
Confucian Humanism and Theodicy

Weigang Chen*

This article explores the puzzle of Confucian “divine humanism” in light of the Weberian scheme of religious rationalization. Relating the Confucian humanistic orientation to current discussions of the phenomenon of “amoral familism,” I argue that the Confucian puzzle calls into question the cornerstone of Max Weber’s comparative religion, namely his influential contrast between religious legitimation and theodicy. In particular, the puzzle suggests that in pre-Confucian China, there was no legitimate cosmic-social world order to which Confucianism managed to adjust, let alone to affirm. As a matter of fact, it was the Confucian solution to the problem of theodicy that laid the foundation for the legitimacy of the ethical polity. Hence, inverting what Weber and neo-Weberian theorists have asserted about the religious breakthroughs in the Axial Age, theodicy constituted the religious prerequisite for political legitimation.

CONFUCIANISM IS well known for its radical humanistic orientation. This tendency has found arguably its most forceful expression in the following statement in *The Analects*:

It is the human that can make the Way [of Heaven] great, and not the Way [of Heaven] that can make the human great. (*Lunyu* 1980: 5.29)

*Weigang Chen, Philosophy and Religious Studies Program, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, The University of Macau, Av. Padre Tomás Pereira Taipa, Macau. E-mail: wgchen@umac.mo.

Similarly, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, one of the four basic canons of Neo-Confucianism, states:

What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature. To follow human nature is called the Way [of Heaven]. Cultivating the Way (of Heaven) is called teaching. The Way [of Heaven] cannot be separated from us for a moment. What can be separated from us is not the Way (of Heaven).¹

There is little doubt that these statements betray an “extreme” brand of humanism (Chan 1964: 44), or, in Max Weber’s terms, an extreme form of this-worldly orientation. In doing so, however, the statements confront us with an evident conceptual dilemma.

On the one hand, these statements indicate clearly that there exists “a purposive and caring Heaven” which is beyond and absolutely transcends the human world and thus acts as *the ultimate arbiter of human affairs* (Tu 1989: 9). In this context, the term “Heaven” in Chinese thought refers to the sum total of ultimate and highest truths about the universe and the human world, against which everything under heaven is to be judged and measured. The Confucian notion of the Way of Heaven, then, comes very close to the term “Truth” or “God” in religious and philosophical writings in the West and other parts of the world. On the other hand, however, we are also told that Heaven is dependent upon the human being, in the sense that it is *through and only through* human activities that the Way of Heaven manifests itself. But how can Heaven be *both beyond and dependent upon* human activities? How, after all, can we conceptualize the relationship between Heaven and the human world in this connection?

A standard answer to this paradox of Confucian humanism is provided by Tu Weiming in his well-known interpretation of *The Doctrine of the Mean*. What holds the key to this perplexity, according to Tu, is “the mutuality of Heaven and man” or what Mircea Eliade terms “the anthropocosmic unity” (Tu 1989: 9). Like the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Confucian mode of thinking is not “anthropocentric” in the sense of insisting that human nature is imparted by Heaven. In this regard, it is inconceivable from the Confucian perspective that “man can be alienated from Heaven in any essential way” (10). Yet, in sharp contrast to the “theocentric” orientation of the predominant religious trends in the West, Confucianism maintains that Heaven also charges the human

¹See *Zhongyong* (1980: chap. 1). Here I adopted Tu Weiming’s translation of this important passage. See Tu (1989: 5–6).

“with the mission of bringing the cosmic transformation to its fruition” (9–10). Hence “the Way is nothing other than the actualization of *true* human nature” and “to know Heaven,” accordingly, is to penetrate deeply into the human’s “own ground of being” (10, emphasis added). In this light, since the Way of Heaven (*tian dao*) is identical with the way of human (*ren dao*), “the path to transcendence (heaven) is none other than the path of self-discovery.” The way to the outer is thus through the inner (Wan 2008).

In spite of its evident insightfulness, Tu’s “anthropocosmic” interpretation has regrettably failed to pinpoint where the paradox posited by the Confucian version of “divine humanism” actually lies. It is of course not paradoxical, as Tu argues, to assert that the human being cannot be “alienated from Heaven in any essential way” (Tu 1989: 10), but it is certainly paradoxical to imply, as Confucius obviously does, that *Heaven cannot be alienated from the human being* in any essential way. Given that the presumed identity between the Way of Heaven and the way of human derives from Heaven’s endowment of human nature, it would logically follow that it is Heaven that makes human beings *truly* human, or, to put it more straightforwardly, it is Heaven that makes human beings great. If so, why does *The Analects* bother to argue precisely the contrary?

This article seeks to decipher the puzzle of Confucian “divine humanism” in light of Weber’s account of religious rationalization. As I argue in the discussion that follows, the Confucian puzzle calls into question the cornerstone of Weber’s comparative religion, namely his influential contrast between religious legitimation and theodicy. In particular, the puzzle suggests that in pre-Confucian China, there was no *legitimate* cosmic-social world order to which Confucianism managed to adjust, let alone to affirm. As a matter of fact, it was the Confucian solution to the problematic of theodicy that laid the foundation for the legitimacy of the ethical polity. Hence, inverting what Weber and neo-Weberian theorists have asserted about the religious breakthroughs in the Axial Age, theodicy constituted the religious prerequisite for political legitimation.

I start by briefly reviewing some of the most basic premises underlying Weber’s theory of religion.

LEGITIMATION VERSUS THEODICY: WEBER’S COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Weber’s comparative studies on the Confucian, Indian, Hebrew, and Protestant civilizations were organized around the relation between God

and the world. What, then, is the “world” which Weber saw being affirmed by Confucianism, rejected by Indian soteriologies, and eventually conquered by ascetic Protestantism?

The “world” as understood by Weber, as Peter L. Berger has suggested, was intimately related to what might be termed the “microcosm/macrocosm scheme of legitimation” (1967: 32–34). Informed primarily by the Hegelian dichotomy between *Sittlichkeit* and *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, the scheme assumed that the reproduction of social order in premodern societies relied on the legitimating effect of a variety of magical-communal cults or “traditionalist” worldviews, which presumably projected traditional social structures and social practices as a faithful reflection of the divine cosmic structure (Bellah 1976: 31). Hence, Weber concurred with Émile Durkheim in holding that all traditional social structures, from a household, clan, or tribal confederation to the Greek city-state and patrimonial states, are essentially religious or cult associations and may therefore be seen as different expressions of the same paradigm of the “sacralized polity” (Weber 1963: 10f; Morris 1987: 70) or “natural religion” (Wach 1944: 55f). Religion in this “communal” sense refers to a system “having its theology, cultus, and personnel so intimately diffused into one or more secular social institutions that they become a part of the concept, rituals, and structure of the latter, thus having no significant independent existence” (Yang 1961: 295).

Only against this premise about the premodern world may we understand why Weber insisted that the rise of autonomous public life in the modern West must derive from the process of the *religious* disenchantment of the “world” (Gauchet 1997), that is, the dual process of disenchanting the established mythical-metaphysical world order while simultaneously religionizing the domain of social labor, and why he viewed the tension between “world” and God as the key to such a process (Weber 1968: 226).

Beneath this profound cultural breakthrough, according to Weber, was the *problem of theodicy*. Even the greatest conventionalism imaginable had to face the actual distribution of fortunes and the unpredictability of one’s fate or destiny. It could hardly explain why there should be misfortunes and injustice in “this best of all possible social orders,” let alone satisfy “even modest demands for justice” (Weber 1968: 206). This personal aspiration for salvation unavoidably raised the question of justifying the unequal distribution of life’s goods, challenged the validity of any traditional microcosm/macrocosm scheme of legitimation, and hence gave rise to the major world religions, from Judaism and Christianity in all its variety to Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam.

We may then judge the level of rationalization of a world religion in accordance with how the relation between God and the established cosmic-social world order was conceived in that religion (Eisenstadt 1985: 47). Political religion, with Confucianism as its purest type, had never succeeded in developing a notion of a transcendental God that was absolutely beyond and above the traditional cosmic and social orders (Schluchter 1990). As a result, “all tension between the imperatives of a supra-mundane god and a creatural world, all orientation toward a goal in the beyond, and all conception of radical evil were absent” (Weber 1968: 228). This aborted form of religious rationalization led naturally to the Confucian adjustment to and affirmation of the established “sacralized” world order.

