

Max Weber's mysticism

DURING Max Weber's life time a number of German thinkers investigated mysticism: among them Wilhelm Preger, Rudolf Otto, and Weber's own friend and colleague Ernst Troeltsch. To this we can add the intriguing figure of Friedrich von Hügel (Preger 1962, Otto 1971, 1997, Troeltsch 1912, von Hügel 1999). However, the standard view is that Weber was not interested in mysticism or if he was it was for other reasons. Marianne Weber mentions mysticism only once and that in connection to Rilke; Bendix puts Oriental asceticism in opposition to occidental asceticism; and Schluchter, who is the authority on Weber's sociology of religion, focuses primarily on the opposition between ascetic activity and mystical passivity (Weber 1926, 464; Bendix 1977, 203; Schluchter 1989: 132). There is no question that Weber's concern from *Protestantische Ethik und die Geist der Kapitalismus* (1905) to his last years was with asceticism; however, from that work until his death he was intrigued by mysticism. There are a number of passages where he treats the topic, some in *Protestantische Ethik*, more in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, and to a greater extent in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*. Except for Schluchter's treatment and Mitzman's comments (Mitzman 1979), there is virtually nothing written on Weber's interest in mysticism. There are only two works that deal with the topic and both are concerned with other matters as well: Bynum is interested in Medieval women mystics (Bynum 1988) and Robertson is also concerned with Hegel, Luther and modernity (Robertson 1975). In what follows, I will argue that, for Weber, mysticism was more than an intellectual antipode to asceticism; indeed, as I shall argue, Weber had a growing interest in mysticism from 1910 onwards.

It is not easy to say what mysticism is, although it is not very difficult to say what it is not: it has no confession, it has no dogma, it has no church, etc. (Tauler 1923, I: XIX). Bernard McGinn, one of the leading authorities on mysticism, declines to define it but he notes that its origins lie in the notion of 'hiddenness' (McGinn 1994, XI, 41). Instead, he offers three markers for it: it is a part of religion, it is a process, and it is the attempt to express the consciousness of God (McGinn 1991, xiv-xvi).

He summarizes mysticism as the ‘consciousness of the presence of God’ (McGinn 1994, 70, McGinn 1998, 12). William James was also reluctant to attempt to define mysticism (James 1994, 413). His reluctance partially stemmed from his belief that his own constitution shut him out from enjoying mystical experiences. Nonetheless, in his Gifford Lectures from 1902—*The Varieties of Religious Experience*—he suggested that it is an ability to see the truth in a special way (James 1994, 412). He offered his famous four markers for mysticism: 1) It is ineffable, there is no positive way to describe it; it must be experienced; 2) Nonetheless, it has noetic qualities, so that it counts as a type of knowledge, albeit not in any normal sense (1); 3) Mystical states are transient and of short duration (2); 4) It is passive—the person in a mystical state feels gripped by some higher power. James’ discussion of mysticism caused considerable interest but also considerable concern. Von Hügel was so impressed by *Varieties of Religious Experience* that when he completed his own two-volume *The Mystical Element of Religion* in 1908 he sent an autographed copy to James (see Adams 1986, 69). Von Hügel shares with James the emphasis on experience and he makes a number of appreciative remarks about him (3). However, in a letter to James he complained that James’ treatment of religion seemed to over-emphasize the ‘personal and the private’ (see Adams 1986, 69). And, in *The Mystical Element of Religion*, von Hügel acknowledges that in the history of religion there was the almost exclusive emphasis on theological concepts and formulations to the exclusion of the individual and the experimental. Now, however, he objects to James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience* because James’ overemphasis on the personal and experiential. His friend, Ernst Troeltsch, shared von Hügel’s assessment (4). Troeltsch published a review of James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience* and in the same year he devoted considerable space to James in his *Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie in der Religionswissenschaft* (5).

(1) See James 1994, 414–415, 442, 461. Lewis White Beck wrote: ‘Now one thing that philosophers seem unable to do is remain silent about the unnameable, the indescribable, the ineffable’ (Beck 1996, 50).

(2) The Beguine mystic, Mary of Oignies, seems to be the exception. She supposedly had an ecstatic rapture that lasted 35 days. See McGinn 1998, 37–38 and 337, note 42.

