifts aimlessly amidst the superficial play of contingent happenings, but is in itself the determining factor; in its own peculiar destiny, it is completely proof against contingencies, which it utilises and controls for its own purposes (Hegel 1993: 126).

By theorising history as the domain of spiritual objectification, Hegel ties all socio-political and legal-institutional traditions to religion. For him, religion is best reflected in “the workings of the state” as well as in “the conduct of individuals” since it is “the original inner principle” that “activates itself within the state” (Hegel 1993: 108). Hegel, by perceiving religion as part of embedded spiritual cause, goes beyond the philosophical imagination of his contemporaries. By secularising and historicising the Spirit, Hegel supersedes the deep-seated duality between the sacred/spiritual and the profane/material, and synthesises these two as one thing. In the evolutionary universalism of Hegel, “abstract-theological”
and “institutional-historical” dimensions become the Janus face of the same phenomenon. Hegel’s comparative phenomenology, firstly, de-deifies history and brings the transcendental existence of the Spirit to an end, and secondly embeds what used to belong to divinity in social-historical time. Modes of belief are no longer an issue of transcending, but of institutional materialisation:

The very essence of Spirit is activity; it realises its potentiality – makes itself its own deed, its own work. [...] It is with the Spirit of a people: [...], that exists and persists in a particular religious form of worship, customs, constitution, and political laws – in the whole complex of its institutions- (Hegel 1956: 74).

This means that the Gods are no longer external to social temporality. On the contrary, from primitive religions to sophisticated ones, the images of Gods correspond to the successive stages of human development. With a comparative semantics of the gods and of the meanings attributed to them (1987: 501–7), Hegel, from ancient times to contemporary cases, chronologically demonstrates how various societies perceive social-political reality along with the image of their gods. In his chronological account, Hegel attributes superiority to Christianity and particularly its Protestant version in terms of the capacity to perceive the reality in its perfect forms. In his Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Hegel takes a geographical tour from the Far East to the West, so as to show the developmental stages of the spirit, in which he ranks world religions according to their level of complexity and sublime nature. In this scheme the Eastern religions – Chinese, Buddhism, Lamaism, Hinduism, Persian and Egyptian religions are considered as nature religions, less differentiated from the natural state, and therefore are in sheer contrast with the higher spiritual stages. Among the early religions, only the Greek and Jewish religions are considered mature enough to be elevated to the level of the spiritual (Hegel 1987: 640–686). Particularly the Greek and Roman nations are positively appraised for their noble pagan traditions. The general standing of world religions from the Far East to the West goes as follows: the Chinese religion emerges as the religion of magic; Hinduism as the religion of fantasy; the Persian religion as the religion of light; and finally the Egyptian religion as the religion of enigma. In this picture, the very early religion of the Romans is defined as the religion of expediency and understanding while the Oriental religions are associated with magic, phantasy and enigma in utter contrast to the rational traits of Occidental spirituality.

Hegel applies this logic to the history of nations and “historical nations” too (Bernasconi 2000: 179–81). Among the other cases Hegel suggests the German nation in particular occupies a
distinctive place as “the German Spirit” represents “the spirit of
the new world”. The German nation is not only “predestined to be
the bearer of the Christian principle”, but also has the capacity to
embrace “the Idea as the absolutely rational aim” (Hegel 1956:354).
Moreover Hegel goes so far as to claim that the heavenly Kingdom
of God will be brought to the earth in the form of the German nation
state. The Spirit’s actualisation in “a Teutonic fatherland” would
eventually lead to the creation of a new “Judaea” as the Germans
are endowed with the spiritual traits other nations do not possess.
In his Philosophy of Right (1953), Hegel salutes the Germanic soul
for representing the age of youth of human consciousness. This
reverence also stems from the fact that the German spirit is shaped
by Protestant notion of “the free individuality”. The concept of
freedom as elaborated by Protestantism realizes itself in “constitu-
tions, property rights and individual rights”. Hegel presents
the Protestant Christianity as nothing, but “the history of the realisa-
tion of the Idea of Individuality” (Kojeve 1986:66). This principle is
embodied not only at the intellectual level, but in all aspects of life
from politics to law and from economy to culture, and it constitu-
tes the backbone of civilizations.