The Confucian denial of any fundamental distinction between the transcendental realm and the traditional sacralized world, Weber went on, manifested itself most prominently in the notion of the Way (*dao*) of Heaven—an “impersonal celestial power” or an eternal cosmic order encompassing both heaven and earth, of which “the social orders of society were but a special case” (1968: 152–153). The Confucian identification of *Dao* with the traditional cosmic-social world order allowed virtually no latitude for questioning Heaven’s inscrutability or *even for raising the questions of theodicy*. Such attempt to immanentize Heaven inevitably brought about the Confucian tolerance of the masses’ unbroken faith in magic and affirmation of the established cosmic-social world order.

The Confucian affirmation of the world and sanctification of tradition could accordingly be considered as an aborted form of theodicy or a “theodicy of good fortune” (Weber 1964a: 271). As such, it contrasted sharply with salvation religion or what may be called “the theodicy of misfortune.” All forms of salvation religion were characterized by an emphasis on the grandiose incongruity between God and the cosmic-social world and by a radical rejection of the world as it is. In other words, common to all the salvation religions was the disenchantment of or negation of the “world”—defined as the “sacralized” political structure and the surrounding “divine” nature (Eisenstadt 1985: 47).

There was, however, a further distinction between two primary types of salvation religion, which Weber termed “contemplative mysticism” and “inner-worldly asceticism,” respectively (Morris 1987: 77). This distinction was pertinent to the contrast between “cosmocentric” and “theocentric” orientations. Whereas the mystic, exemplified by the Buddha and the Hindu ideal of *sannyāsin*, was engaged in a contemplative “flight” from the world and a “mystical union” with the transcendental and thus left the immanent cosmic-social world untouched, the

worldly ascetic was a “rationalist” characterized by a dialectical combination of rejection of the world and an attempt to reconstruct it in accordance with God’s commands. It follows that only the Protestant inner-worldly asceticism could carry through the complete “de-magification” and disenchantment of the traditional cosmic-political order and accordingly provided the religious prerequisites for the public reorientation of social labor (Weber 1964b).

Weber’s comparative religion may then be summarized as follows: Holding constant the legitimating efficacy of “the unity of order in the cosmos and in society” in historical societies (1968: 153), we may assess the capacity of a given rational religious worldview for rationalization in terms of its relations to the established cosmic-social order. It was in line with this presumption that Weber characterized Protestantism and Confucianism as the two ends of the whole spectrum of religious rationalization. Whereas a lack of a transcendental tension accounted for the Confucian tradition’s optimistic affirmation of the traditional cosmic-social world order and its tolerance of the magic-communal religiosity, ascetic Protestantism alone had cut off all trust in “superstition” and “magical manipulations,” thereby carrying through the complete disenchantment of the existing sacralized world with the greatest consistency (226).

SITTlichkeit AND “AMORAL FAMILISM”: THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL REPRODUCTION

Weber’s analysis of Confucianism, especially his claims to the Confucian denial of the transcendental tension and to the uninterrupted power of magic in China, has evoked quite a few critical responses. Thomas A. Metzger, for instance, questions the Weberian characterization of Confucianism as an ethic of “adjustment to the world,” calling attention to the conspicuous parallels between the Neo-Confucian sense of predicament for the moral fulfillment of the self and Weber’s Protestant “tensions” (1977: 202–203). Similarly, Benjamin Schwartz (1975) and Tu (1979) argue that in *The Analects*, one may find considerable emphasis on “Heaven” which is treated not simply as the immanent *Dao* of nature and society but as a transcendental will interested in the Confucian redeeming mission.² More recently, Heiner

²This line of inquiry was responsible for the emergence of a large number of studies on “Confucian spirituality” and the “Confucian mode of modernity.” Among others, see Liu (1990), Rozman (1991), Tu (1991, 1996), Brook and Luong (1997), Bell and Chaibong (2003), Tu and Tucker (2004), and most recently, Yang and Tamney (2011).

Roetz suggests that Confucian moral philosophy, with its evident indifference toward the ancestral and natural spirits, is to be analyzed as a rational ethic that transcends “the conventional level of *Sittlichkeit*” and may therefore be seen as a Chinese version of “the post-conventional ethics of responsibility” (1993). Michael J. Puett counters Weber by bringing into focus the “perceived tensions between nature and culture” in ancient Chinese thought (2001), especially the rivalry between the attempts to anthropomorphize the divine (through ritual practices of divination and sacrifice) and the opposite tendency to seek to attain divine powers (through practices of self-cultivation) so as to “become a God” (2002). And Wei Shang’s study on Confucian “ascetic ritualism” takes a step further to highlight the world-rejection dimension of the Confucian tradition (2003).

These criticisms force a major rethink of the starting point of Weber’s comparative religion, namely the microcosm/macrocosm scheme of legitimation. As noted above, this scheme stemmed from the Hegelian dichotomy between *Sittlichkeit* and *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. The notion of *Sittlichkeit*, defined as the ethical life or what Jürgen Habermas calls “the lifeworld” of a society, posited the ethos–community–subject complex as the key to the process of social reproduction. In this view, the most important function of society is to provide a collective ethos or a stock of unproblematic, background convictions that define the basic structure of a society, especially the “maxims” of the distributions of wealth, income, and status (Habermas 1984: 70). Society, then, is to be seen as a moral community that is detached from and standing above individuals’ calculated needs. This normative community secures the dialectic relationship between institution and human action, serving as the formative site in which historical “subjects” capable of value-oriented actions are produced and reproduced. These “subjects,” in return, tend to perceive the existing institutions as “justified” and “legitimate.” It is in and through their subsequent value-oriented actions (*praxis*) that society becomes a reality *sui generis* (Berger 1967: 4).

Such a communalistic perspective on social reproduction prepared the ground for Ferdinand Tönnies’ dichotomy between a traditional, kin-based *Gemeinschaft* (community) resting on a collective sense of solidarity (the general will, *conscience commune*, etc.) and a modern, impersonal *Gesellschaft* (association) resting on economic exchange and self-interest (Putnam 1993: 114).

It is important to note that while contemporary social theory has borrowed heavily from the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, this conceptual dualism has been questioned and defied by

an increasing number of studies. There is little doubt that in a typical Hobbesian situation, a strong family system can be seen as “an essentially defensive mechanism against a hostile and capricious environment” (Fukuyama 1996: 88). In this connection, family and broader forms of kinship, like clans or tribes, can be considered as an avenue to sociability (28). The question is whether family and kinship or communal structures in general are to be seen as the locus of ethical-public life, as the lifeworld that generates legitimate orders and is therefore what makes the traditional ethical polity possible.

In his classic study, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, Edward Banfield challenged the conventional romantic idealization of *Gemeinschaft* as a community of trust, stability, and congeniality by arguing that the dominant ethos of a familistic society is by definition the “amoral familism” (1958). Based on his study of social life in a southern Italian peasant community “Montegrano” after World War II, Banfield observed that social ties and moral obligations in a typical kin-based society were limited to the family and the kinship structure alone; outside of this, individuals did not trust each other and therefore did not feel a sense of responsibility to any larger groups (Fukuyama 1996: 56).

In the Montegrano mind, any advantage that may be given to another is necessarily at the expense of one’s own family. Therefore, one cannot afford the luxury of charity, which is giving others more than their due, or even of justice, which is giving them their due. The world being what it is, all those who stand outside of the small circle of the family are at least potential competitors and therefore also potential enemies. Toward those who are not of the family the reasonable attitude is suspicion. The parent knows that other families will envy and fear the success of his family and that they are likely to seek to do it injury. He must therefore fear them and be ready to do them injury in order that they may have less power to injure him and his. (Banfield 1958: 116)

The dominant “moral” code in Montegrano can therefore be properly characterized as the *amoral familism*: “Maximize the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that all others will do likewise” (85).

Robert Putnam has extended Banfield’s findings by linking “amoral familism” with what he has termed “vertical bonds” of patronage, clientelism, and the Mafia. In such an atomized society, recourse to patron-client ties was both a sensible response to social fragmentation and a rational strategy for survival (Putnam 1993: 145). As one report from

1876 noted, “every local notable in his jurisdiction of power was the head of network of persons, who depended on him for their economic survival and social prestige and who furnished him legal support in terms of electoral suffrage and illegal support in the recourse to private violence in defense of his particular interests” (145). In fact, peasants feared exclusion from the patron–client system, for it alone assured their physical subsistence, so long as the peasant–client remained obedient and “faithful” to the landlord–patron (145). Like the conventional clientelism it mirrored, the Mafia provided a kind of privatized Leviathan. In addition to offering protection against bandits, rural theft, and inhabitants of rival towns, “Mafia ‘enforcers’ enabled economic agents to negotiate agreements with a modicum of confidence that those agreements would be kept” (147). Ironically, “the most specific activity of *mafiosi* consists in producing and selling a very special commodity,” indispensable in economic transactions, yet definitely in short supply in the absence of credible state enforcement of laws and contracts—trust (Gambetta 1988). Needless to say, such products of a disorganized society as clientelism and the Mafia tend to preserve and perpetuate social fragmentation and disorganization (Graziano 1973).

