

A Note on Civilizations and Economies

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Abstract

This article approaches the topic of civilizations and economies through a discussion of two key texts that appeared during the first wave of interest among social scientists for the phenomenon of civilization: 'Note on the Notion of Civilization' ([1913] 1998) by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, and 'Author's Introduction' ([1920a] 1930) by Max Weber. Durkheim and Mauss were of the opinion that civilizations have their own, unique form of existence that is very difficult to understand and theorize. Civilizations, they nonetheless suggest, are marked off by symbolic boundaries and consist of elements that are hard for political authorities to control, including money, commerce, techniques and tools. Max Weber's most important attempt to struggle with the idea of civilization, can be found in his portrait of Western civilization in 'Author's Introduction'. Weber, as is well known, suggests in this writing that Western civilization is characterized by a 'specific and peculiar rationalism' – and he devotes a large part of the text to a portrait of modern rational capitalism. This type of capitalism, we conclude, is consequently civilizational in nature. Its emergence, as Weber also shows elsewhere, cannot be explained by referring to some special group or nation. The two works by Weber and Durkheim and Mauss, the article concludes, allow us to better understand civilizations as distinct social-cultural configurations and also to approach their economic dimension. Both works emphasize the fact that one needs to use an interdisciplinary as well as a comparative approach to undertake a civilizational as well as a civilizational-economic analysis.

Key words

■ civilization ■ Durkheim ■ economy ■ Mauss ■ Weber

In recent years the notion of civilization has attracted quite a bit of attention, in the media as well as among scholars. This is largely due to the work of Samuel Huntington, author of *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996; see also 1993). There is also the important work on civilizations by S.N. Eisenstadt, the recipient in 2006 of the prestigious Holberg International Memorial Prize (e.g. Eisenstadt, 2000, 2001). At the center of the work of Huntington is a concern with the reemergence of Islam on the international political scene; and his concept of civilization is primarily informed by an attempt

to understand political-religious conflicts. Eisenstadt similarly views civilization as closely related to the phenomenon of religion, although he casts it primarily in ontological and not in political terms.

In order to address the theme of *economy and civilization* – the central topic of this note – one may therefore want to rely on the writings of some other authors than Huntington and Eisenstadt. The ones I have chosen are two articles by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss. What these works have in common is that they constitute the foundational texts when it comes to the use of civilization as a social science concept. As I hope to show, they also allow us to start a fruitful discussion of the role of the economy in civilizations.

The texts of Weber and Durkheim and Mauss were produced at a time when the concept of civilization was for the first time attracting serious attention among social scientists; this is what makes them foundational. The first article, co-authored by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, is entitled ‘Note on the Notion of Civilization’ ([1913] 1998). The second article is from a few years later: Max Weber’s, ‘Author’s Introduction’ ([1920a] 1930).

These two texts, to repeat, constitute the first wave of important social science writings on the concept of civilizations. They are both very brief and even fragmentary in nature. They by no means ‘solve’ the problem of civilization. But, as I shall try to show, they are very suggestive. They are first of all united in a belief that civilization represents an important phenomenon as well as one that is hard to theorize. They further hint at the existence of a number of interesting social mechanisms at work in civilizations. The two texts, as I shall try to show, provide a theoretically sound foundation from which to proceed.

Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, ‘Note on the Notion of Civilization’

Little is known about the background to Durkheim and Mauss’s joint note about civilization, except that it appeared in Durkheim’s journal, *l’Année Sociologique* in 1913.¹ It would seem that the inspiration for the text mainly came from Durkheim since Mauss’s later writings on civilization pursue somewhat different ideas.

The following should be added so the reader is able to situate ‘Note on the Notion of Civilization’. First, Durkheim often referred to national society as well as international society in his writings; and he saw the two as logically connected. National societies developed first in human history, but one day they would be replaced by an international society (e.g. Durkheim, 1915). Civilizations did not fit this linear evolution and were awkwardly situated in between the two. Civilizations, in brief, represented something of a challenge to Durkheim and his view of the evolution of society. They should not exist; and it was not all that clear what they were.

The second point to bear in mind when one looks at Durkheim’s concept of civilization has to do with his general theory of social phenomena. Durkheim was convinced that social phenomena are deeply mysterious and that the social

scientist can only understand them through laborious and ingenious research. The social scientist typically has to rely on 'social facts' in the form of signs and indices (say, suicide rates) and from these reconstruct the contours of some social phenomenon.