(3) Peter Neuner held that experience plays a fundamental role in von Hügel’s thinking (Neuner 1977, 49). For von Hügel’s comments on James, see von Hügel 1999 II: 30, 41, 266.

(4) The Protestant theologian Troeltsch and the Catholic religious thinker von Hügel had a long friendly relationship. Their correspondence began in 1901 and ended with Troeltsch’s sudden death in 1923. This cancelled Troeltsch’s trip to England where he was to give lectures in London, Oxford and Edinburgh. Von Hügel had arranged this trip. He edited the lectures and published them in 1923 (Troeltsch 1979). For an account of their relationship and Troeltsch’s letters to von Hügel, see Troeltsch 1974.

(5) See Troeltsch 1982, 69 and Troeltsch 1905. Troeltsch also gave a complimentary yet

Troeltsch begins by noting contemporary thinkers' mistrust of church dogma and their endorsement of empiricism (Troeltsch 1905, 6). That he has James in mind is clear: he refers to James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* as the 'best and finest achievement of modern psychology of religion' (Troeltsch 1905, 14). He applauds James' emphasis on empirical studies and commends him for showing the psychological element in religious feeling (Troeltsch 1905, 16-17). However, Troeltsch objects that this is only psychology and that it leads James to underappreciate the intensity of religious and mystical feelings. He also objects to the emphasis on the single and empirical, which tends to blind James to the whole and rational side that makes up religious experiences (Troeltsch 1905, 22-23). Troeltsch looks to Kant as a corrective to James' all pervasive emphasis on the empirical. That does not mean that Troeltsch agrees with Kant's transcendental idealism when it comes to religious investigations. Schleiermacher had already complained that Kant's religion is too ethical and that he did not appreciate the religious sense that he describes as the feeling of absolute dependence on God (Troeltsch 1905, 34-35). Troeltsch approvingly lists Schleiermacher's investigation of his self with the mystical self-preoccupations of Augustine and the mystics. One point of Troeltsch's work is to comment on James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*. A second point is to show that there are Protestant correctives to James and Kant. But a third point is to show the depth of mystical feeling, regardless of whether it is Catholic or Protestant.

Troeltsch's *Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie* is valuable in itself, but its importance increases when we presented it in context. He placed it in 1904 in St. Louis at the International Congress of Arts and Letters in commemoration of the 100 years of the Louisiana Purchase. He and his friend Max Weber traveled there together, spending approximately five weeks in close company (6). When Troeltsch was working on *Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie*, Weber was working on *Protestantische Ethik*. During their journey to America they had numerous discussions and it is likely that the topic of mysticism arose (7). In any case, even in *Protestantische Ethik* there are 'tantalizing references' to mysticism (Robertson 1975, 242).

critical account of James after his death. See Troeltsch 1913.

(6) See Rollman 1993. We have yet to have a definitive account of the Weber-Troeltsch relationship. We know that they were friends for over seventeen years, that the Troeltschs lived upstairs in Weber's Heidelberg house

from 1910 to 1915, and that they had a high regard for each other's works and opinions. See Graf 1987.

(7) Hennis claims that James was a major influence on Weber and it was through Troeltsch that he learned to appreciate James. See Hennis 1996, 54-66.

The first references are to the German mystic Johannes Tauler (Weber 1993, 36-38, 47). Tauler was a student of Meister Eckhart and learned much from him. They are two of the most important Rheinland mystics and both were highly influential. There are, however, a number of dissimilarities. Meister Eckhart was a trained scholastic and his sermons were filled with metaphysics. He was not always understood and he knew this: he reportedly asked: 'what may I do if someone does not understand that?' (8) Tauler, by contrast, strove to write in such a way that his many listeners could follow what he was saying (Preger, Band 3, 140, Clark 1949, 44-45). Moreover, after his 'conversion' he was far more concerned about the welfare of his listeners and he tailored his sermons to deal with mundane matters as well as metaphysical ones (9). These first references are on Weber's chapter on Luther (Chapter 3). The connection between the mystic Tauler and the reformer Luther may seem tenuous at first. However, from 1515-1518 Luther read Tauler and learned to appreciate many of his ideas. Weber was aware of this influence and he assumes that many of his readers would know that as well. That is why in his remarks on the origin of the word 'Beruf' he notes that the first similar usage is found in one of those German mystics whose influence on Luther is recognized (Weber 1993, 37). In a note Weber allows that there is no certainty that there is a direct influence from Tauler's use of 'Beruf' to Luther's use; nonetheless, he suggests that there is (10). Furthermore, he stresses that there are strong traces of Tauler's thinking in Luther's works such as 'Freiheit der Christenmenschen' (Weber 1993, 36, note 40). In a slightly later note Weber contends that Tauler's use of the word 'Beruf' is in principle the same as Luther's, both in its spiritual sense as well as the worldly, and this is an instance where the German mystics share a common opposition to the Thomists (Weber 1993, 41, note 45). In the same note Weber states that