The phenomenon of “amoral familism” is certainly not unique to Italy or to Latin Catholic cultures in general. In fact, as Francis Fukuyama has pointed out, it finds an even purer expression in Chinese societies (1996: 56). As in southern Italy, there is a very strong inclination on the part of the Chinese to trust only people related to them by kinship relations, and conversely to distrust people outside their family and kinship group (75). According to Gordon Redding, “the key feature [of a Chinese society] would appear to be that you trust your family absolutely, your friends and acquaintances to the degree that mutual dependence has been established and face invested in them. With everybody else you make no assumptions about their goodwill. You have the right to expect their politeness and their following of the social proprieties, but beyond that you must anticipate that, just as you are, they are looking primarily to their own, i.e., their family’s, best interests” (1990: 66).

Given the pervasive lack of trust and security, people in a familistic society are typically forced to rely on “the forces of order.” State power, then, provides the only alternative to anarchy (Putnam 1993: 112; Fukuyama 1996: 338). Against this background, it is not difficult to see why the Platonic–Aristotelian contrast between the private realm of social labor and the public realm of the *polis* runs directly counter to the modern polarity of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. In sharp opposition to the modern idyllic portrait of the kinship system, the classical scheme sets the boundary not between the economic and the family,

but between labor (which includes both kinship structures and economic activities) and the *polis*. In this view, both the family and the economic are related exclusively to the maintenance of life and stand for something that human life has in common with animal life. To put it otherwise, *both* the kin-based community *and* the market society, from the classical point of view, represent the sphere of “human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be” or the sphere of *the private self*, which is tied to needs and wants and therefore not considered to possess sufficient dignity to constitute a way of life defined by the human *telos* (Arendt 1954: 12; MacIntyre 1984).

The phenomenon of “amoral familism” hence brings back the Hobbesian problem of public order and compels us to confront, once again, the paradox of social reproduction. In view of such challenge, Fukuyama has suggested making a distinction between at least two broad paths to sociability: one based on family and kinship and the other on the State (1996: 62). The natural and spontaneous bonds of *Gemeinschaft* (family and kinship) provide an institutional framework for the operation of economic activities and organizations, which lack the capacity for self-reproduction (i.e., sociability), but the same “ascriptive” bonds also explains why family and kinship have a great deal of trouble creating large, durable national organizations and therefore have to look to the State to provide an institutional framework within which their own self-reproduction becomes possible. For analytical reasons, it would be necessary to differentiate political reproduction from social reproduction. While the latter refers specifically to the problem of the reproduction of communal structures, the former concerns exclusively the reproduction of political institutions.

But here the real problem comes in. How should we conceptualize the difference between the two modes of reproduction? Since both *Sittlichkeit* and the *polis* represent noneconomic, discursive relations, why should the one have fallen and the other have succeeded in breeding the public-ethical domain? In a word, what makes a state “the State”?

COSMICIZATION VERSUS LEGITIMATION: FATE OR DIVINE JUSTICE?

The beginnings of the answer to these questions, I would suggest, lie in the problem of religion and political legitimation. All modern social theory, as Lawrence Scaff (1989) has put it, starts from the assumption that a government or state is considered “legitimate” if and only if it possesses the “right to rule.” Yet this definition, obviously,

leaves open the most crucial question: “in what does ‘right’ consist, and how can its meaning be determined?”

It is noteworthy that this question has been answered by Weber in two different ways. The *first* answer is provided in his discussion of “the theodicy of good fortune.” For Weber, to say someone has a *right* to his good fortune is to assert “he ‘deserves’ it and, most importantly, he deserves it in comparison with others.” Desert or merit, then, is what makes good fortune “legitimate” fortune (Weber 1964a: 271). This concept of religious legitimation presupposes: (1) an all-embracing divinity that presumably punishes and rewards according to individuals’ merits or demerits; and (2) the equal distribution of “fortune” (life’s goods, including “honor, power, possession, and pleasure”) in such a way that religion must provide specific reasons to explain, regulate, and justify any unequal distribution of such goods (271). The major function of religion is therefore to explain “legitimate fortune” in ethically rational terms. Applying this conception of religious legitimation to the right to exercise political power, the right to rule would indicate: everyone is originally equal such that whoever dares to make a claim to political power must provide sufficient or good reasons to explain why it is the claimant rather than anyone else that should be put in power. Legitimacy is then to be defined as follows: *a regime or a state is considered legitimate if and only if those who claim to political authority possess sufficient merits and thereby deserve the right to exercise political power in comparison with others.* For the convenience of analysis, let us call this definition of legitimacy the *conception of legitimacy as the right to rule.*

Viewed in this way, the claimant’s *de facto* possession of merit or desert constitutes the prerequisite for the public’s perception of the validity of an institutional order. Yet Weber’s *second* answer to the question of the right to rule has evidently inverted this relationship between the right to rule and acceptance or acquiescence. In conformity with Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s idea of the *volunté générale* and Georg Hegel’s notion of *Sittlichkeit*, Weber famously proposes conceptualizing legitimacy as the intersubjective *belief* in the “validity” of an order (1978: 31). In this view, societies can neither be created nor sustained through force or strategic action alone. Social order and collective identities rely upon a mutual recognition of the binding force of consensual norms and values (Baynes 1992: 81). A configuration of social relationships is called an “order,” as Weber pointed out, only if the conduct is oriented to determinable norms; but such actions would occur only if the order is held by at least part of the actors to be “valid,” “exemplary,” or “binding” (1978: 31). The legitimacy of a regime is then to be defined

as its capacity to engender and maintain the belief that “the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society” (Lipset 1960: 77) and the view that the established order stands for “the best of all possible social orders” (Weber 1968: 206).

Thus, instead of ascertaining the legitimacy of a regime in terms of whether it possesses sufficient merits and is therefore entitled to hold the right to exercise political power, Weber’s own usage of legitimacy dissolves legitimacy into belief or opinion, thereby reducing the right to rule to “belief in the right to rule” (Scaff 1989: 453). In fact, the Weberian definition of legitimacy has actually marginalized and consequently rendered simply irrelevant the very notion of the right to rule. As a result, the definition amounts to saying: “If a people hold the belief that existing institutions are ‘appropriate’ or ‘morally proper,’ then those institutions are legitimate. That’s all there is to it” (453). For the convenience of discussion, we may characterize this usage of legitimacy as *the consensus-centered conception of legitimacy* or, more simply, the conception of legitimacy devoid of the right to rule.

The disparity between these two conceptions of legitimacy confirms Carl Friedrich’s observation that Weber’s usage of legitimacy may conflate authority with legitimacy (1963: 233; Schaar 1984: 109). In his widely quoted definition of authority (*Herrschaft*), Weber argues that both power and authority involve “the possibility of imposing one’s will upon the behavior of other persons” (1954: 328). What distinguishes authority from power, coercion, or force is that “authority” is present only in the situations in which the exercise of power is *not* derived from “constellations of interests” (Bendix 1977: 291). In other words, for authority to be present, there must be not only “evidence of the influence of the rulers in terms of the objective degree of compliance with the command,” but also “evidence of that influence in terms of the subjective acceptance with which the ruled obey the command” (292). Obviously, this definition of authority is identical with the consensus-centered conception of legitimacy but different from the right-centered one, which, to use Friedrich’s words, involves exclusively “that aspect of authority which refers to entitlement” (1963: 233), that is, the “right” to exercise political power over others.

The distinction between authority and legitimacy (in the narrow sense of “entitlement”) becomes especially relevant when it comes to the analysis of a *Gemeinschaft* such as family or kinship. As a mode of sociability, family and kinship are usually seen as representing the natural and spontaneous integration defined by “ascriptivism” (i.e., that associational members share a certain set of inherited features. See Kim 2004: 66). The ascriptive nature of *Gemeinschaft* is determined by two

factors: (1) natural or biological membership (e.g., the members of a family, clan, or tribe are related to one another by blood or marriage); and (2) natural authority (i.e., that the “relations of social super- and subordination” are “naturally given” and determined by birth [Weber 1968: 241], and that each member plays specific roles and is conceded to appropriate rights and duties).