The 'Note on the Notion of Civilization' is only five pages long and does not contain a definition of what a civilization is. This would seem to indicate that its value for the discussion of civilizations – including their economic element – is minimal. This, however, is not the case. Instead, as I shall try to show, 'Note on the Notion of Civilization' contains a number of fertile ideas that can be further developed. These either explicitly touch on, or can easily be related to, questions about the role of economic factors in civilizations.

Durkheim and Mauss make four major points in their note. The first has to do with the argument that civilizations differ from states, nations and other political formations. While the latter have 'political boundaries', civilizations have '*symbolic boundaries*' (Durkheim and Mauss, [1913] 1998: 153; emphasis added).

Second, while there is a difference between political societies and civilizations, this does not rule out interaction or interpenetration between the two. For one thing, civilizations typically include several or many political societies. A political society such as the nation state may also try to make use of a civilization for its own purposes. '*Without doubt*', as Durkheim and Mauss phrase it, '*every civilization is susceptible to nationalization*' (Durkheim and Mauss, [1913] 1998: 153; emphasis added). This does not mean, however, that a civilization and some nation state can become one. '[A civilization] may assume particular characteristics with each people of each state; but its most essential elements are not the product of the state or of the people alone' (Durkheim and Mauss, [1913] 1998: 153).

This point leads to the next and most important one in the Durkheim and Mauss note, namely that a civilization constitutes *its very own and unique type of social formation*. It constitutes a formation that differs from all other social groups, not only from political societies but, to repeat, from all groups (*sociétés*). Civilizations, the authors suggest, are '*less clearly defined groupings*, which do have individuality and are the seat of *a new sort of social life*' (Durkheim and Mauss, [1913] 1998: 153).

The term 'grouping' is not to be found in the original French but is an invention of the translator, Benjamin Nelson, a sociologist who also happens to be an expert on civilizations. It is nonetheless an apt term since civilizations, according to Durkheim and Mauss, are not like other groups or societies; they 'have their own unity and form of existence' (p. 153).

And this unity and form of existence are very hard to capture. The authors suggest at one point that civilizations constitute 'a kind of moral milieu' (p. 153). Given the authors' view of morality, this means that there exists some kind of moral-cognitive glue that holds civilizations together. They also say twice that civilizations can be described as 'interdependent systems' (*systèmes solidaires*). Civilizations, to cite the fullest of these two statements, are 'complex and interdependent systems, which without being limited to a determinate political organism are, however, localizable in time and space' (p. 152).

The authors, to repeat, do not provide the reader with a full definition of what a civilization is; and the quote about complex and interdependent systems is as close as they get. But even if Durkheim and Mauss fail to come up with a definition, they do provide some tantalizing hints of what constitutes a civilization. These are mainly related to the symbolic boundaries that were mentioned earlier, and which in their turn grew out of the authors' attempt to differentiate civilizations (with symbolic boundaries) from political societies (with political boundaries).

Political societies consist of social phenomena that can be directly controlled, the authors argue, such as political and legal institutions. Civilizations, in contrast, seem to be related to phenomena that *cannot* be controlled in this fashion. The authors write:

Not all social phenomena are equally apt to internationalize themselves. Political institutions, juridical institutions, the phenomena of social morphology constitute part of the specific character of each people. On the other hand, the myths, tales, money, commerce, fine arts, techniques, tools, language, words, scientific knowledge, literary forms and ideas – all these travel and are borrowed. In short, they result from a process involving more than a determinate society. (p. 153)

Finally, Durkheim and Mauss also argue that civilizational research has its own methodological demands. The study of civilizations, they emphasize, has to be interdisciplinary and comparative. Three sciences are explicitly mentioned as important to civilizational analysis: sociology, history and ethnography.

The authors insist that sociology is absolutely central to civilizational analysis and that its task is to address 'more general questions' (p. 154). History and ethnography, in contrast, deal with 'preliminary tasks': 'to map [the] areas of civilization and to link diverse civilizations to their fundamental source'. As to the type of method that should be used in a civilizational analysis, Durkheim and Mauss mention one only: 'It is a matter of arriving at causes and laws by means of methodical comparison.'