(8) 'Was mac ich, ob ieman daz niht enverstât? He also said 'Who has understood this sermon, to him I wish him well. Were no one present here I would have preached to this collection box'. See Otto 1971, p. 18.

(9) See Preger 1962, III: 97. The story of Tauler's 'conversion' is that, supposedly, a man came to him and told him that he was only a beginner and did not understand spiritual matters. This prompted Tauler to devote a number of years engaged in self-examination (Tauler 1923 I: xxxi). However, there has been research that purportedly shows that this person was not Tauler (see Clarke 1949, 41-43). Beck stresses Meister Eckhart's single concern

with the soul and his indifference towards the world: 'But Eckhart has little interest (in his mystical works at least) in the world; he is interested in the soul' (Beck, 1996, 52).

(10) Weber's justification is Tauler's 'beautiful sermon' on Eph. 4 where Paul appeals to his readers to 'lead the life worthy of the calling to which you have been called'. Tauler begins with 'Brüder, ich gebundner Mensch in Gott, ich bitte euch, daß ihr würdig wandelt in in der Berufung, zu der ihr berufen seid, mit aller Demut und Sanftmut und mit Geduld einander in Liebe vertrag'. What follows is Tauler's four point commentary (Tauler 1923, 42-48).

Luther and the mystics share the same belief in the equality of vocations but also that there is a hierarchy that is God given. Another similarity that Luther shares with the mystics against the Church is the belief that there is no priest that can help and that religion is essentially personal (11). Weber cites or mentions Tauler at least five more times (12). Perhaps most interesting is Weber's connection of Luther to the mystics in regard to the *unio mystica* (Weber 1993, 71). Now Weber allows that this developed in Lutheranism. He also acknowledges that Luther's *unio mystica* is not the yearning to be one with God as found in 'That Contemplative' Bernard of Clairvaux (13). And Weber does draw the distinction between the medieval Catholics who lived from hand to mouth and the Lutherans and especially the Calvinists who dedicated their lives to work (Weber 1993, 76). He also notes that Luther never had the inclination to take flight from the world, one of the defining characteristics of a mystic (Weber 1993, 90 note 145, McGinn 1994 120, 127). And he draws his distinction between the passivity of the mystic with the activity of the ascetic (Weber 1994, 72-73). However, he cautions: that 'mystical contemplation and rational "Berufssakese"' do not exclude each other' (Weber 1993, 72 note 99). More importantly, the famous distinction between the mystic as vessel and the ascetic as tool was added in 1920 when Weber had completed his studies on *Wirtschaftsethik* and had prepared *Protestantische Ethik* for Band 1 of his *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (Weber 1993, 73, 183 [221]). As the 45 pages of changes and additions in Weber 1993 show, Weber made a number of important changes. These included a number of additional references to Troeltsch—in particular, to Troeltsch's *Soziallehren* (14).

Like *Protestantische Ethik*, Troeltsch's *Soziallehren* was first published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* beginning in 1908 and ending in 1910. The *Archiv* was the journal that Weber, Edgar Jaffé and Werner Sombart took over in 1903 (15). Troeltsch then reworked major parts of *Soziallehren* and published it as Band 1 of his *Gesammelte Schriften* in 1912. He also added chapters on Calvinism,

(11) Guttandin 1998, 74. Weber writes: 'no one can help him. No priest—for only the chosen can spiritually understand the Word of God' ('Niemand konnte ihm helfen. Kein Prediger—denn nur der Erwählte kann das Gotteswort spiritualiter verstehen') Weber 1993, 62.

(12) Weber 1993, 45 note 56, 47 note 61, 72 note 99, 80 note 127, 96 note 157.