Strictly speaking, the question of the right to rule could hardly be posed within this framework of “natural authority,” since the domination of parents, clan elders, or tribal chiefs is biologically or naturally given and cannot be questioned. To put it differently, the authority of parents over children or that of clan elders over other clan members does not revolve around the question of “entitlement.” And the biological or kinship bonds are sufficient for sustaining the reciprocal relationships between superiors and inferiors and therefore securing the “subjective compliance” of the inferiors with regard to the “content of the command” of the superiors.

This may explain why “natural religion” (i.e., communal cults) is essentially cosmological. As Charles Taylor observes, echoing Mircea Eliade, the effectiveness of a “cosmic archetype” in social integration derives from its capacity to cast the world as the embodiment of an underlying cosmological framework, to envision the different levels and types of existents as expressions of the same scheme (1993: 256). Within this cosmic *logos*, each individual or group has a necessary place and cannot be otherwise; each is therefore necessary for the others, and for the whole; and the place of each relative to the others is thus natural, right, according to the order of things; different classes and functions correspond to different links in the chain of being; and different groups can then be seen as expressing complementary principles (274). Once the parallelism between cosmos and society is assumed, these complementary principles come to act as a general formula for the service of justification. Thus, the lion represents in the kingdom of animals what the eagle does among the birds and what the king does in the human realm (256).

There is little doubt that such “correlative cosmology” has been “the traditional justification of hierarchy” in prepolitical societies (274). The “correspondences” or “resemblances” between the “hierarchical” order in the physical cosmos and the “natural authority” characteristic of a *Gemeinschaft* are obvious. Both hierarchical orders are “naturally grown” and therefore have no pertinence to any assumption about the *entitlement* to domination.

But it should be obvious that the presumed parallelism between “cosmos” and “society” would sooner or later fall apart whenever the

question of the right to rule has to be posed, either in the transitions from tribal societies to political societies or in the situations in which competition between families, lineages, or clans renders the “third-party enforcement” of state power simply indispensable. For how can we seriously expect that, *in the kingdom of animals*, some “dominated” species, say the rabbit or the lamb, goes to the lion and ask why it is the lion rather than any other species that *deserves* the dominant position among animals? The survival of the fittest—that is the way of life in the physical “cosmos!” On the other hand, how we may ever talk about “legitimation” in any meaningful way, if, *in the human realm*, we never ask or cease asking the fundamental question as to who is *entitled* to rule or who *deserves* the right to exercise power over others? Indeed, how can we even identify ourselves as *human* beings, if, *in the human world*, we simply take it for granted and regard it as being “natural” or “by a necessity of things” or “according to the order of things” that the strong prevails over the weak, the powerful over the powerless, and the victorious over the conquered?

These are not merely counterfactual questions. Over the period of the first millennium BC during the Axial Age, it was precisely by asking and addressing these vital questions concerning our human identity that “certain creative minorities in the high civilizations of the ancient world initiated simultaneous cultural breakthroughs,” which marked a total rupture with the cosmological-correlative mentality of archaic communal religions, sparked off a global process of the rationalization of worldviews, and paved the way for the emergence of the major world religions (Schwartz 1985: 2).

One salient illustration of such ontological clash between cosmicization and religious legitimation, between communal cults and world religions, is found in ancient India. Essential to our understanding of the origins of the Indian caste system is the religious sanction in the sacrifice of the *Purusha* (the Cosmic Giant) in *Rig Veda* X.90. As is well known, the myth described how the gods had simultaneously created society and cosmos by dismembering the giant as the victim at the cosmic sacrifice, thereby providing a common reference point for the parallelism between cosmic and social orders (Hopkins 1971: 73). Thus, just as the feet of the *Purusha* are his base, so the Sudras, the servile class, are the base of the society, and the earth is the base of the cosmos. By contrast, the head of the *Purusha* is related to the most important elements of society and the cosmos, namely the Brahmins and heaven. The cosmos, human society, and the sacrifice are then seen as “parallel orders of reality of equal antiquity and permanence” (24–25; also see Dumont 1980; Smith 1994; Benavides 2000).

The myth of the *Purusha*, needless to say, perfectly matches the logic of cosmicization as depicted by Charles Taylor. By virtue of the “correspondence” between the “different levels and types of existents,” what the Aryan migrants represent in the human society is what the heaven does in the cosmos and what the lion does in the kingdom of animals. The domination of the victorious is then “justified” on the grounds that they, just like the lion among animals, are born to be the pure, the superior, and therefore the powerful.

Ironically, the “match” only has the effect of highlighting the conceptual incongruity and practical improbability of the microcosm/macrocsm scheme of legitimation. Whereas it makes little sense to ask, in the physical cosmos, why a lion is born to be a lion or why a rabbit is born to be a rabbit, it certainly makes perfect sense and is absolutely essential to ask, *in the human society*, “Why you are born to be a Brahmin while I am born to be a Sudra?”

The significance of this question for our understanding of the *real* legitimation base of the caste system can hardly be overestimated. During the Axial Age, as Weber conceded (1959: 25–29), it was exactly in response to this challenging question that Upanishadic philosophers came to produce what has widely been recognized as the pillars of the classical Hinduism: the idea of *karma* (retribution in each life for an individual’s good or bad deeds in the previous life) and the idea of *samsara* (transmigration of the soul). By holding that an individual’s fate in this life is exactly proportional to the ethical merits or demerits that he has earned for himself in his previous life, the new theory of retribution rejects bluntly the view that one’s position in society results from the *accident* of his birth (Bendix 1977: 171). In doing so, it marks a total rupture with the earlier cosmic mentality. Now no one may claim that he enjoys a high caste status simply because he is born to be the privileged; instead, everyone is born in the caste that “he *deserves* as a result of his conduct in a previous life” (171, emphasis added).

No less striking was the conflict between cosmicization and religious legitimation that took shape in the pre-Confucian China. We may start by noting that more recent studies on religion and state structure during the Shang dynasty (c. 1600–1050 BC) do confirm Weber’s observation (1968: 87) that early Chinese civilization was permeated with a buoyant commitment to a fusion between the ancestral worship and the “Caesaro-papist” bureaucracy. David N. Keightley, for instance, characterized “the religious logic of Shang theology” as an inextricable blending of the ancestral cult and the legitimation of the Shang State (1978). The Shang theology was based on the belief that *Shangdi*, the High Lord, conferred fruitful harvest and divine assistance in battle,

that the king's ancestors were able to intercede with *Shangdi*, and that only the king could communicate with his ancestors.

Worship of the Shang's ancestors, therefore, provided powerful psychological and ideological support for the political domination of the Shang kings. The king's ability to determine through divination, and influence through prayer and sacrifices, the will of the ancestral spirits legitimized the concentration of political power in his person. All power emanated from the theocrat because he was the channel, "the one man," who could appeal for ancestral blessings, or dissipate the ancestral curses, which affected the commonality. It was the king who made fruitful harvest and victories possible by the sacrifices he offered, the rituals he performed, and the divinations he made. (Keightley 1978: 213)

The emergence of *Shangdi* as the High Lord coincides with "the supremacy of Shang and its ruling clan" (Chang 1976: 120). The Shang king's claim to universal supremacy within the "civilized" world thus parallels the emergence of a supreme ruler within the divine world (Schwartz 1985: 30). "The king is naturally the 'high priest' of his lineage's ancestral cult, as is the patriarch of any patrilineal-based kin group. Beyond this, by dint of his monopoly of access to the high god, he certainly is also in some sense the 'high priest' of the worship of Ti [*Shangdi*] as well. Indeed, through his special relationship to Ti, he claims hegemony over all the 'tutelary deities' throughout his realm" (35–36).

The Shang theology, with its distinctive mixture of the ancestral and state cult, therefore marks the genesis of what Weber terms "the one lay religion"—the Chinese version of the microcosm/macrocosm scheme of "legitimation" that takes roots in kinship relations and accounts for the virtually permanent familistic character of Chinese society (1968: 143). Some analysts have accordingly followed Weber to suggest that the leading role played by lineage groups in establishing the foundations of state structure in early China highlights the ancestral cult as an ultimate source of political legitimation.³

The problem with this line of analysis, as Benjamin Schwartz has forcefully argued, is that it confuses the motivations behind the Shang theology with its conceptual coherence and practical effectiveness. No

³See, for instance, Chang (1976: 190f).

doubt the Shang State intended to justify its domination over the conquered peoples by linking the High Lord “ascriptively” to the fate of its royal lineage (1985: 31–32). But it is precisely in this intention that we may discern the serious limitations of the Shang’s kinship paradigm of political order. The royal lineage’s ultimate source of authority lies in the presumed connection of its ancestors with the High Lord. Hence, even if the success of the royal lineage in pursuing and obtaining power may itself prove the particular numinous efficacy of the royal ancestors, this cannot prevent the conquered clans or tribes from competing for power by making a claim to a similar connection. Everyone, after all, has ancestors (29). In this regard, the kinship paradigm of political order renders true “state” power—i.e., the right to rule or the source of political legitimacy—simply unaccountable (29).