Insofar as the political analysis of civilizations is concerned,
modes of belief and the perceptions of divinity are considered as
the leading determinants in explaining the political cultures in the
Far East, the Middle East and the West. The shadow of the Occi-
dental spirit is so overwhelmingly prevalent in Hegel’s philosophy
that from Chinese morality and Hinduism to the ancient Egyptian
and Persian religions his main preoccupation remains to prove how
especially distant the Spiritual capacities of these religions remain
from the Spiritual maturity of the Occident (1956: 111–222). Hegel,
moving from the Orient to the Occident, evaluates world religions
according to their capacity to comply with the Protestant principle
of “free individuality”. Following that Hegel associates the Far
Eastern religions (Mongolian, Chinese and Indian) with the tradi-
tion of the omnipotent patriarchal ruler, and Islam’s “abstract
monotheism” with unrestrained and institutionalised arbitrariness
in the political domain. On the other hand in contrast to the Ori-
ental religions, Hegel praises the Christian idea as the highest prin-
ciple where “the spirit’s recognition of itself and its own profundity”
is realised within its own political system (Hegel 1993: 196–209).
Of these Hegel’s assessment of Islam in particular shows how inter-
connected he thinks the image of the god of Islam and its political
culture are. Hegel’s analysis revolves around the image of an arbi-
trary and unrestrained God who expects believers to follow a uni-
versal and simple message. For Islam, “the worship of the One” is
“the only final aim” (Hegel 1956: 356); therefore the Islamic spirit
is “unlimited”. It is unlimited – in the negative sense of the term – for God’s unrestrained energy “enters into secular life with a purely negative purpose” (1956: 356–7). And “by interfering with the world” the Islamic god does nothing but destroy the principle of free individuality as it only allows the principle of “the pure adoration of the One”. Throughout his comparative analyses, in an essentialist way Hegel ties world religions with certain types of political systems as he considers that even the realm of politics is a field of self-realisation for the spirit (Hegel 1993: 108):

Religion is not something introduced from outside in order to regulate the workings of the state and the conduct of individuals towards it from within; on the contrary, it is the original inner principle which determines and activates itself within the state.

In the eyes of Hegel, all other Oriental religions with the exception of Judaism tend to “enslave the Spirit to the world of realities” and suppress free individuality. Thus in none of the Oriental religions does the Spirit find the opportunity to transform reality. The Mohammedan principle in particular is “deprived of every concrete predicament” as the object of Islamic worship is purely intellectual and abstract. For that reason Muslims’ fanaticism for the accomplishment of their religion “with the greatest enthusiasm” (p. 357) only produce “an enthusiasm for something abstract that sustains a negative position towards the established order of things” (p. 358). The unlimitedness and abstractness of Islam, implies Hegel, does not let it “cool its fanaticism down” (p. 359–360) and the principle of free rationality take over. Departing from the image of the Islamic God, Hegel thus traces the historical trajectory of Islamic politics and portrays its doom.

In the following paragraphs, departing from Hegel’s “absolute spirit” I shall discuss the culturalist continuities and convergences between Weber’s ideal types of world religions and those of Hegel’s phenomenology. Although the term Spirit has different connotations for both Hegel and Weber, interestingly differences fade away when it comes to the question of historical development. Below we shall see how the Occidental Geist reflourishes at the point where Weber unbreakably links his sociology of religion with the question of rational development.

III. Weber’s Rationalised Spirit as the Culturalist Cause of Developmental Sociology

Among the founders of sociology, undoubtedly Weber goes farthest in providing a generous comparative analysis of world religions. Weber’s works capitalist ethics, bureaucratisation and rationalisa-
tion still constitute one of the leading inspirations for historical sociology (Weber 1994: 267–301; Turner 1996: 234–86; Bendix 1966; Turner 1974). In this section, rather than dealing with the general characteristics of Weber’s sociological oeuvre, I will focus on how the questions of capitalist development and its underlying religious ethos and rationality became a central issue in his comparative analysis of world religions. As well known, by tracing the genealogical link between capitalism and the Protestant economic ethic, Weber proposes an alternative culturally sensitive reading against the orthodoxy of historical materialist approaches. With the prioritisation of the religious phenomenon and its underlying rationale in shaping the economic-institutional traditions of modern societies, Weber develops a counter-thesis against what he regards as Orthodox Marxist reductionism. For that reason Weber’s study of world religions serve a different objective, an objective which gave birth to the counterpart of historical materialism.

Weber’s sociology of religions starts with the analysis of how certain interpretations of religious beliefs became popular among particular classes and therefore representative of their worldviews. By linking socio-political and class backgrounds with religious Weltanschauung, Weber draws the distinction between Occidental and Oriental societies according to their religious-ethical backgrounds. Although the analysis of class structures and political traditions is never missing, Weber aims to reverse the logic of causality between various modes of belief, presumably concretised in economic ethics and rationalities and economic-political institutions. Thus in the Weberian scheme religion becomes the foremost historical determinant by which the questions of historical development in general and of capitalist development in particular are explained.

The impediments to the development of capitalism must be sought in the domain of religion, although certain purely political factors, such as the inner structural forms of domination, also played important roles (Weber 1993: 269).