(13) For a detailed account of Bernard's

erotic mysticism and especially his erotic commentary on the 'Song of Songs' see McGinn 1994, 158-224, esp. 178-180, 187-190, 193-222.

(14) See esp. Weber 1993 158 [1], 175 [123], 177 [149], 191 [328], 195 [384].

(15) Weber and Sombart dropped out of their editor roles in 1909. See Weber 1990, 603, note 3.

sects, mysticism, and a conclusion. Troeltsch and Weber had many points of convergence, such as their views on Luther and Calvin and the distinction between Church and Sect (Winckelmann 1987, 200). However, as Troeltsch pointed out in 1910, he and Weber had different objectives and different goals (Winckelmann 1987, 189, 192). Whereas Weber dealt with religion in so far as it was an economic issue, Troeltsch dealt with it as a larger cultural one. Furthermore, Weber was concerned primarily with Church and Sect. This was not the case with Troeltsch. As Trutz Rendtorff has shown, Troeltsch devotes 50 pages to sects and over 90 pages to mysticism (Rendtorff 1993, 179 note 2). And he devotes approximately 40 pages to asceticism.

Troeltsch took up Weber's distinction between Church and Sect but he added a third type: mysticism (16). Much of Troeltsch's discussion of mysticism is not relevant for the purposes of this paper: he discusses a number of Protestant mystics, including Münzer, Schwenkfeld and Sebastian Franck. He also treats the mysticism of the Dutch and the English as well as that of the Quakers and the Herrnhuter (Troeltsch 1912, 878-925). In addition to these, Troeltsch also looks at philosophers. Leibniz and Spinoza have mystical elements in their writings, and he notes that both Schelling and Hegel confess to having been influenced by the German mystics. What is of concern here is Troeltsch's overall view of mysticism. Like Weber, Troeltsch sees mystical elements in Luther (Troeltsch 1912, 849). And, like Weber, Troeltsch sees Protestant mysticism as stemming from Bernard and others from the late Middle Ages (Troeltsch 1912, 850). The mystic rejects any 'objectification' of the religious experience, such as dogma or rites, and believes that mysticism in the widest sense is the experience of the immediate presence of God. He traces mystical experiences to Paul but notes that ancient civilizations such as the Greeks and the Persians also had people who had mystical experiences (17). There is also mysticism in a narrower technical sense, and here he points to, among others, the intellectual mysticism of the Dominicans and the willing mysticism of the Franciscans (Troeltsch 1912, 856). Mysticism is an immediate and individual living process as opposed to external authority, dead letters and sterile ceremonies (Troeltsch 1912, 858-859). Instead, 'The entire mystical thinking stands indeed in the service of a personal living

(16) Troeltsch sets out the three types in a paper from 1911 entitled 'Epochen und Typen der Sozialphilosophie des Christentum' where he defines the mystic as one who has the 'belief in the immediate presence of Christ in the

soul' (Troeltsch 1925, 126).

(17) Troeltsch 1912, 851-852. He cites a number of sources but particularly Erwin Rohde's *Psyche* and James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

piety...' (18) None of this is found in Calvin, who is bound up with the notion of sects. Instead, mystical elements are found in Luther (Troeltsch 1912, 860). Now Troeltsch is able to spell out the differences between the Baptismal sects and the mystical individual. The former knows the laws of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, and with that the living according to the absolute law of nature. The latter knows only the spirit, its freedom and its inner movement (Troeltsch 1912, 863). The Baptist has the external word as rule and external authority; the mystic has the inner word and internal tiny spark (19). There is some degree of individuality in the sects, but it is nothing like the 'radical individuality' of the mystic (Troeltsch 1912, 864-865). The mystic is indifferent to others; his primary, if not exclusive, concern is with God. However, Troeltsch admits that there is a social aspect to the mystic. There may be connections with other like-minded people outside of the monastery (Troeltsch 1912, 866). Troeltsch again stresses the difference between a member of a sect and a mystic, with the former basing his beliefs upon text and authority while the latter bases his beliefs upon the feeling of freedom (Troeltsch 1912, 875-876). Troeltsch concludes his 'overview' of mysticism by remarking on its lack of inclination towards organization and stressing the mystic's concern with his (or her) soul (20).