The main points that Durkheim and Mauss make may not seem much in themselves, but if one takes a closer look at them, they turn out to be useful starting points for a discussion of our three key questions: what constitutes a civilization?; what role do economic elements play in civilizations?; and how are this type of issues to be studied? The discussion below aims to illustrate this fecundity.

One may begin with Durkheim and Mauss's idea that a civilization has symbolic boundaries, while political societies have political ones. A civilization typically covers a number of political societies; and a civilization can presumably also cross the area of a political society, say a vast empire. Since symbolic boundaries lack a political staff to enforce them (in contrast to political boundaries), a civilization can easily be invaded by a political society. The flip side of this is that a civilization may in its turn easily spread to or invade a political society since it can bypass conventional defense lines.

While the notion of symbolic boundaries has some obvious consequences for political affairs, how about economic affairs? Economic ideals or usages should

in principle be able to bypass political boundaries as easily as, say, religious ideals and usages. But there may also be a limit to the travels of economic ideals and usages. Recall that Durkheim and Mauss argue that political and legal institutions are immobile and typically limited to the area that is controlled by a political society. Some crucial aspects of economic life – such as property and economic legislation more generally – are equally dependent on, and therefore limited to, political society.

Durkheim and Mauss's point that political societies may attempt to 'nationalize' a civilization can similarly be developed in a number of directions. The reason for wanting to nationalize a civilization in the first place may be that a country and its ruler may want to acquire some of the prestige that comes from being closely associated with a certain civilization. If, say, Sweden decides that its church should be Christian, this may strengthen the defense of the country since appeals can now be made to the Christian faith of its citizens. This represents one of several advantages of having a state church.

Nationalizing a civilization can, in brief, be useful for the ruler of a political society. But according to Durkheim and Mauss, there is more to the story than this. A civilization can by definition not be kept within the borders of a political society; it always slips away. To nationalize, say, Christianity only goes so far since it is a religion that is universal in nature.

It is, on the one hand, clear that a civilization can be expanded through the activities of a political state. But even if a civilization comes to cover a larger area in this way, it can never be totally controlled by a political society. Its boundaries, once more, are symbolic and not political. This results in an interesting dynamic that can be called 'the civilizational dilemma': a civilization can be used by a political society – but it ultimately eludes its control.

The most important part of Durkheim and Mauss's analysis of civilizations is their suggestion that a civilization has its very own and elusive identity. They do not, as earlier mentioned, try to give a definition of a civilization except to emphasize that it is not locked into one carefully guarded area along the lines of a political society. Instead they point to the fact that certain elements *cannot* be locked into place; they also hint that these are central to the phenomenon of civilizations.

Durkheim and Mauss do not spell out exactly how these elements constitute a civilization, so on this point we may want to add to their analysis. Let us begin by looking at their list of items that cannot be kept within the boundaries of a political society. They are the following:

- myths
- tales
- money
- commerce
- fine arts
- techniques
- tools

- language
- words
- scientific knowledge
- literary forms and ideas.

The first thing to notice is that this is a bit of a rag tag collection. If we try to sort the various items into categories, however, the list begins to make more sense. The key categories now become:

1. *Religion* (myths, tales)
2. *Economy* (money, commerce, tools, techniques)
3. *Language* (words)
4. *Art* (fine arts, literary forms and ideas)
5. *Science* (scientific knowledge)

These five elements, I would argue, give a hint of the basic building blocks that together make up a civilization for Mauss and Durkheim. Note also what they do *not* consider to be part of a civilization, namely political and legal institutions. For the moment, then, let us assume that what Durkheim and Mauss regard as a civilization is a special configuration of elements that belong to the areas of religion, economy, language, art and science.

We can also look at the individual items in the list of Durkheim and Mauss and see where this leads us. The items that relate to the economy are the following: techniques, tools, money and commerce. Techniques and tools are closely related phenomena. They are also interesting for our purposes because they are not directly tied to the legal-institutional part of political society. One may speculate whether they indicate a deeper level of the economy than the legal-political structure – a civilizational level? We speak, for example, of the Iron Age and the Bronze Age, and mean by this that the tools that were used during these periods were made of a certain metal.