Departing from an ideal type of modern capitalism, Weber compares diverse religious traditions in the Orient and Occident and examines their potential to pave the way for capitalist rationality and modern institutions. In this scheme, the Oriental world is identified with non-Puritan economic ethics, magical beliefs and non-rational traditions. The Orient, in Weber’s sociology, emerges as the historical anti-thesis of Western societies, while the Occident appears to be endowed with the cultural-religious potential for rational development. Weber’s systematic emphasis on the
peculiarity of Western civilization and its distinctive psychological traits is an outcome of his early encounter with the German historical schools (Marshall 1982: 30–40). This encounter inspired him to develop a culturalist and ethno-centric understanding of the differences between the Occident and the Orient. Weber’s sociology of religion primarily serves the objective of disclosing the inadequacy of non-Western religions in giving birth to modern institutions (Zubaida 1972: 308–313; Turner 1996: 277–9), and despite the depth and sophistication of his oeuvre (Marshall 1982, Bendix 1966, Turner 1996), Weber cannot escape from the historicist traditions of Germany that were inclined to relativize the role of specific causes in the chain of historical development, i.e. the history of capitalism. By prioritising the cognitive-psychological features of world religions, Weber ties the unique aspects of religious cultures with the birth of modern institutions. His theory of adequate causality thus attributes ultimate significance to certain traits of world religions in the development of the rationality of modernity. In Weber’s comparative sociology the focal point turns out to be whether the inner cultural-psychological traits of world religions are compatible with the spirit of modernity (Tiryakian 2001: 283–5). Weber points out the decisive role of such legacies – or the lack of them – in the history of the Orient:

None of the mass religions of Asia [. . .] provided the motives or orientations for a rationalised ethical patterning of the creaturely world in accordance with divine commandments (Weber 1993: 267).

In the following paragraphs, I would like to draw attention to how Weber’s comparative sociology of religion is interwoven with historical culturalism. To the extent Weber’s objective remains limited to a search for those psychological-ethical dynamics that are inadequate for the creation of modern rational institutions, such an agenda remains trapped within the premises of historicism. It is my claim that Weber’s genealogical account of capitalism is predominantly culturalist as it points out the spiritual causes that intrinsically advance or hinder the development of modern rationality. However despite such a culturalist tendency, Weberian sociology provides a paradigmatic ground for both the literature of modernization and theories of civilizational divergences. In this section I will argue that these aspects of Weber’s developmental sociology consolidates theoretical infrastructure for historical culturalism. Weber, by attributing a privileged mission to the Occidental Protestant ethics, also reveals the ethno-centric tone of his sociology of religion. This is thoroughly crystallized in his impressive comparative works on religion (1967, 1976, 1984, 1993) where
Weber essentializes the cultural-psychological characteristics in the last instance.

Although Weber pays utmost attention to dissociating himself from two dominant intellectual currents of his time, namely “the one-sidedly materialistic and one-sidedly spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and of history” (1976: 183), he fails to escape from the appeal of historical culturalism. Weber, while criticizing orthodox materialist reductionism, sways towards a culturalist genealogical account of capitalism. Being a neo-Kantian himself Weber systematically utilizes ideal types in his analysis of world religions, their elite structures and economic ethos (Parkin 1982: 96). Yet in contrast to Hegel’s universalistic ambitions, Weber is not interested in the theorisation of a progressive and evolutionary history that successively links the historical epochs with the stages of human consciousness. Weber rather emphasizes the unique and distinctive characteristics of these religions/civilizations and their inherent differences from each other under the influence of the German historical schools. Although Gordon Marshall disagrees with Weber’s critics who try to Hegelianize his Protestant Ethics (1982: 133), so say the least Weber is keen to develop a form of historical culturalism in his comparative sociological works. But it would be too simplistic to label Weber’s thesis idealist. In the following section I will argue that this feature of Weberian sociology is best exemplified where Weber applies his ideal-typical approach to world religions (Parsons 1929: 31–51; Schluchter 1985: 13–24; Tester 2000: 44). Interestingly enough, Weber’s ideal types are designed to account for various types of bureaucratic systems, economic ethics and urban development and seek strong causal links between belief systems and social phenomena (Turner 1996: 257–86). Undoubtedly, Weber’s ideal type of the Western model of rationality and Puritan subjectivity is the most influential one, justifying the superiority of the Christian-Protestant ethos vis-à-vis the rest. It is in that sense that Weber’s ideal-type of capitalist development proceeds through a sociological version of historical culturalism.