We do not know Weber's thoughts regarding Troeltsch's discussion of mysticism in the *Soziallehren*. However, we can get a fairly good idea from comments that he made on a paper that Troeltsch presented at the first meeting of the *Deutsche soziologischen Gesellschaft* in Frankfurt in October 1910. The paper that Troeltsch gave was 'Das stoisch-christliche Naturrecht und das moderne profane Naturrecht'. There he sets out the three types: Church, sect, and mysticism. The last, he argues, is 'in truth a radical, "communityless", individuality' (21). It is independent of history, culture and other intermediaries.

We can get a sense of Weber's estimation of Troeltsch's paper in a letter to Franz Enlenburg. He thought it excellent ('ausgezeichnet'), in

(18) Troeltsch 1912, 859. Among others, Troeltsch cites von Hügel's *The Mystical Element of Religion*.

(19) Troeltsch 1912, 863. While many mystics spoke of a small spark, it is perhaps best associated with Meister Eckhart (Clarke 1949, 19-20).

(20) Troeltsch 1912, 939-940. Consider this remark about Troeltsch's mystic: 'The mystic, one could say, can live with the Church, though

the Church does not mean very much to him or her. Mysticism sets a pattern for a personal quest for religious well-being' (Steeiman 1975, 200).

(21) Troeltsch 1925, 173. The mystic stands in immediacy with Jesus or God. Later (186), he says that mysticism 'is the radical, organizationless, individuality of the immediate religious experience'.

part because it was totally 'value free'. And the debate about it was the day's best (22).

In 1911 Rudolf Otto published *Das Heilige* which some compare in importance to Schleiermacher's *Reden*. Like James and many others, Otto does not offer a definition of mysticism. He does give the essential characteristic as that of the divine dominating the mortal (23). He emphasizes the mere mortal mystic's feelings of nothingness with the greatness of God, and following Schleiermacher he stresses the Christian's feeling of absolute dependence on God (Otto, 1997, 9-12, 20-25, 30). We do not know what Weber thought of the book, or indeed whether he had read it (24). However, we have good grounds to believe that Weber read the two articles on mysticism in the second edition of *Logos. Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie der Kultur*—if for no other reason than that he was involved in developing the journal. One article was entitled 'Mystik und Metaphysik' by Sergius Hessen from St. Petersburg and the other 'Formen der Mystik' by Georg Mehlis, the editor of *Logos* (25). Mehlis argued that, despite the apparent contradiction between form and mysticism, he could distinguish between two types: theoretical and practical. Like Windelband, who considered Meister Eckhart to be the father of mysticism (Windelband 1993, 264), Mehlis regarded him as the dominant theoretical mystic (Mehlis 1912, 246-247). It is Eckhart's attempts to deal with the 'coincidenta oppositorum' and with the necessity of absolute quietness (Mehlis 248, 243). It is the notion of absolute silence that Weber emphasizes.

In the section on 'Religionssoziologie' from *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* Weber writes: 'Only if the creaturely in man is totally silent can God speak in the soul' (26). In the 'Religionssoziologie' Weber places mysticism on an almost equal footing with asceticism. He writes that 'either' there is the ascetic 'or' there is the mystic. The ascetic works in

(22) Wolfgang Schluchter suggests that Weber's interest in mysticism was prompted initially by his work on the Russian Revolution of 1905, but that the catalyst for a major rethinking came with Troeltsch's paper (See Schluchter 1989, 129. See Weber 1994, 655).

(23) Otto 1997, 106 note 1. He bases this in part on Schleiermacher's *Reden* of which he thinks highly. Otto wrote an enthusiastic introduction to his edition of the *Reden* published in 1899 in honor of the 100 years since its first appearance. It is dedicated to Dilthey because of his biography of Schleiermacher. It also includes three references to James. See Schleiermacher 1899.

(24) Marianne Weber does not mention Otto and there is nothing in the 1911-1912 correspondence. But it is difficult to believe Weber and Troeltsch did not discuss Otto and his works given the latter's extremely high regard for him. Both Troeltsch and Otto believed in the history of religions theory and both had considerable respect for Schleiermacher based on serious studies of him (see Drescher 1993, 379, note 257).

(25) Hessen 1912 and Mehlis 1912. See also Weber 1998, 75, 77, 87, 96, and 97.