What then about money and commerce?; how are these related to civilizational analysis? Again, they have supposedly a tendency to escape from political society. Money, as we know from Gresham's Law, if nothing else, travels its own ways, driven by individual interest. And commerce makes people leave their political society and seek out actors and profit in other societies. Capitalism, as we know, has a tendency to expand; and here we have two mechanisms through which this takes place.

Maybe one could call the various items on the Durkheim and Mauss's list 'civilizational carriers'. One might also push the analysis further than Durkheim and Mauss by arguing that certain groups of people act as 'exporters' and others as 'importers' of civilizations through their economic and other activities. Merchants are an obvious example of people who are both exporters and importers of civilization. Explorers, travelers and migrant workers are some other groups. Certain groups may also see it as their task to *block* the import or export of civilizational elements.

The list of Durkheim and Mauss also provides us with some hints about the method to be used in a civilizational analysis. If art, language and science are part of the civilizational phenomenon, the analyst has to have recourse to expertise in these areas. Art historians, linguists and historians of science will be needed. And to analyze the economic elements of a civilization, you not only need experts on economic theory, but also other experts with other types of economic expertise, such as economic geographers, economic anthropologists, economic sociologists and economic historians.

Max Weber, 'Author's Introduction'

When Max Weber's work on civilization is discussed, the focus is usually on his studies of the so-called world religions. Weber began work on this type of religion in the early 1910s; and his studies are known in English as *The Religion of China*, *Ancient Judaism*, and *The Religion of India* (Weber, [1920d] 1951, [1921a] 1952, [1921b] 1958). Three important essays are also part of this project, which Weber referred to as *The Economic Ethics of the World Religions* (see Weber, [1920a] 1930, [1920b] 1946, [1920c] 1946).

The problem with equating Weber's work on civilizations with what he had to say about world religions is that this project had been constructed with a very particular problem in mind, namely to investigate the role of major religions in the emergence of modern rational capitalism. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–1905) was viewed by Weber as the first installment in this project, while *The Religion of India* and so on continued the query.

It is true that some interesting concepts and ideas that are helpful to civilizational analysis can be found in the volumes that resulted from this project. There is, for one thing, Weber's idea that the basic vision and diffusion of each world religion is associated with the activities of certain social groups – what Weber calls *carriers*. In the case of Christianity, for example, the carriers were itinerant artisan journeymen; and in the case of Buddhism, mendicant monks (see Weber, [1920b] 1946: 268–699, [1921–1922] 1978: 468–518). There is also Weber's notion of *economic ethic* or the fact that economic activities are always evaluated, in religions as well as in society more generally. Most religions, for example, put a positive value on charity and a negative value on profit-making as a major goal in life. Similarly, economic activities in a civilization are always evaluated; and one may perhaps speak of a *civilizational economic ethic*.

Still, there exists only one single writing in all of Weber's production that directly addresses the issue of civilizational analysis, and that is his introduction from 1920 to the writings that make up *The Economic Ethics of the World Religions*. This is the famous 'Author's Introduction'.²

This article is a little less than twenty pages long and delivers its complex argument at a fast pace. Weber starts out by saying that the type of analysis he will be engaging in represents a form of 'universal history of culture' (Weber, [1920a] 1930: 23). Another term for this genre is 'cultural history' (p. 24). The

term 'culture' (*Kultur*), as used here, means more or less the same as 'civilization' (*Zivilisation*), a term that Weber rarely used in his work.³ The translators of 'Author's Introduction' also agree that what Weber had in mind in this essay is civilization (e.g. Weber, [1920a] 1930, 2002a, 2002b).

'Author's Introduction' is centered around a famous portrait of Western civilization. It starts in the following way:

A product of modern European civilization (*Kulturwelt*), studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization (*Okzident*), and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we would like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value. (Weber, [1920a] 1930: 13)⁴

As this quote makes clear, there is some very special quality to Western civilization, according to Weber, that makes it seem 'universal'. By this, Weber presumably means that Western civilization is seen as a model for other civilizations to follow. What accounts for this universality is especially one item, namely 'the specific and peculiar rationalism [*Rationalismus*] of Western culture' (p. 26).