However, rather than offering a solution to the existing methodological problems, Weber’s application of ideal-types to world history leaves us with more substantial difficulties (Parkin 1982: 57–63). These difficulties commence as the hypothetical ideal types of “asceticism”, “economic ethics” and “rationality” are linked with concrete historical experiences. The ideal-typical representation of world history through the lenses of sociology of religion remains susceptible to being overshadowed by cultural essentialism. This reduces the whole enterprise to a different type of phenomenology of spirit. As a matter of fact Weber’s analyses of Indian,
Chinese, Judaic and Islamic religions mainly derive from an analysis of the images of gods and of the divine messages – or the calling as the leading cause of historical development (Weber 1993: 262–74). Weber regards the calling as the embedded spiritual motor behind the social development. The calling indicates the internalized divine message and how it guides the populace and particular strata through their ordinary daily practices. It is in that sense that religious ethics becomes central in Weberian historical sociology. Yet such a fixation on the nature of the divine message runs the risk of cultural reductionism and leads his methodology into a form of culturalist determinism rather than a theory of adequate causality or elective affinity. This is where Weber’s venture of developmental sociology gets trapped in the shadow of the Occidental Spirit. In fact Weber’s works on ascetic ethics of the ancient Judaism, the religions of China and India (Weber 1984: 73–82; Bendix 1966: 98–256; Weber 1978a: 576–634) and his uncompleted works on Islam (Turner 1974: 23) remain culture-bound and Occident-centric. Moreover in the last resort they try to prove the cultural inadequacy of non-Protestant cultures for the development of modernity (Schluchter 1985: 156–74).

This attempt is so central for Weberian sociology that it is continuously overwhelmed with the question of why the Chinese, Indian and Islamic civilizations proved incapable of giving birth to capitalism and its rationality. This is puzzling as various forms of capitalism, i.e. booty capitalism, pariah capitalism and traditional capitalism, had existed in the Eastern geographies long before western capitalism came to exist. For Weber, capitalism historically comprises two components, substantial and spiritual (Parkin 1982: 41–2), two components brought together only in the Occident. Weber, by rejecting pure materialist and spiritualist approaches, tries to develop a theory of the elective affinities so as to explain these two components. For example booty capitalism, argues Weber, existed in Islamic societies but essentially failed to institutionalize “the model of activism” required for capitalist economics (Zubaida 1972: 308–338). By considering Islam as an inherently patrimonial religion that undermines individual activism, Weber seems to neglect the non-religious dynamics that consolidated the patrimonial culture in the Middle East (Turner 1974: 171–184). However, the spiritual element that Weber constantly seeks is lacking not only in the sphere of Islam but in the whole Orient:

For various popular religions of Asia, in contrast to ascetic Protestantism, the world remained a great enchanted garden. [...] No path led from the magical religiosity of the non-intellectual classes of Asia to a rational, methodical control of life. Nor did any path lead to that methodical control from the world accommodation of Confucianism, from the world-rejection of Buddhism, from the world-conquest of Islam,
or from the messianic expectations and economic pariah law of Judaism (Weber 1993: 270).

No need to repeat that in the eyes of Weber even early Christianity is not sufficiently Occidental since both “magic and belief in demons” occupy important place in its origins. Partly due to its emphasis on the miracles, magic, saints and resurrection, and partly due to its being influenced by Judaism (Weber 1967: 405–24), Weber excludes early Christianity from the picture of the Occidental ideal-type. For that reason, Weber’s model of “ascetic puritan subjectivity” is contrasted not only with Oriental religions, but also with the Oriental roots of Christianity. Similar to Hegel’s model of subjectivity, Weber too portrays the new individual as a paragon of rationality for whom the ultimate path to salvation became work in this disenchanted and demystified world. The kind of work, strictly guided by the Protestant understanding of calling, eventually leads to the rationalisation of all aspects of life but particularly economic life (Weber 1976: 62). The perception of calling evolves in such a way that the culture of work becomes an epiphenomenon of religion, if not a substitute for it, a substitute by which “the spiritual principle” is translated into the material world. Weber, in a psychological fashion, takes the perceptions of god, duty, guilt etc. as the leading dynamic behind the practices of work.

Interestingly enough, similar to the Hegelian slave subject whose struggle for emancipation and recognition became possible only through work, Weber’s Puritan subject too is only able to achieve salvation through a worship of work. For both “the slave” and “the ascetic subject”, the question of emancipation and salvation is tied to the birth of a work ethic. With the internalisation of servitude and/or work, the Occidental subject advances towards modern self-consciousness and economic rationality. Although various forms of asceticism are seen in world religions (Bendix 1966: 83–281), none proves capable of developing the traits of Western rationality. As the culture of self-mastery and diligence becomes a psychological prerequisite for salvation, Weber’s Puritan subject “perform” labour ‘as if it were an absolute end in itself. For the puritan subject, labour is not merely a material activity, but a totally ascetic or methodical practice motivated by the religious ethos. This world is so rationalized and demystified that it evolves towards a form of Hegelian asceticism which Alexander Kojève formulated (1986: 63) as “mastery without a slave, and slavery without a master”. Such a model of work is best exemplified in Calvinist Protestantism (Weber 1976: 63):

The ability of mental concentration as well as the absolutely essential feeling of obligation to one’s job, [. . .], and a cool self-control and frugality [. . .] enormously
increase performance. This provides the most favourable foundation for the conception of labour as an end in itself, as a calling which is necessary to capitalism.