(26) 'Nur wenn das kreatürliche im Menschen völlig schweigt, kann Gott in der Seele reden...' Weber 1980, 330.

the world as a tool ('Werkzeug') of God (Weber 1980, 328, 331, 332). This does not mean that the ascetic approves of the world; indeed, the ascetic is world-rejecting ('Weltablehnen'). In contrast, the mystic does not simply reject the world, the mystic wishes to flee from it ('Weltflucht') (Weber 1980, 330). Weber draws another contrast between the activity of the ascetic and the passivity of the mystic—the former is God's tool and the latter is God's vessel ('Gefäß') (Weber 1980, 331). The mystic does not *do*; the mystic wishes to *have*. What the mystic wishes to have is a certain type of knowledge; that is, specifically, of God. Weber insists that this particular type of feeling counts as a particular type of knowledge for the mystic. In order to know God, that is, to overcome the distance between God and man, man must refrain from action and must empty himself as much as possible. This is necessary to create the possibility for the mystic to engage in the 'unio mystica' with God (Weber 1980, 330). Weber appears to acknowledge that there are difficulties with maintaining the opposition between the active ascetic and passive mystic when he allows that the distinction is fluid (Weber 1980, 330). The mystic is not completely passive; the emptying of oneself is an activity. Furthermore, Weber writes of the 'energetic concentration' that is the mark of the mystic (Weber 1980, 331). The difference that Weber seems to suggest is that, for the ascetic, activity is a goal in itself whereas, for the mystic, it is merely a means to an end. To the ascetic, the mystic's inactivity is an indication of the mystic religious sterility with his emphasis on feeling. The ascetic also believes that the mystic abdicates his role in working for God. From the mystic's point of view, the ascetic's concern with worldly activities leads to a life containing insurmountable tensions between power and good (Weber 1980, 331). Weber points to another contrast: the world-fleeing mystic is perhaps more dependent on the world than the world-rejecting ascetic. The mystic lives on the voluntary offerings of man and nature, be they berries and nuts or alms and donations (Weber 1980, 331). Weber offers another contrast between the ascetic and the mystic, since the ascetic lives and works within the world he has an interest in the meaning of it. For the mystic, who cares not for the world but for another higher 'reality', there is no need to be concerned with the world's meaning (Weber 1980, 332). Weber also contrasts the differences in humility. For the ascetic, humility is the way in which he must regard his worldly success—that it is not his, but rather God's success. For the mystic, humility is associated with the way in which he lives within the world—he minimizes his worldly activity in order to achieve the silence that is necessary for him to seek refuge in God (Weber 1980, 332). He

seeks the continuous 'quiet euphoria' of contemplation. This need for quiet marks all mystics, whether they are from the East or the West (Weber 1980, 330). As in *Protestantische Ethik*, here also Weber uses Tauler as the representative of western mysticism. It is Tauler who after the day's work wishes to retire at night in order to have the possibility of the 'unio mystica' (Weber 1980, 333, 330). And, like Troeltsch, Weber stresses the mystic's individuality and lack of social interaction. In fact, the mystic does not have a strong sense of social activity in general. He is alone and wishes to be alone: he does not want to do, but to 'feel'. If there is any basis for the development of a 'genuine mystic community action' ('genuiner Mystik Gemeinschaftshandeln', it stems from the acosmism of feeling of mystical love (Weber 1980, 333). Contemplation, not action, has been the watchword of Christian mystics. Weber claims that certain mystics have even seen that activity is better than contemplation, and he cites Meister Eckhart as an example (Weber 1980, 334). Eckhart gave a sermon in which he commented on Luke 10: 38-42. Martha complains that she is working hard and Mary is doing nothing but listening. Jesus tells Martha that she should not be troubled and that Mary has the 'one needful thing'. Mystics, from Origen on, have interpreted this passage as Jesus' endorsement of contemplation over activity (McGinn 1991, 69, 126, 215, 249). According to Weber, however, Eckhart finally preferred Martha over Mary (27). Is Weber misunderstanding or misusing Eckhart? We have no way of telling. However, Weber suddenly speaks of the 'echter Mystik', 'true mystic' and the 'genuin mystischen Gottesbesitz' ('genuine mystical possession of God') (Weber 1980, 332, 365). Has Weber's interest in asceticism prompted him to devalue mysticism again? A few points support this interpretation. One is his interest in action. A second is his antipathy towards the irrationality of feeling (see Weber 1980, 362). A third builds on his three-fold distinction of legitimate domination: traditional, charismatic and rational (Weber 1980, 122-140). All mysticism and mystery cults believe in the habit of (traditional) rituals, which he claims leads one away from *rational action* (Weber 1980, 322, his italics). Furthermore, the mystic's attraction is charismatic (Weber 1980, 322). Finally, Weber distinguishes between the Western mystic's conception of the world and the Eastern mystic's—the former believes that it is a created 'work' whereas the latter believes that it is simply a given for all eternity (Weber 1980, 335). In his later work, Weber will make more of the contrast between eastern and western mysticism.