Only against this background may we fully comprehend the nature and significance of the religious “breakthrough” that crystallized in ancient China toward the end of the second millennium BC (Roetz 1993: 39; Puett 2002: 57–60; Slingerland 2009: 110f), when the Zhou people overthrew the dynasty of the Shang in the name of *tian-ming* (the Mandate of Heaven). At the core of the whole notion of the “Heavenly Mandate,” which is to figure centrally in the religious ideology of the Western Zhou era (1050–772 BC), is the centrality of *tian* (Heaven) itself. In stark contrast to the Shang notion of the High Lord, the transcendental powers of Heaven are by no means inextricably tied to the claims of any lineage (Schwartz 1985: 39; Puett 2002: 58). Instead, the Zhou people justify their rebellion by an argument which can count among the most efficacious of Chinese history. “Heaven confers a dynastic mandate for rule to the most virtuous. If the dynasty becomes tyrannical, it loses its legitimation. It will be removed by a rebel who acts in Heaven’s name and founds a new dynasty” (Roetz 1993: 39). As the Duke of Zhou, speaking in the name of the king, declares,

It was not that our small state dared to aspire to the mandate of the Shang dynasty, but that Heaven was not with Yin. It would not strengthen its misrule. It helped us. Was it we who dared to seek the royal throne? *Shangdi* [the High Lord] was not for them.⁴

⁴See “Hongfan” in *Shujing*.

This is why a poem in *The Book of Odes* proclaims:

Don't you mind your ancestors!
Cultivate your virtue.
Always strive to be in harmony with Heaven's Mandate.
Seek for yourselves the many blessings.⁵

What makes the grand idea of the Mandate of Heaven truly new and innovative is “the clear elevation of Heaven to a central and transcendental position in the cosmos and in the ethical life of society” (Schwartz 1985: 46). Thus, if the Shang theology of the High Lord represents an attempt to construct a divine cosmic order in light of the metaphor of lineage hierarchy on earth and then to justify the earthly hierarchy in terms of the identity of cosmic and social orders, the religion of Heaven in the Zhou dynasty represents a bold effort to reconstruct the divine cosmic order as the locus of “objective, universalistic criteria of behavior,” which is in no way bound to any royal lineage and in terms of which everything under heaven is to be judged and measured (46, emphasis added). Heaven is the God of Justice.

The rupture between cosmicization (the Shang theology) and religious legitimation (the Zhou religion of Heaven) is fully reflected in the nuances and ambiguities of the very notion of *tian-ming* per se. The word *ming* initially meant a “command,” but it has also come to mean “fate” or “destiny” (Schwartz 1985: 126). The notion of *tian-ming* then refers both to God’s command or God’s justice (the mandate of Heaven) and to the impersonal cosmic order that predetermines the distribution of fortunes and misfortunes for an individual, a community, or a people. The antagonism between these two connotations of *tian-ming* is evident. Since “Heaven” in the mandate theory is an ethical deity and the theory subordinates political rule to morality, it is hardly surprising that the early Zhou people held the conviction that the good will earn the reward, and the bad the punishment, of Heaven (Roetz 1993: 39). “Whether Heaven will send calamity or happiness,” the *Shujing* states, “depends on one’s virtue” (1980: 39). This ethical interpretation of *tian-ming* paves the way for the rise of Confucian ethic which, as Weber has put it, operates with the polar opposites “right” and “wrong” or justice *vis-à-vis* injustice (1968: 205). In contrast, the interpretation of *tian-ming* as “fate” points toward the impersonal order of the cosmos that is apparently beyond human ability to

⁵See “King Wen” in *Shijing* (1980).

choose (Slingerland 1996; Chen 1997). In this connection, the ancient Chinese concept of *ming* is parallel to the Greek notion of *moira*, the Hindu notion of *rita*, and the Persian notion of *asha* (Tambiah 1990: 7). This concept takes root in the Shang state cult and the cult of the ancestors, anticipating the later development of the Daoist cosmology which, as Weber has also pointed out, operates with the polarity of “clean” *vis-à-vis* “unclean” (Weber 1968: 205) or, in Mary Douglas’ terminology, “purity” *vis-à-vis* “impurity” or “order” *vis-à-vis* “liminality” (1989).

Given the antinomies inherent in the notion of *tian-ming*, it is not surprising that the conviction of Heaven was utterly upset in the Chunqiu era (770–481 BC). During this turbulent period, “there is not a single text in which one does not find the motives of chaos, decay, worry, fear, and deliverance—vocables that reflect the mood of the time” (Roetz 1993: 43). Earthquakes, famines, and political chaos all raised the question of theodicy: How could Heaven, as the supreme ethical power, tolerate these calamities which struck right at the innocent (39)? The power of Confucianism, as we shall see presently, lies precisely in its answer to this fundamental challenge.

GOD’S JUSTICE ON EARTH: THEODICY AS THE SOURCE OF STATE-BUILDING

The preceding discussion provides exemplary situations in which one may seriously reappraise Weber’s polarity of religious legitimation versus theodicy. The Weberian polarity, we may recall, starts from the microcosm/macrocosm scheme of legitimation. Only against this premise about the premodern “world” may we see why Weber attaches so much significance to the tension between God and the established cosmic-social order as the yardstick for gauging the transformative capacity of a world religion.

The question, however, is whether cosmicization and religious legitimation are the same. As Weber has himself acknowledged, religious legitimation, when defined as the “theodicy of good fortune,” presupposes the monotheistic concept of “a rewarding and punishing God” who determines the distribution of “fortune” (honor, power, possession, and pleasure) and “misfortune” solely in terms of one’s merits or demerits (Tenbruck 1975: 685). But such a concept, as previously noted, makes no sense at all in the physical cosmos and for this reason is absent in virtually all versions of “natural religion,” “primitive ontology,” or communal cults. Thus, contrary to what Weber and other proponents of the microcosm/macrocosm thesis have asserted about “traditional societies,” there was no *legitimate* political order prior to

the Axial Age, waiting there for a world religion to reject or to affirm. Rather, the pre-Axial Age world was the one dominated by the cosmic force of “fate,” which predetermined the distribution of fortune or misfortune in a natural, ascriptive, and ethically senseless way. And the great achievement of the world religions lay precisely in their capacity to produce a new idea of divinity, namely a God of unconditional justice, in opposition to the cosmic order of archaic communal religion. In doing so, they established the question of the right to rule or the principle of political legitimacy as what defines the human condition. In this sense, all the world religions were historically political religions.

Viewed in this way, the so-called transcendental tension between God and the world concerned not so much the transformation of the existing political order as state-building, for the simple reason that the tension in question was precisely what made a *political* order possible in the first place. Accordingly, the challenge facing all the Axial Age civilizations was to reconstruct the pre-Axial Age order in light of the “tension” between God’s justice and the cosmic-social world of fate and to change it into a *legitimate* political order.

This challenge for “state-building” brings us to a central issue that has been utterly ignored within the Weberian scheme of comparative religion, namely the linkage between theodicy and political legitimacy. Weber is certainly right in arguing that any attempt to relate the social order to a rewarding and punishing divinity would sooner or later run into the problem of theodicy or the “theodicy of misfortune”—the enormous incongruity between God’s omnipotent providence and the established cosmic-social world (Weber 1964a). “Why do the righteous suffer? Why do the wicked prosper?” These questions arise inevitably whenever the belief in one just, all-powerful deity is juxtaposed with the experienced reality of the suffering of the innocent (Green 2005). Theodicy may then be thought of as the effort to defend God’s justice and power in the face of a *de facto* world ruled by the impersonal force of fate, wherein the distribution of fortunes is subjected to the blind play of cosmic, natural, or social forces.