In sum, whether we call it “a phenomenology of asceticism” or “existential psychology” (Bendix 1966: 270; Weber 1949: 96–8), it would not be wrong to argue that at the very heart of Weber’s sociology reside sets of concerns similar to those which preoccupied Hegel. In that sense, via different trajectories both Hegel and Weber can be claimed to have adopted a culturalist analysis of historical development. Despite Weber’s methodological concerns emphasizing the notions of “adequate causality” and “unintended consequences”, the theoretical crux of Weber’s historical sociology remains religion-based (Tester 2000, Buss 1999). And this is also where Weber’s sociologised spirit begins to cast its long shadow on social theory, a shadow initially created by the German historical schools and then extended into historical sociology by the Protestant spirit.

Before concluding this section I would like argue that Weber’s comparative historical sociology relies on two significant traditions, which take his account of historical development to the borders of relativist culturalism. Although this analysis requires further elaboration, here it may suffice to claim that Weberian comparative sociology synthesises a) the neo-Kantian categories of ideal types as a priori starting points, with b) the historical schools of the German tradition which emphasize the genealogically authentic, distinctive and unique cultural traits in history. Weber, leaning on these traditions, tries to develop a non-materialist understanding of “adequate causality” and a theory of “elective affinity” (Löwith 1999: 170–4; Buss 1999: 323–28; Weber 1978a: 11–2). But as I indicated above, to the extent that Weber’s comparative analyses essentially separate Occidental rationality/ethics from non-Western civilizations in an essentialist fashion, ideal-typical categories end up depicting the Orient and the Occident in exclusive terms. It is at this point that the whole Weberian enterprise runs the risk of being caught in cultural determinism as it seeks authentic and distinctive pathways for historical development. Therefore the synthesis of ideal-types and the German historical tradition unluckily leads to the emergence of historical culturalism in sociological imagination. In the following paragraphs, I will move to Samuel Huntington’s contemporary version of historical culturalism which, like Hegel and Weber, theorises the development of “the democratic spirit” along in essentialist terms.
IV. Huntington’s Struggle for the Occidental Civilization and its Democratic Spirit

Wherever one looks along the perimeter of Islam, Muslims have problems living peacefully with their neighbours. The question naturally rises as to whether this pattern of late-twentieth-century conflict between Muslims and non-Muslim groups is equally true of relations between groups from other civilizations. (Huntington 1996b: 256).

When Francis Fukuyama in *the End of History and the Last Man* (1992) declared the triumph of liberal values and free-market ideology, it was clear that the philosophical coordinates of his theory were mainly derived from Hegel. But when Samuel Huntington (1996b) in his *Clash of Civilizations* drew a conflictual picture of late modern history, possibly it did not occur to many that Huntington’s paradigm of clashing civilizations had parallels with Hegel and Weber. Interestingly enough the thesis of “civilizational clash” appears extremely culturalist in contrast to Huntington’s previous works on political change, modernization and democratization, all written from rather universalistic viewpoints (Huntington 1966, 1968, 1971, 1992). His current works, however, lay emphasis on deeply embedded cultural determinants and divides up world political-geography according to incompatible civilizational zones. This division is essentialist as it judges non-Western civilizations according to their historical incapacity and reluctance to comply with Western democratic values and political culture. In the following paragraphs I will argue that Huntington’s thesis is a subtle reformulation of Euro-centric historical culturalism as it rephrases the superiority of the Occidental Spirit with a renewed emphasis on the democratic ethos of the West. In that sense I will argue that Huntington's conceptualization of world history has striking parallels with the Hegelian and the Weberian traditions, two very strong paradigms that reproduce Eurocentric and culturalist understandings of modernity and capitalism.