The first part of 'Author's Introduction' is devoted to a presentation of the different elements or spheres (*Sphären*) in Western civilization that all have undergone the process of rationalization. There is, for one thing, science; and Weber mentions, among other things, the rationalization that astronomy, mathematics and chemistry have undergone. He also refers to the rationalization of art, politics and religion. All of these topics – science, art, politics and religion – are quickly touched on in four pages, followed by a section more than twice as long on the role of the economy in Western civilization. What Weber calls '*modern rational capitalism*' has only appeared in the West, and it constitutes 'the most fateful force in our modern life' (pp. 17, 25).

It deserves to be mentioned that the nine pages devoted to capitalism in 'Author's Introduction' constitute the longest and fullest discussion of this topic that can be found in Weber's work. He suggests that there exist three types of capitalism: *modern rational capitalism*, *political capitalism* and *adventurers' capitalism*. The latter two have existed far back in history and in all parts of the world, while the former is relatively young and has only emerged in the West. While the latter two can co-exist with traditional economies and with traditional types of rulers, this is not the case with modern rational capitalism which is also very dynamic in nature.

Modern rational capitalism is defined by Weber as follows: 'the pursuit of profit, and forever renewed profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise' (p. 17). By the term 'rational', Weber means that this type of capitalism is methodical and systematic in nature. Greed is not its essence nor its moving force:

It should be taught in the kindergarten of cultural history that this naïve idea of capitalism must be given up once and for all. Unlimited greed for gain is not in the least identical with capitalism, and is still less its spirit. Capitalism may even be identical with restraint, or at least a rational tempering, of this irrational impulse [greed]. (p. 17)

What characterizes modern rational capitalism is a small number of key institutional features. First, there has to be a rational organization of (formally) free labor. This means that huge parts of the population must gain their livelihood exclusively by working for capitalists. Second, there is the rational capitalist firm. Its distinguishing features are that it is separate from the household and that it makes use of rational book-keeping. Third, there are some complementary rational institutions that have developed in the West, without which rational capitalism could not exist. These are the legal system and the political system.

One obvious concern of the student of Western civilization, according to Weber, is why this particular type of rationality has only developed in Europe and not elsewhere in the world. One can, for example, find capitalist interests in India and China, Weber says, but 'why did not the scientific, artistic, the political, or the economic development there enter upon that path of rationalization which is peculiar to the Occident?' (p. 25).

This last concern points to the fact that the student of civilization has to make use of the comparative method, something that Weber also explicitly states. He adds that the student of civilizations in addition needs to draw on the work of many different specialists, such as sinologists, indologists, anthropologists and more. '*Trespassing on other special fields cannot be avoided in comparative [civilizational] work*' (p. 29; emphasis added). That a civilizational analysis has to draw on knowledge from so many different fields, Weber also points out, makes it extra brittle. '[Analyses of civilizations] are destined to be superseded in a much more important sense than this can be said, as it can be, of all scientific work' (p. 28).

So much for the content of Weber's article. Just like Durkheim and Mauss's 'Note', it is clear that 'Author's Introduction' contains a number of ideas that can be further developed. While Weber does not explicitly state what the elements (or spheres) of a civilization are, one can nonetheless make an educated guess about his answer, based on the discussion in 'Author's Introduction'. A civilization, more precisely, is made up of five types of elements: religion, politics, the economy, art and science. There may also be some extra element that is common to these five elements. In any case, what characterizes Western civilization is, to repeat, a 'specific and peculiar rationalism'.

What role does the element of the economy play in a civilization, according to Weber? Since Weber only discusses Western civilization and not civilizations in general, it is not possible to answer this question. We do know, however, that Weber (in retrospect) considered *The Protestant Ethic* to be part of his study of civilizations; and based on this work we can say that at least in the case of Western civilization, the role of the economic element can vary quite a bit. Before the Reformation, the economy was an important part of Western civilization, but religion had monopoly on the legitimate view of what constituted the goal and meaning of human existence. This changed, as we know, with the Reformation; and from now on it became acceptable and legitimate to view work as well as profit-making as the goal of life.

Very importantly, Weber's decision to include *The Protestant Ethic* in his work on civilization provides us with some important clues about the way that he

looked at a civilizational analysis of the economy. This study does not discuss the development of a new capitalist spirit in one or several countries but in one civilization: Western civilization. Lutheranism as well as ascetic Protestantism could at the time be found in a number of countries but it did not follow national boundaries.