One of the most powerful and most rational solutions to the incongruity between fate and merit has been the individual quest for salvation (i.e., compensation or redemption) that leads readily to various consistent forms of world rejection. “The need for an ethical interpretation of the ‘meaning’ of the distribution of fortunes among men” (Weber 1964a: 275), as Ronald Green has observed, was a major impetus for the emergence of a variety of compensation theodicies in the Axial Age, as illustrated by the Indian *karma-samsara* complex and

by eschatological theodicies in biblical religions.⁶ Common to all these recompense positions on the problem of innocent suffering is the conviction that unmerited or innocent suffering must be “placed in a larger context of experience and meaning,” far beyond death (Green 2005: 9114). Hence, in the Indian context, for any unjust suffering in this life, there will definitely be a just compensation in some future life. In eschatological theodicies, on the other hand, human life is held to transcend personal death and the righteous eventually receive their full reward while the wicked receive appropriate punishment.⁷ Since these “religions of salvation” assume that God’s justice can never be fully realized in this sinful world (eschatological theodicies) or in any cycle of rebirth in this world (*karma* theodicy), it comes as no surprise that all of them hold a negative attitude toward the “world.” For instance, while it is certain that deeds which generate good *karma* will lead to prosperity or bliss in some future life, it is absolutely certain that such a state will not endure.⁸ Suffering is virtually inescapable within *samsara*. Salvation, accordingly, is to be defined as *moksha*, or liberation from *samsara*.

The question to be raised in this context is: Granted that the challenge for “state-building” in the Axial Age required an affirming attitude toward the world, how then could such world affirmation be compatible with the radical split between God and the cosmic-social world of “fate,” a split that was characteristic of virtually all the Axial Age religious worldviews? In other words, how could God’s justice be authentically revealed and actually realized in the world ruled by the fatalistic laws of the cosmos, wherein innocent suffering or unmerited misfortune was a rule rather than an exception? For the purpose of this study, we may term this question *the problem of God’s justice on earth*, or, to use Immanuel Kant’s nomenclature, the “mystery of the divine call (of men, as citizens, to an ethical state)” (1960: 133).

This divine *call* to the building of “a kingdom of God on earth,” as Kant further argues (1960: 85, 133), presupposes a bifurcation of two

⁶For an excellent analysis of the world-rejection orientation within the Confucian tradition, especially the Confucian concept of “ascetic ritual,” see Shang (2003), Introduction and Chapter 6.

⁷These theodicies differ from one another on the question of just when or how such recompense occurs. The *eschaton* (‘last thing’) can be envisioned as a historical epoch that begins at the end of history, a time when the righteous are resurrected in renewed bodies. Or it can be understood as an eternal heavenly realm that one enters after death. In either case, eschatological theodicies assume that the blissful future life more than compensates for present suffering” (Green 2005: 9114).

⁸“Because every transgression brings its penalty, and because those who are spiritually or materially well placed are more likely to transgress, existence in *samsara* is an endless shuttle between momentary respite and prolonged misery” (Green 2005: 9119).

realms of action—namely, the distinction between the “intelligible world” and the “sensible world.” A rational being, Kant writes, thus has “two perspectives from which he can consider himself and from which he can acknowledge the laws governing the use of his powers and consequently governing all his actions. He can consider himself *first* so far as he belongs to the world of sense, under laws of nature (heteronomy); and *secondly*—so far as he belongs to the intelligible world—under laws that are not empirical but, being independent of nature, are founded on reason alone” (Kant 1952: 282). On the one hand, humans inhabit the sensible world wherein our actions are determined by the fatalistic laws of nature and the regularities of cause and effect. Here I am only an empirical being, incapable of freedom. Every exercise of my will is conditioned by some interest, desire, or need. All choice is heteronomous choice, governed by the pursuit of some end. My will can never be a first cause, only the effect of one or another impulse or inclination (Sandel 2009: 127–128). On the other hand, however, humans can construct an intelligible world. Here, being independent of the fatalistic laws of nature, we are capable of autonomy, that is, capable of acting according to the laws we give ourselves (128). According to Kant, only from this intelligible standpoint can we regard ourselves as free, “for independence from the determining causes of the sensible world is freedom” (1952: 282, emphasis added). And once we think of ourselves as free, “we transfer ourselves into the intelligible world as members and recognize the autonomy of the will together with its consequences—morality” (282). Moreover, for Kant “the moral experience *itself* may legitimately be regarded as an experience of the Divine” (Greene 1960: lxvi). In other words, it is in the categorical imperative and in human freedom that God reveals Himself. Absolute moral obligation, then, implies a relation between the human who is obligated and an objective, transcendental reality capable of evoking this strong sense of duty (lxvi).⁹

Viewed from this perspective, the distinction between the fatalistic order of the cosmos and God’s justice on earth (or between the sensible world and the intelligible world) holds the key to the process of political reproduction. And whoever holds the capacity to respond to “the divine

⁹As Theodore M. Greene put it rightly, at least in his later thinking, notably in the *Opus Postumum*, Kant discards his earlier attempt to use the ideas of God and immortality as a teleological explanation for the source of the binding force of the moral law. For a summary of Kant’s attempts in the *Opus Postumum* to relate God to the moral law along these lines, see Smith (1923: Appendix C).

call to the ethical state” and to act as the carrier of the “intelligible world” possesses the right to rule.

Here is where the linkage between theodicy and political legitimacy comes to light. Given the enormous incongruity between divine justice and the ethically irrational cosmic order of fate, I would argue, the only feasible way for any world religion to resolve the problem of God’s justice on earth is to have recourse to a notion of *predestination*; in this light, theodicy provides the religious foundation for any mode of political legitimacy. Let me explicate this point by looking more closely at Weber’s analysis of the Calvinist concept of predestination as the foundations of inner-worldly asceticism.

For Weber, we may recall, the belief in predestination represents a unique Judeo-Christian response to the problem of theodicy and has played, under the Calvinist interpretation, a cardinal role in transforming Christianity from a world-rejecting religion into a religion of an inner-worldly asceticism—that is, a religion aiming at mastering the world *via* world-rejection. Behind the mystery of innocent suffering, according to Weber, is “an unimaginably great ethical chasm between the transcendental God and the human being continuously enmeshed in the toils of new sin” (1978: 522). Indeed, “God’s Providence is so absolutely transcendental and His will so inscrutable that they lie completely beyond the reach of human comprehension” (Kim 2004: 37). The experienced reality of unmerited suffering, then, only confirms that God made a decision or decree about whom over the course of the ages would be saved *prior to* any decision or action that those who are saved might take during their lifetime in quest of their own salvation (McIntyre 2005).

It is noteworthy that the idea of predestination in this light comes to imply just the opposite of what compensatory theodicies aspire to. In contrast to the eschatological view that a true believer, with good faith or benevolent works, will be granted salvation in the end, “now all that can be known is that a few who are predestined shall be saved in the end and the rest damned eternally” (Kim 2004: 37). From this standpoint, God’s providence and decision can never be affected by human conduct and are absolutely independent of whatever humans do. No amount of good work and no sincerity of religious practice can guarantee salvation (37–38). “To assume that human merit or guilt play a part in determining this destiny would be to think of God’s absolutely free decrees, which have been settled from eternity, as subject to change by human influence, an impossible contradiction” (Weber 1958: 103).

At first sight, the notion of predestination thus interpreted seems to have dissolved the problem of theodicy by undermining the very notion

of a rewarding and punishing God who treats everyone absolutely equally and determines the distribution of fortunes solely in terms of one's merit or demerit. It would thereby logically lead believers back to pre-Axial Age fatalism (Weber 1958: 232). Quite the contrary, according to Weber. In fact, the "psychological effect" of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination has been a dire need for gaining assurance of one's salvation. "To attain the necessary self-conviction, the Puritan self needs proof, indeed, more than proof, tangible proof" (Kim 2004: 44). Faith, as Weber put it, "had to be proved by its objective results in order to provide a firm foundation for the *certitudo salutis*" (1958: 114). In this light, worldly labor in one's calling thus becomes the only *sign* of salvation in this world. "Of course, this does not imply that I can alter my predetermined status through my performance of worldly works. Indeed, such an endeavor is useless" (Kim 2004: 44). Nonetheless, these works are still "indispensable as a sign of election. They are the technical means, not of purchasing salvation, but of getting rid of the fear of damnation" (Weber 1958: 115). It is this necessity of self-conviction through the worldly life that pushes the Puritan self to adopt an affirmative attitude toward the world, thereby cutting off "the fatalistic consequences of logic" (Weber 1958: 115, 232; Kim 2004: 44–45). This brings us to the Calvinist version of God's justice on earth *à la* Weber, namely the inner-worldly asceticism. A true believer should not only abstain from worldly happiness and pleasure, but also conquer this imperfect, sinful world according to God's will in order to bring it closer to perfection. In doing so, one may affirm his sense of election and attain psychological assurance (Kim 2004: 45).