Huntington, like Hegel and Weber, not only seeks a strong correlation between religious, social and political phenomena, but also draws the spiritual-ethical frontiers of democracy between major world civilizations-religions. Huntington considers “religion as the foundation of the great civilizations” (Huntington 1996b: 47) and as the driving force behind socio-political systems. Accordingly he divides world civilizations into seven sub-groups; the Japanese, Chinese, Hindu, Muslim, Latin American, African and the Western civilizations (1996b: 40–55). This grouping overlaps with major world religions and their distinctive patterns of economic development, political democratization and modernization.
(Inglehart 2000), and considers macro-civilizational entities as culturally homogeneous, peculiar and crystallized processes. Relying on the axiom of authenticity of civilizational-religious formations, Huntington designs his version of historical culturalism in order to explain the genealogy of democratic ethos. To the extent Huntington’s theory is based on the premise that major world religions have unique and authentic characteristics corresponding to inherently irreconcilable political values and trajectories, his approach ends up repeating the theses of cultural reductionism and historicism (Huntington 1996a: 35). By ascribing trans-historical essences to world religions, Huntington draws a thick line between the Occidental democratic culture and the rest. In his geo-civilizational theory, he places the Occidental Geist in opposition to Oriental civilizations, particularly the Chinese and the Islamic ones, in terms of their intrinsically non-democratic cultures and incompatibility with the Occidental democratic spirit.

Interestingly enough Huntington develops his ideas on Islam and Confucianism in his other seminal book The Third Wave: Democratization in Late Twentieth Century (1991), yet further elaborates in the Clash of Civilizations (1996). The change of paradigmatic in his most recent works marks a dramatic shift from the universalist theses of modernization literature towards a relativist and culturalist stance (Kreutzmann 1998: 255–65). Contrary to his early works on the patterns of political modernization (Huntington 1966: 378–414), Huntington’s new analysis prioritises cultural-religious traits in the making of civilizations (Alker 1995). This paradigmatic shift can be considered as an outcome of frustration with theories of modernization. In fact Huntington claims that the universalist hopes of modernization instead of fostering Western-style political institutions, caused “cultural schizophrenia” in non-Western societies. For him democratic spirit is not necessarily derived from the level of economic development, but from specific cultural-historical legacies. Thus Huntington’s retreat from universalist and assimilationist presuppositions of modernization theory (Huntington 1971: 283–322) begins to be accompanied by a new historical culturalist approach.

In the following paragraphs I do not intend to present a full critique of Huntington’s thesis, nor will I attempt to discuss all the theoretical implications of Huntington’s thesis. In this section I will rather limit myself to a critique of Huntington’s cultural essentialism. In doing so I will argue that Huntington’s problematisation of political processes and democratic ethos suffers dramatically from a Eurocentric culturalism (Huntington 2000: xiv). To the extent Huntington puts the cultural-religious determinant at the centre of his analysis of the formation of democratic spirit this brings him
close to historical culturalism. Huntington, first by depicting the post-
Cold War era World Order in terms of the zones of incompatible polit-
ical systems and cultures (Melleuish 2000: 109–120), and second
by tying these political systems with civilizations, subscribes to a
culturalist theory of history. It is culturalist because Huntington
argues that the driving force behind the democratic ethos is
civilizational. This, moreover, shapes inter-religious and inter-
civilizational relations on the global scale, let alone the new axes of
international alliances and antagonisms. Although Western civiliza-
tion can, by no means, be reduced to its religious background, i.e.
Western Christianity, argues Huntington, the major denominator of
identification is still its religious characteristics. Religion, in this
scheme, becomes the motor and the blueprint of civilizational de-
velopment. This means that ideological fault-lines between competing
sides are no longer drawn between traditional and modern societies
as the modernization paradigm suggests, but between Western and
non-Western values, the values embedded in civilizations.

If non-Western societies are to modernize, they must do it in their own not the
Western way and, [. . .] build upon and employ their own traditions, institutions
and values. Political leaders imbued with the hubris to think that they can funda-
mentally reshape the culture of their societies are destined to fail. [. . .] The Western
virus, once it’s lodged in another society, is difficult to expunge. [. . .] [These strate-
gies, f.a.] produce torn countries; they don’t create Western societies. They infect
their country with a cultural schizophrenia which becomes its continuing and defin-
ing characteristic (1996b: 154).

At first glance, an approach of this kind can be considered as plu-
ralist; however a closer look at the political implications will
suggest otherwise. Alongside the fact that these are implicated with
the global power politics of the United States, this ethno-centric
perception of politics fosters the idea of civilizational Apartheid
between belligerent and irreconcilable traditions. As a result
Huntington attributes intrinsic cultural superiority to the West, a
superiority derived from the Occidental “old values, democracy,
individual liberty, rule of law, human rights and cultural freedom”
(Huntington 1996a: 35). The outcome of such a cultural particu-
larism is, naturally, to become protective rather than assimila-
tionist. It is for that reason that Huntington emphasizes the urgent
need for the Occident to maintain its cultural authenticity and
specificity. This also means that Huntington is far from advocat-
ing a mixture of civilizational values as such a convergence between
the Occidental and Oriental civilizations only leads to cultural
schizophrenia in the East.