The central problem in *The Protestant Ethic* is the emergence of a rational capitalist mentality or spirit in the West. According to Weber – and this represents an important point from the perspective of this note – we will only be able to analyze this problem if we start with the role that a certain type of religion played in Western civilization. This religion then migrated to the area of the economy, where it helped to spark a new and rational capitalist mentality.

Or to put it differently: a social science that is limited to one type of analysis (say economic history or the history of religion), and to one or several nations (say, England or the Netherlands), will be unable to track and explain this process. *In brief, in order to properly understand the emergence of modern rational capitalism you need to make a civilizational analysis.*

This represents a strong claim for civilizational analysis. Note that the argument presented here is supported by other and related analyses of capitalism in *The Economic Ethics of the World Religions*. To understand the operations of modern rational capitalism (not only its emergence as in *The Protestant Ethic*), you need to draw on a civilizational analysis. The reason for this, according to Weber, is that capitalism is not only an economic phenomenon but also a political, legal and cultural phenomenon. We can see this, for example, from its need for a certain type of state, legal system and culture.

Weber presented his analysis of modern rational capitalism during the years 1900–1920, and much has of course happened since then. Nonetheless, his analysis seems as relevant today. Can economic development – to generalize Weber's argument – only be understood through a civilizational analysis, that is, through a type of analysis that not only takes economic factors into account but also politics, law and culture (and probably also art and science)?

Weber, as we know, did not live to spell out his ideas about civilizations in detail. In the famous Chapter 1 of *Economy and Society*, called 'Basic Sociological Terms' (1921–1922), he presents the reader with definitions of all the key categories in sociology – but not 'civilization'. He starts with 'social action' and then proceeds to higher and more complex forms: from 'social relationship' over 'order' and 'organization' to 'the state' and 'the church'. A question one may ask is therefore the following: what would Weber's definition of civilization have looked like, if he had decided to include one in *Economy and Society*?

Even if this question may seem a bit artificial, the answer is fairly straightforward. The reason for this is that *Economy and Society* provides the reader with a number of theoretical building blocks that can be used to construct new concepts. The key concept to be used in this particular case, I suggest, is 'order' (*Ordnung*) – which Weber defines as obligatory or exemplary ways of acting to which actors orient their actions. Orders have a certain continuity to them; sanctions are also connected to them, and these come into play if the actors deviate from the prescribed ways of acting.

A civilization, from this perspective, may be defined as follows: *A civilization is a cultural order, to which actors orient themselves and which consists of economic, religious, political, artistic and scientific elements.* By being oriented to the order, the actions of the actors are provided with a general meaning. The task of the analyst can be summarized as follows (and I paraphrase Weber): he or she has to causally explain the course and consequences of the particular type of social action that is informed by the civilizational order.⁵ By consequences are meant intended as well as unintended results.

Before leaving the argument in 'Author's Introduction', something also needs to be said about one particularly difficult and intriguing aspect of Weber's argument. It has to do with Weber's emphasis on the 'specific and peculiar type of rationalism' that is characteristic of Western civilization. It is this rationalism, to recall, that according to Weber invests Western civilization with '*universal* significance and value'. While Weber's way of expressing himself on this point is not very clear, a likely interpretation of this statement is that the rationalism of Western civilization makes it exemplary and seen as worth imitating by people in other civilizations.

Weber's idea about the exemplary nature of Western civilization is interesting; and it is clear, for example, that the Western type of civilization is today spreading all over the world. This includes, among other things, Western modes of politics (e.g. the idea of democracy) as well as Western modes of legal thought (e.g. antimonopoly legislation and bankruptcy legislation). Quite a bit of globalization, including economic globalization, can be understood as the spread of what Weber terms Western civilization.

Note also the interesting twist to Weber's argument, namely that rationalization does not only represent the most efficient way of doing something but the most efficient way of doing something *to which a certain value is attached*. Weber is perfectly clear that rationality and rationalization do not only involve means but also ends – in this case, Western ends. Referring to the fields of the economy, politics, religion and so on, he writes: 'Each one of these fields may be rationalized in terms of very different ultimate values and ends, and what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another' (Weber, [1920a] 1930: 26).

The fact that what is 'rational' constitutes a *mixture* of efficiency and values is helpful in understanding both the spread of Western civilization and the resistance to it. Precisely because of its value component, Western civilization invites some of its adherents to spread it ('it is the best way to do things'), and some people to oppose it ('we prefer our own values'). Some people, to use the terminology introduced earlier, become in this way exporters of Western civilization, some importers, while others construct obstacles to its spread.