Over the past few decades, the Kantian nature of Weber's examination of ascetic Protestantism has attracted increasing scholarly attention. In his study on Western rationalism, for instance, Wolfgang Schluchter argues that the linkage between Kantian ethics and the Protestant ethic is critical for our understanding of Weber's "systematic" sociology of religion (Schluchter 1981: 62f). In an excellent analysis of Weber's politics of civil society, Sung Ho Kim goes a step further to claim that Weber's notion of "the Puritan *Berufsmensch*" (the Puritan vocational person) can be construed as a sociological counterpart to the Kantian package of value, rationality, and freedom as the foundation of moral agency (2004: 45). It is not by coincidence, then, that Weber asks his audience to give especial heed to the Protestant origins of the Kantian moral theory. "[L]oveless fulfillment of duty stands higher ethically than sentimental philanthropy. The Puritan ethics would accept that in essentials. Kant in effect also comes close to it in the end, being part of Scotch ancestry and strongly influenced by Pietism in his bringing

up. Many of his formulations are closely tied to ideas of ascetic Protestantism” (Weber 1958: 270).

It may be argued, however, that all these apparent parallels have only the effect of highlighting a fundamental deviation between Weber and Kant, a deviation that is of considerable theoretical significance for our understanding of “predestination” as one of the most basic cross-cultural categories that have shaped the moral imagination of humankind. For Weber, it was the idea of the necessity of affirming one’s election and proving one’s faith in world activity that forced the Puritan self to pursue his ascetic ideals within mundane occupations. This idea “gave the broader groups of religiously inclined people a positive incentive to asceticism. By founding its ethic in the doctrine of predestination, Calvinism substituted for the spiritual aristocracy of monks outside of and above the world the spiritual aristocracy of the predestined saints of God within the world” (Weber 1958: 121). In stark contrast to this *teleological* view that the need for attaining self-conviction about one’s “election” serves as the psychological incentive for the Puritan self’s “worldly morality” and “worldly activity,” the defining feature of Kantian ethics is its relentlessly *deontological* stress on the antithesis between duty and inclination. According to this “preacher of duty for the sake of duty,”¹⁰ for any action to be morally good, “it is not enough that it should *conform* to the moral law—it must also be done *for the sake of* that law” (Kant 1952: 254). In other words, the only motive that confers moral worth on an action is the motive of duty, by which Kant means doing the right thing solely because it is right (Sandel 2009: 111).

Thus, if we act out of some motive other than duty, our action lacks moral worth. This is true not only for self-interest but also for any and all attempts to satisfy our needs, wants, desires, and preferences (Sandel 2009: 112), even if it comes to such sublime or spiritual personal inclinations as “beneficence” or “compassion” (Kant 1952: 258). “An action done from duty,” thus Kant writes, “derives its moral worth, *not from the purpose* to be attained by that action, but from the maxim in accordance with which the action is decided upon; it depends, therefore, not on actualizing the object of the action, but solely on the principle of volition in accordance with which the action was done, without any regard for objects of the faculty of desire” (258–259). For this reason, the moral worth of an action consists not in any possible consequences

¹⁰I am indebted to A. S. Pringle-Pattison for this characterization of Kant. See Pringle-Pattison (1920: 22–23).

that flow from it, but in the motive of duty from which the action is done. A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes. It is good in itself, whether or not it prevails (Sandel 2009: 111). Even if this will were completely powerless to carry out its aims, even if with its utmost effort it still accomplished nothing, “even then it would still, like a jewel, glisten in its own right, as something that has its full worth in itself” (Kant 1952: 256).

Viewed from this perspective, the significance of the concept of predestination for “worldly morality” or “worldly activity” lies not in any motive it produces for banishing the anxiety about one’s “election.” Rather, the concept may inspire a true believer to act upon the imperfect world, precisely because it *cuts off whatever connections there might be between the duty for obeying God’s divine commands and one’s concern over personal gains, including the concern over one’s salvation*. Indeed, “the moral law as a divine command” requires “the capacity for respect for the moral law as *in itself a sufficient incentive of the will*” (Kant 1960: 23, 37). The concept of predestination in this deontological light comes to imply, then: My action has moral worth when and only when it is done solely out of my duty to stand by God’s justice, motivated *neither* by any concern over the arbitrary whirl of fate *nor* by any ulterior motive to attain what Weber has termed “a firm foundation for the *certitudo salutis*” (1958: 114).

It is noteworthy that such a deontological understanding of “predestination” is not limited to any single world religion. It actually goes to the core of “worldly morality” of virtually all the axial-age civilizations. A compelling case in point is the *Bhagavad Gītā*, whose greatness and continuing importance lies precisely in its success in generating a fundamental shift within Hinduism from “world rejection” to “inner-worldly asceticism.” In unveiled defiance of the orthodox ideal of world-renunciation (i.e., abandoning actions in order to escape the effects of *karma*), the *Gītā* argues that the right path to liberation or freedom is precisely *karma-yoga*—asceticism of inner-worldly conduct (*Bhagavad Gītā* 1945: 3.4–3.24). In this light, it is not the actions themselves that cause rebirth, but the concern over the “fruits” or outcomes of actions (Hopkins 1971: 92). Action aimed at obtaining worldly gains or bettering one’s chance in the future life is surely a sign of being incapable of freedom, but the same is also true of any inaction aimed at escaping from the effects of *karma*. Both are motivated by one’s concern over personal gains or losses. The true *sannyasin*, therefore, is not the person who has given up all her ethical duties, but the one who has performed her duty purely for the sake of duty, without any

attachment to its outcomes, including the outcome of personal salvation (93).¹¹

A similar deontological interpretation of predestination is provided in the Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land Buddhism), a Japanese Buddhist sect founded by Shinran Shonin (1173–1262). The cornerstone of the Shin belief is the doctrine of predestination that stresses the absolute incapacity of humans to save themselves and the necessity of faith alone (Bellah 1976: 113).¹² Given the close parallelism between the Shinshu stress on “faith alone” and the Calvinist notion of predestination, it is hardly surprising that the Shinshu took ethical conduct in the daily life as the best way of actualizing one’s absolute faith in the grace of Amida. As a Shinshu tract of the Tokugawa period put it, “A person who lacks faith can easily do unreasonable evil deeds. Therefore, although he should not expect the complete atonement of his inborn evil qualities, it would be well for him daily to improve his bad heart as a sign of his having attained a believing heart (faith)” (Bellah 1954: 118).

In sharp contrast to the Weberian interpretation of predestination, however, the Shin belief severs faith from any personal concern over one’s salvation or any personal need for attaining the sign of election. This “faith-for-the-sake-of-faith” thesis is most eloquently articulated in the following quote from Shinran:

Your aim in coming here, traveling at the risk of your lives through more than ten provinces, was simply to learn the way of rebirth in the Pure Land. Yet you would be mistaken if you thought I knew of some way to obtain rebirth other than by saying the Nembutsu, or if you thought I had some special knowledge of religious texts not open to

¹¹In the technique of *karma-yoga*, the *Gītā* states, “one’s mind is fixed on action alone, not its fruits; it is single-aimed. . . . Action alone is your concern, never at all its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be your motive, nor let yourself be attached to inaction. Steadfast in *Yoga*, engage yourself in actions, abandoning attachment and becoming even-minded in success and failure. Such even-mindedness is called *yoga*. . . . Seek refuge in the right mental attitude. Wretched are those who are motivated by the fruits of action. One who acts according to the technique of *karma-yoga* casts off, in this world, the consequences of both of his good acts and his bad acts. Therefore take to this *yoga*. *Yoga* is skill in actions” (*Bhagavad Gītā* 1945: 2.41–2.50).