However, we should keep in mind that Huntington does not adopt
a monolithic notion of the West. He divides the Christian tradition
into three sub-groups, and of these, only one deserves to be the bearer of the truly Western spirit. The Western spirit, at the origins of which Protestantism resides, is remarkably different and superior to the Catholic Latin American and Russian Orthodox worlds. Adopting a different version of Weber’s *Protestant Ethic* thesis, Huntington depicts Catholicism as a static culture hindering capitalist development (Huntington 1996b: 125; Grondona 2000: 44–55; Landes 2000: 2–13). Although Weber had not written on Orthodox Christianity, Huntington extends Weber’s account of Catholicism to it and considers the Orthodox version of Christianity as an alien and rival civilization to the West. This further leads to a Eurocentric reading of Christian values at the centre of which Protestantism resides.

According to Huntington, Latin American Catholic civilization not only differs from the West by virtue of its economic ethos and political culture, but by virtue of its inability to “respond to the psychological needs of the present-day people”. This is why Huntington considers massive conversions from Catholicism to Protestantism in Latin America as a progressive step towards adjustment into the psyche of capitalism and its individualist political values. Conversion to Protestantism in Latin America eases the emergence of a kind of work ethic and lays grounds for a democratic individualist culture:

The spread of Protestantism among the poor in Latin America is not primarily the replacement of one religion by another, but rather a major net increase in religious commitment and participation as nominal and passive Catholics become active and devout Evangelicals (Huntington, 1996b: 99).

Huntington’s fervent culturalism associates “Europe with Western Christendom” and sets this background as the criterion “for the admission of new members to the West” (Huntington 1996b:160). Moreover “if democracy, free markets, the rule of law, civil society, individualism, and Protestantism take firm root in Latin America”, argues Huntington (1996a: 43–4), Western civilization can become a three-pillared civilization that comprises America, Europe and Latin America. According to this formulation, the cultural-civilizational axis gets completed as another limb is assumed into the Western civilizational association. On the path to establishing such a civilizational unity, Huntington suggests that the core states should act as the protectors of the Western values. Huntington, thus, defines civilization in a quite communitarian, if not Tönniesian, fashion:

A civilization is an extended family and like older members of a family, core states provide their relatives with both support and discipline. In the absence of that
kinship, the ability of a more powerful state to resolve conflicts in and impose order on its region is limited (Huntington 1996b: 156).

As Huntington considers the role of a leading *core state* vital as the custodian of civilizational values and political ethos (1996b: 207–9), he comes closer to the Hegelian idea of state as the crystallisation of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). For Hegel too, the state is the universalist kernel of ethical life (Hegel 1953: 160), that not only protects civil society from disintegration, but also provides the principles which “unite the believers” (Hegel 1988: 278). Quoting from Benjamin Franklin, a Puritan figure oft-referred to also by Max Weber (Marshall 1982: 17–8, 52–4), Huntington argues that “the peoples of the West must hang together, or most assuredly they will hang separately” (1996a: 44). Particularly against the threat posed by the Islamic and Chinese civilizations, the Western states should move from “the phase of warring states” towards “the phase of universal state” (Huntington 1996a: 43). For this to be realised two leading segments of the West, namely Europe and North America, should overcome their “particularity” and “semi-universality”. Otherwise at the global level it will not take long for the alarm bells to ring for Western values.

At this point it is not difficult to guess that Huntington expects the United States to take the responsibility. This is not only because the US represents a higher level of development, but also because it is capable of sustaining the coherence of Western values both within and outside Western civilization. Although Huntington in his later works emphasizes that unilateralism may damage US interests (1999: 35–49), he does not give up the idea of universal states as the guardian of civilizations. Thus the civilizational paradigm evolves toward a new *Realpolitik* in which the *modernization paradigm* cedes its place to the *historical culturalist paradigm*, a form of culturalism whose perception of historicity and historical development is haunted by the spectre of the Protestant spirit.

Interestingly Huntington applies his paradigm of civilizational clash to domestic developments, as he points out that the danger of de-Americanisation of American society particularly through demographic changes and cultural Latinisation. According to Huntington the global threat comes from Islam and Confucianism, while the domestic threat comes from the process of Latinisation. Huntington fears that the increasing population of Hispanics and Blacks in the US may eventually undermine American identity and Western liberal values. Against such a cultural hazard, two constitutive axes of American society, i.e. European culture and political democracy, must be defended by the reassertion of America’s original values (Huntington 1996a). The idea of the uniqueness of
the Western culture leads Huntington to adopt a protectionist strategy against the risk of the flourishing of cultures of non-Western origin:

Multiculturalism at home threatens the United States and the West; universalism abroad threatens the West and the world. Both deny the uniqueness of Western culture. [. . .] A multicultural America is impossible because a non-Western America is not American. [. . .] The preservation of the US and the West requires the renewal of Western identity (1996b: 318).