Conclusion

By now I hope to have shown that the two articles by Durkheim-Mauss and Weber allow us to approach the subject of civilization and economy in a fruitful manner. The topic is demanding, but it also yields in interesting ways when

analyzed by seminal social scientists such as Weber, Durkheim and Mauss. Most importantly, 'Note on the Notion of Civilization' and 'Author's Introduction' both provide a foundation, on which to build an analysis of civilization and economy, and some suggestions for how to proceed in methodological terms.

There exist some similarities and differences as well as complementarities between the approach of Weber, on the one hand, and that of Durkheim and Mauss, on the other. As to similarities, both Weber and Durkheim and Mauss suggest that the economy is an integral part of every civilization. Both assign a place to trade and commerce; Durkheim and Mauss also point to the role played by various material factors, such as tools and techniques.

Weber, however, is the one who proceeds the furthest by arguing that certain economic phenomena can only be properly understood and analyzed with the help of a civilizational type of analysis. Modern rational capitalism is not a national or a local creation but a *civilizational* creation, he suggests, more precisely, a product of Western civilization.

Weber's reasoning on this point raises the question if certain key problems in economic development should not similarly be approached as civilizational problems, with all that this entails. One especially wonders if a multitude of interacting forces are not at work when a huge country or a whole continent – say, China or the United States, South America or Europe – either take off or do not take off. I would say that the argument for using a civilizational analysis in this case is strong enough to be taken seriously.

Weber, on the one hand, and Durkheim and Mauss, on the other, also argue that civilizational analysis has to be comparative as well as interdisciplinary. It has to be comparative because knowledge of a civilization can only be acquired by confronting it with other civilizations. And it has to be interdisciplinary, because civilizational analysis draws on topics that are handled by different disciplines in the modern university. One may of course argue that the academic division of labor today is much too advanced and much too artificial. But civilizational analysis is so broad that unless there is *no* division of labor, there has to be co-operation – or '*trespassing*', as Weber put it – between different experts.

To analyze civilizations and economies, you also need a very broad concept of economics. Mainstream economics with its traditional focus on microeconomics is not enough, nor are the attempts of 'economic imperialism'. One also needs the support of many other experts who all deal with some special aspect of the economy: economic historians, economic sociologists, economic geographers, economic psychologists and economic anthropologists. To this, one can add members of neighboring disciplines who are especially interested in the link between their own discipline and the economy, such as legal scholars who specialize in economics, political scientists with an interest in political economy, and so on.

There also exist some differences between the views on civilization that one can find in Weber and Durkheim-Mauss. While they agree that the core of a civilization consists of a small number of interrelated elements, the ones that they single out are not totally identical. This becomes clear if we enumerate them in Table 1.

Table 1 Comparison of Weber's and Durkheim and Mauss's cores of civilization

<i>WEBER</i>	<i>DURKHEIM AND MAUSS</i>
religion	religion
economy	economy
politics	–
–	language
art	art
science	science

While Weber and Durkheim and Mauss agree that the economy is an integral part of a civilization, they disagree when it comes to politics and language. The reason why Durkheim and Mauss do not include politics has to do with their argument that political society differs from a civilization mainly through its political and legal institutions. Weber would presumably have agreed with this, so why does he include politics? The reason is that he is not talking about concrete political and legal institutions, as Durkheim and Mauss do, but about political-legal *models* – general ways of doing things that transcend national and political boundaries.

What about language; why does not Weber include language in his analysis of civilization? This is more intriguing than why Durkheim and Mauss do not include politics in theirs. Weber, it appears, was not very interested in language, something that becomes clear if one quickly surveys his work.⁶ For an anthropologist such as Mauss, it was of course different; and also Durkheim spent several years working closely with anthropological literature. In any case, it would seem that language is central to cultural and civilizational concerns, and that it should be included on the list of the components that make up a civilization.

That this is the case also becomes clear if one starts to scrutinize various economic phenomena. While there is an obvious material dimension to economic phenomena – from tools and other parts of production to the need of the human body to be sheltered and fed – these also have a meaning structure. If language involves communication between people, and communication presupposes shared meaning, it is clear that language is an integral part of economic acts. Money, for example, has a very distinct meaning structure – and so do acts of exchange, firms, and so on.