¹²Like Calvin, Shinran held that due to our own sinfulness, we possess no means of emancipating ourselves “from the bondage of evil deeds,” “no matter what kind of austerities or good deeds we try to perform.” The old belief that we may earn a status of salvation through the practice of austerities and meditation is pointless, for it implies that humans are capable of “choosing” Amida. The true path to salvation is just the other way around: Amida chooses all beings to be saved. We must therefore throw “our helpless souls wholly upon the Divine Power of Amida Nyorai, in the firm belief that His Forty-eight Vows were for the express purpose of saving all beings who should put their trust in Him without the least doubt or fear.” See Nakai (1937: 111).

others. Should this be your belief, it is better for you to go to Nara or Mt. Hiei, for there you will find many scholars learned in Buddhism and from them you can get detailed instruction in the essential means of obtaining rebirth in the Pure Land. As far as I, Shinran, am concerned, it is only because the worthy Honen taught me so that I believe salvation comes from Amida by saying the Nembutsu. Whether the Nembutsu brings rebirth in the Pure Land or leads one to Hell, I myself have no way of knowing. But *even if I had been misled by Honen and went to Hell for saying the Nembutsu, I would have no regrets.*¹³

Implied in this ontological understanding of predestination is the notion of a “becoming God,” which is formulated by Hans Jonas but traceable to Friedrich W. I. Schelling (Jonas 1996; Dallmayr 2006: 175). The “divine calling” to “an ethical state,” according to Schelling,¹⁴ would remain ultimately “inscrutable” unless we recognize that evil, as illustrated by the fatalistic laws of nature that determine the distribution of life goods in an ethically senseless way and thereby account for the prevalence of innocent suffering, is “a real force.” This means that we have to directly confront the vital question that springs from such recognition and stands at the core of the mystery of predestination: How can evil come from God who is regarded as utter goodness in the first place (Schelling 1936: 24–25)?

What holds the key to this question is the distinction between two dimensions of being: “namely, actual existence (*Existenz*) and the basis or ground (*Grund*) of this existence” (Dallmayr 2006: 175). With regard to God, the two dimensions are closely linked and inseparable. As there is nothing before or outside of God, He must contain within Himself the ground of his existence (Schelling 1936: 31–35). It follows that “the ground of his existence, though contained in God, is not God viewed as absolute . . . rather, it is only ‘the basis of his existence’ or ‘nature in God’—which, to be sure, is inseparable but yet distinguishable from him” (Dallmayr 2006: 175). What emerges here is the notion of a “becoming God”—a steady self-manifestation or epiphany of God (175).¹⁵

¹³See Hirota (1982). Here I adopted Ryusaku Tsunoda’s translation. See “Selections from the *Tannishō*” (emphasis added), included in Tsunoda et al. (1958: 216–217).

¹⁴The subsequent discussion on Schelling and the notion of “divine becoming” relies especially on Dallmayr (2006).

¹⁵In his *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, Heidegger reconstructs this notion of divine becoming in terms of the notion of a “juncture of being” or a joining of modes of being (*Seynsfuge*). Basically, this juncture reveals “a mode of temporal becoming within being itself, that is, the unfolding of an *embryonic latency* into spiritual self-manifestation. In the case of God or the divine, *Seynsfuge* implies a move from the darkness of divine nature to full spiritual epiphany or self-disclosure.” See Dallmayr (2006: 175) and Heidegger (1985: 109).

For Schelling, it is this notion of a *becoming God* or the epiphany of God that allows us to decipher what Kant has termed the “mystery of the divine *call* of men to an ethical state.” Divine becoming aims at “progressive spiritualization or God’s revelation as spirit” that requires an otherness or a foil to testify to this process. This foil is humankind or human being as his counterpart, though distinct from God (Dallmayr 2006: 179). As creatures, human beings are rooted in “nature” or the “ground” of divine becoming; “at the same time they are the receptacle of divine light, the locus where God’s ‘existence’ can become most fully apparent” (179). This unique “divine” condition of humankind gives rise to the fundamental distinction between nature (the sensible realm) and freedom (the intelligible realm) which for Kant defines the basic human condition. In Heidegger’s words, freedom as interpreted by Schelling is not a human property or attribute, but the other way around: human *Dasein* figures as property of freedom in terms of which human beings become human in the first place (Heidegger 1985: 9).

The notion of divine becoming in this light thus implies “a God emerging in time instead of possessing a completed being that remains identical with itself throughout eternity” (Dallmayr 2006: 185). In contrast to certain Hellenic eternal divinity, the notion can be better reconciled with the portrayal of God in the Hebrew Bible, in which God is affected and indeed altered by what human beings do (Jonas 1996). Historical events for the Hebrews thus become “situations” of reciprocity between God and humans, and as such they acquire a religious value (Eliade 1974: 104). In this connection, it may then be said that human history *is* theophany or “the epiphany of God” (104). “What this view of God’s *dependence on* humans implies,” Dallmayr observes, is a radical “revision of the conception of God as all-powerful or omnipotent” (2006: 182, emphasis added). It follows that “God must assist humans in becoming properly human, while humans need to assist God to be properly God” (185).

It is only a short step from this notion of the “divine” human condition to the Confucian scheme of “divine humanism.” As previously noted, Confucianism arose in response to the problem of theodicy that utterly upset the belief in Heaven during the pre-Confucian era. Given the enormous incongruity between God’s divine justice and the experienced reality of innocent suffering rooted in the ethically irrational cosmic order of fate, the only feasible way to resolve the problem of God’s justice on earth is to forsake the notion of God’s providence over the universe, holding that divine justice may manifest itself only in and through the human aspiration for constructing a just political

order—an order which defies and stands in opposition to the arbitrary and ethically irrelevant arrangements of the world of fate. No wonder, then, that classical Confucian thinkers tended to attach great significance to the moral will of humankind as the direct manifestation of the Way of Heaven. As Mencius put it forcefully, “He who exerts his moral will (*xin* or conscious mind) to the upmost knows his human nature (*xing*). He who knows his human nature knows Heaven.”¹⁶

This conception of the moral will as the revelation of the will of Heaven carries two important implications: (1) that it is only in and through human “freedom”—defined as the moral will to achieve independence from the fatalistic causality of the surrounding physical world and the capacity to choose between good and evil—that the Way of Heaven reveals itself; and (2) that “freedom” as the manifestation of the will of Heaven, in turn, is what alone makes us uniquely human. In this light, it is our heavenly endowed moral will that determines our human nature. To know our human nature is accordingly to know the will of Heaven.

But even more crucial in this “divine” human condition is the role of humankind as the counterpart to God in the process of divine becoming. As Mencius further argues, the point of knowing Heaven is to “serve Heaven” (*shitian*), that is, to respond to the divine call of humans to the realization of God’s justice on earth. To accomplish this mission, we must preserve our moral will and nurture our human nature, “By retaining one’s moral will (conscious mind) and by nourishing one’s human nature one is serving Heaven.”¹⁷

This means that one has to stand against the ethically senseless arrangements of fate and always be ready to “give up one’s life for the sake of rightness” (*Mengzi* 1980: 6A/10, 7A/2). In other words, the way of serving Heaven is to defy the blind play of cosmic, naturalistic forces so as to establish “the righteous fate” for oneself.

To remain steadfast to our moral will no matter whether we are going to die young or to live a ripe old age; to build up our moral character no matter what fate is to befall us. This is the way to establish the [righteous] fate.¹⁸

In doing so, we can transform our moral will (“unmoved conscious mind”) into “upright vital energy” or “flood-like vital energy” and let

¹⁶ 盡其心者 知其性也。知其性，則知天矣。” See *Mengzi* (1980: 7A/1).

¹⁷ 存其心 養其性 所以事天也。” *Mengzi* 7A/1 (emphasis added).

¹⁸ 夭壽不貳，修身以俟之，所以立命也。” *Mengzi* 7A/1.

this upright vital energy to “fill the space between Heaven and Earth,” thereby making Heaven’s divine justice prevail over the world (*Mengzi* 1980: 2A/2). In this sense, it is human ethical conduct, and human ethical conduct alone, that renders possible the realization of God’s justice on earth.

Only against this background may we understand why Confucius insists that “It is the human that can make the Way [of Heaven] great, and not the Way [of Heaven] that can make the human great” (*Lunyu* 1980: 15/29), and why the *Doctrine of the Mean* states that “to follow human nature is called the Way [of Heaven]” and that what can be separated from humans cannot be the Way of Heave (*Zhongyong* 1980: chap. 1).

In view of the close linkage between the notion of divine becoming and Confucianism, it may be said that the following quote from the diaries of Ety Hillesum, a young Jewish woman from the Netherlands who perished in Auschwitz in 1943, may best catch the essence of the Confucian concept of “divine humanism”:

I will always endeavor to help God as well as I can. . . . With every heartbeat it becomes clearer to me that you cannot help us, but that we must help you and *defend up to the last your dwelling within us*.¹⁹

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¹⁹Hillesum 1989 (emphasis added), quoted in Dallmayr (2006: 185), in Jonas (1996: 192), and in Bernstein (2002: 199).

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