(27) Weber 1980, 334. A reading of Luke 10: 38-42 does not support such an interpretation. Nor apparently, does Eckhart's sermon. See Eckhart 1979, 158-164.

The section on 'Religionssoziologie' in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* was probably written in 1912 or 1913. As Tenbruck has argued, the whole of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* is problematic and the editors of *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* are trying to address most of the issues (Tenbruck 1999, 133-156, Schluchter 1991, 597-598). Nonetheless, Weber's discussion of mysticism seems to be an investigative midpoint between the mild interest shown in *Protestantische Ethik* and the investigations from 1915 onwards which are to be found in the three volumes of *Religionssoziologie*.

In volume One Weber focuses on the mysticism of Laotse. Like all mystics, Laotse seeks God, or perhaps better, seeks the 'godly principle' which is Tao (Weber 1989, 383, 386). As with other mystics, Laotse is contemplative, a point that Weber repeatedly stresses (Weber 1989, 107, 383, 385, 389, 391). As such, Laotse seeks to arrive at Tao through contemplation, and not through action. Even if he does not totally reject action, he seeks to minimize it (Weber 1989, 384). Like all mystics, he is absolutely indifferent to the world (Weber 1989, 380, 390). Thus, he does not even engage in any *active* struggle against the world (Weber 1989, 389). The mystic is utterly indifferent to the world and its rational social ethics (Weber 1989, 389). Weber quotes a German translation of Laotse: 'This all is without use for your person' (28). It is without use because it in no way furthers the 'unio mystica'. This would be the peacefulness that the mystic seeks (Weber 1989, 379). Weber also draws the conclusions that the mystic is indifferent to the everydayness of the world and that his interest is really in himself (Weber, 113).

In the second volume Weber stresses the self-interest in one's soul that the Brahman possesses (Weber 1996, 271). The Brahman also seeks knowledge, specifically a mystical reunification. Once again, Weber stresses that this is not knowledge in any ordinary sense, but rather a 'Haben' ('having') (29). And he also stresses the Indian's life of thought to the minimization of activity (Weber 1996, 282).

The Buddhist mystic differs from the usual mystic in that he is not necessarily self-absorbed. Instead, he seeks an unlimited feeling for man and animal (30). In this, the mystic seeks to be God-like. Weber again points to the difference between man and God: man has a need for, and interest in, activity. In contrast, rest is Godly (Weber 1996, 530).

(28) 'Dies alles ist ohne Nützen für deine Person', Weber 1989, 386.

(29) Weber 1996, 280. Later he writes 'The mystical knowledge is not, at least not adequate and rational, communicable', Weber 1996, 529. Compare this with James'

first two points about mysticism, above, page 39.

(30) Weber notes the similarity with Father Zosima from *The Brothers Karamazov* and with Platon Karataev from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (Weber 1989, 333 and note 4).

It is in the 'Zwischenbetrachtung' ('Intermediate Reflection') section of *Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligion* that Weber again takes up the issue of mysticism. Once more Weber places active asceticism against contemplative mysticism (Weber 1989, 481). It is here that he calls the ascetic and the mystic 'polar concepts'. On the one side there is the God-willed activity of the ascetic who considers himself to be God's tool; on the other side there is the contemplation of the mystic who regards himself as God's vessel. He does not *do*, but rather *has* possession of the holy (Weber 1989, 482). This opposition lessens if the ascetic moves towards the mystic by minimizing work and maximizing contemplation, just as the mystic moves towards the ascetic by not drawing the world-fleeing conclusion but choosing instead to remain within the world's order. Weber has four categories:

Ascetic

Mystic

(1) innerworld (2) world-fleeing (3) innerworld (4) world-fleeing

The mystic will minimize activity even if he remains within the world, for he must not *do* but must *be* (Weber 1989, 482-483). The fundamental principle for any true mystic is to remain silent, for only then can God speak. For the innerworldly ascetic it is through activity that there is godliness, and even while rejecting the world, by acting, the ascetic dominates the world. To the mystic, the ascetic seems preoccupied with vain self-justice; to the ascetic, the mystic seems preoccupied with pleasurable self-absorption (Weber 1989, 483). As Weber makes clear, there are degrees of opposition between asceticism and mysticism.