As has just been mentioned, there exist similarities as well as differences between the ideas about civilization and economy that can be found in 'Note on the Notion of Civilization' and 'Author's Introduction'. Are there complementarities as well? Most importantly of all, are there complementarities that point to some novel and interesting idea – beyond what Weber and Durkheim and Mauss say individually?

One complementarity, I would argue, is that while Durkheim and Mauss ask questions about the boundaries of civilizations, Weber looks at their core. Durkheim and Mauss hint that it is by focusing on the boundaries, on the fact that certain elements so easily slip through political boundaries and establish

their own symbolic boundaries, that we may get a handle on the phenomenon of civilization. Durkheim and Mauss say, on the other hand, very little about the content of civilizations. Weber, in contrast, is much more interested in the core of a civilization, as indicated by his fascination with the element of rationality in Western civilization, but he pays little attention to boundaries.

My sense is that Durkheim and Mauss and Weber nicely complement each other on this point. The former are much more sensitive than Weber to the fact that a civilization is an elusive phenomenon and hard to grasp; but they push this view, it seems, even to the point of forgetting about its main content or at least to theorizing about it. Weber is just the opposite. He is obsessed with the content of Western civilization; and he pays little attention to its boundaries.

If we were, so to speak, to add Durkheim and Mauss to Weber in the particular case of Western civilization, we may get a bit closer to the truth. This type of civilization is indeed centered around rationality and reason, as to its content, but is nonetheless like all civilizations cast in a social-cultural form that follows its own laws – and these have little to do with the way that reason and rationality have developed in the West.

This may also be true for the element of the economy and what Weber terms modern *rational* capitalism. On a series of points, it is clear that this type of capitalism represents a very efficient and dynamic way of organizing the economy. But if it is also civilizational in nature (part of a civilization), as Weber believed, it will ultimately also follow a set of other laws than those that economics so far has tried to establish.

By now the reader will hopefully agree that the two fragmentary writings that have been presented and discussed in this note are valuable in several respects. First and foremost, they allow us to construct a strong conceptual foundation in our attempt to deal with the topic of civilization and economy. A civilization, they suggest, can be defined as a cultural order, with symbolic boundaries, to which individuals orient their actions. The economy is part of this order and can be described as exemplary and obligatory ways of acting when it comes to people's livelihood.

But the writings of Durkheim and Mauss and Weber also have another quality, which is perhaps even more important. This is that they allow us to ask new questions about the economy, questions that come from confronting the topic of the economy with that of civilization. Civilizations, they suggest, follow their very own laws; and these must be taken into account since they affect the economy in a number of ways. Is it for example enough with knowledge about national economies or does this type of knowledge have to be complemented with knowledge also about civilizational economies? Is modern capitalism a very advanced form of capitalism – or just a very advanced form of Western capitalism? Is economic globalization a single force – or rather the conflux of various economic forces, including civilizational ones?

Notes

- 1 The note appeared as the introduction to a section of reviews (by Durkheim and others) on the theme of 'Civilization and Types of Civilization'.
- 2 Weber's *Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion* were published in three volumes in 1920–1921 under the title *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*. The work on *The Economic Ethics of the World Religions* was published as part of these collected essays; and it begins with an introduction (*Einleitung*) – a text that Talcott Parsons in 1930 published as 'Author's Introduction' (Weber, [1920e] 1968, [1920a] 1930). Today also other translations exist (Weber, 2002a, 2002b).
- 3 A search on a CD-ROM of Weber's work shows that the term '*Zivilisation*' can be found only eight times in his main corpus, including once in the work on the economic ethics of the world religions (Weber, 1999).
- 4 Here as elsewhere in this article I will be using Talcott Parsons' translation of 'Author's Introduction' (Weber, [1920a] 1930). There also exist, to repeat, other and more recent translations (Weber, 2002a, 2002b).
- 5 Weber's famous definition of sociology reads: 'Sociology . . . is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences' (Weber, [1921–1922] 1968: 4).
- 6 Nowhere in his work, to my knowledge, does Weber include lengthy discussions of language. One can find discussions of single words (such as *Beruf*) as well as references to languages spoken in this or that part of the world – but no discussions of the various families of language and the like.

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