Despite the fact that Huntington admits that more than one type of political system may prevail within a civilization, he nevertheless categorically discards the possibility that both Chinese and Islamic cultures may go through a process of democratization (1996b: 184–5). What Huntington stresses in The Third Wave is not just the historical incompatibility of Confucianism and Islam with democracy, but the intrinsic animosity of these two against liberal political values (1991: 73–74; 307–8). This is because Confucianism equates power and morality, and uncompromisingly supports the compliance of individuals with the idea of hierarchy and state authority (Huntington 2002: 295). As social harmony and cooperation are held superior than discord and competition, the cultural grounds for the plurality of ideas do not materialize in Confucianism. For that reason, although some East Asian societies achieved industrial modernization, their traditions precluded the development of democracy. Thus Huntington claims that democracy can take roots in East Asia only where Confucianism regresses in favour of Christianity. In South Korea, after many decades of attempts to industrialize, democracy began to institutionalize only after the 1980s when conversions to Christianity gained pace (Huntington 1991: 73–4, 281). As long as Asian political culture is shaped under the sign of Confucianism it appears that their political systems will lack the truly Western democratic ethos.

In the case of Islam, despite Islam’s discursive emphasis on egalitarianism and voluntarism the outcome is no different. Like Confucianism, throughout its history Islam did not experience the Western type of feudalism, the Reformation, Enlightenment, the French Revolution and liberalism (Huntington, 2002: 294). Besides, Islam bases political participation on religious affiliation, and describes the frontiers of the public sphere in strictly monopolistic terms, favouring the privileges of Muslims. Notwithstanding various attempts to emphasize their compatibility with democracy, no Islamic society has so far proved capable of sustaining a democratic regime. In most Muslim societies, fundamentalist movements are on the rise; and in most Muslim societies with a sizeable non-Muslim religious minority there exist continuous waves of
inter-group violence. From Sudan to Egypt and from Malaysia to Indonesia, Muslim majorities seem to suppress non-Muslim minorities. “Muslim societies”, claims Huntington, “have problems living peacefully with their neighbours” (1996b: 256), an “incidental” phenomenon which results in Islam having “bloody borders” with its outer world. This situation is also related with how Islam had been spread and how its Prophet has been perceived, namely in the form of a warrior-prophet, in contrast to the peaceful images of Jesus and Buddha. Huntington, at this point, successfully designs a different version of historical culturalism similar to Weber’s developmental sociology. As Weber links the Occidental Puritanism to capitalist development, Huntington ties Western-American Protestant spirit with liberal democratic ethos.

V. Conclusion

It is far beyond the scope of this study to uncover routinely-to-be-expected forms of historical culturalism in the social sciences and particularly in the comparative analysis of Western and non-Western societies. Such a task needs to be fulfilled in a more detailed and lengthy way than our birds-eye view permits. The strong veins of historical culturalism that have guided comparative analyses are, through different channels, reproduced in the works of Hegel, Weber and Huntington. These leading figures are far from ordinary practitioners of modern thought, but are rather the paradigm-setters. These culturalist analyses prioritise the idiosyncratic paths of philosophical, economic or political progress. But as their theories of historical change appear culture-bound or, to be more specific, religion-bound, their comparative analyses become susceptible to be eclipsed by various types of cultural reductionism. As I discussed above by those thinkers the question of historical development is systematically reduced to an essentialist phenomenology of world religions. Within these phenomenological analyses, the Occidental Spirit is not only presented as the blueprint against which all other Oriental cases are judged, but is also ranked accordingly. Besides their anti-cosmopolitan and ethnocentric implications, these approaches formulate a new form of culturalist orthodoxy quite hegemonic in social thought (Amin 1989, McLennan 2000). Similar to its predecessor, i.e. historical materialism, historical culturalism too suffers from a similar type of reductionism, a reductionism which perceives “the Spirit” as the primary cause steering the trajectory of historical change. In terms of their heavy reliance on the phenomenology of Spirit, to varying degrees, all three theoretical paradigms contribute to a new form of cultural reductionism.
It is my argument that historical culturalism also underpins a new form of Eurocentricism as it idealizes the Occidental Spirit and ascribes negative sets of traits to Oriental cultures. The overwhelming stress on the spiritual, ethical and civilizational superiorities of the Occident in steering the trajectory of progress is shared by all three figures whom I have briefly examined above. Hegel, Weber and Huntington consider modes of belief as the primary motor of historical development concretized in economic institutions, political cultures and philosophical traditions, etc. In doing so, in a refined but ethnocentric fashion, they try to make a case for the superiority of the Western, Christian and Protestant cultures in the making of modern history and providing the spiritual component for progress. In doing so they define not only how history is made in its mundane forms, but also subtly dictate how history should be interpreted in the shadow of the Occidental Geist.

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