Weber was never preoccupied with mysticism, although I believe that I have demonstrated that he had a growing interest in it. Whether it was kindled by his work on the Russian revolutions, as Schluchter suggested, or by Troeltsch's 1910 paper, as Mitzman believed (Mitzman 1979, 195) or by some other cause is not of primary importance. What is of primary importance is that Weber had a growing appreciation for mysticism, and not simply from a scholar's point of view. In an often-cited letter to Ferdinand Tönnies written in 1909, Weber remarks that in religious matters he is 'unmusical' (31). Weber wrote another letter less than two weeks later in which he discussed the historical significance of mysticism. He adds that he does not have the psychic capacity to experience such religious feelings, again because he is religiously 'unmusical' (Weber 1994, 70). During the last decade of his life it seems that Weber began to become 'musical'. Perhaps the best support for this comes from

(31) The letter is dated 19 February (Weber 1994, 65).

Eduard Baumgarten who recounts a story that Marianne Weber told him sometime around 1918 or 1919. Max and Marianne would often sit in their salon before retiring. They would sit there mostly in silence, with Max enjoying a cigar. On one occasion he said:

Tell me, can you picture yourself to be a mystic?

That would certainly be the *last thing* that I could think about myself. Can you then picture *yourself* as one?

It could even be that I *am* one. How much more in my life have I 'dreamt' than one ought actually to allow oneself, thus I never feel *entirely* dependably at home. It is, as I could (and want) just as well as also to withdraw myself *entirely* from *everything* (32).

This passage is instructive for what it does say as well as what it does not say. First, Weber does not respond directly to Marianne's assertion that it would be the *last thing* that she could imagine herself to be. Second, he does not address her high degree of certainty. Instead, he says that he certainly *could be* a mystic. Third, he speaks of the number of times that he has 'dreamt' but does not explain what he means—does he mean nightly dreams, daytime reveries, or of making the plans? What he does say is that he has done more dreaming than one ought to allow oneself. Again, he is silent on what he means by this—has he somehow broken some self-regulation or has he engaged in dreaming that is somehow too pleasurable? Fourth, he says that he never reliably feels at home—does he mean that he never *completely* or *comfortably* feel at home? The second possibility is strengthened when one considers *daheim* to be a sense of belonging, a sense of being at ease in one's place or in one's surrounding. It is a sense of not being alienated but rather feeling at one with the world. Finally, the last sentence is crucial—that he could and would *withdraw himself from everything*. This is a variation of the contemplative mystic's 'flight from the world'—he would not flee but would deliberately remove himself from it. The passage is fascinating because it is enigmatic. Finally, we have the enigmatic last words that Weber uttered: 'The true is the truth' (33).

I have not suggested that Max Weber ever was a mystic, despite Marianne's story. But I have suggested that Weber developed an interest in mysticism, an interest that seemed to grow in the last five years of his

(32) Sag mal, kannst Du Dir vorstellen, Du seist ein Mystiker?

Das wäre gewiß das *Letzte*, was ich mir Denken könnte. Kannst Du es denn etwa für *Dich* dir vorstellen?

Es könnte sogar sein, daß ich einer *bin*. Wie ich mehr in meinem Leben 'geträumt' habe als

man sich eigentlich erlauben darf, so bin ich auch nirgends *ganz* verläßlich daheim. Es ist, als könnte (und wollte) ich mich aus *allem* ebensowohl auch *ganz* zurückziehen. (Baumgarten 1964, 677).

(33) 'Das Wahr ist die Wahrheit' (Weber 1926, 711).

life. Until the correspondence from those years is made available and until we have a reliable biography of him, we may never really know how he felt about mysticism.

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