

BUDDHISM AND RATIONAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Andreas Buss

The emphasis placed on growth and rational economic development is today not only frequently questioned in the Third World (Pieris, no date) but even in the Occident (Hirsch, 1976). Western theories of development have ceased to insist on purely rational economic development and have started to at least consider the possibility that other factors may have a bearing on the quality of life and that overemphasis of any aspect of society may lead to malaise. Economic overdevelopment is often believed to have produced the "aberrations" of community and cultural decay, unemployment, inflation, pollution, general anomie. P. Berger (1974) explains that some development theories exact a high price on the level of meaning and that the people who are unwilling to pay this price must be taken with utmost seriousness. Moreover, he insists that those who are objects of policies should have the opportunity to participate not only in specific decisions but in discussions on the definitions of their situation. Gunatilleke (1979) suggests that "in relation to the wholeness of experience the non-material dimension, the spiritual and religio-cultural component in development and change assumes central importance". While this current of thought has started to relegate the purely economic view of society and development to the sidelines, highly original options seem to be available in some Asian countries, different styles of development, emphasizing self-reliance, autonomy, and austere life styles, thus replacing "the hedonistic values associated with a free market" (Pieris, no date, p. 96). When western thinkers on development still believed in the desirability of unlimited growth, Mohandas Gandhi thought already that civilization in the real sense of the word consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary restriction of wants. Surely, the rediscovery of the "virtues" of underdevelopment and "the sanctity of poverty" may have their romantic aspects, but there is something to be said for the "ideologies" according to which the fate of the peasants is more important than economic development and which are more concerned about the state of the producers than about the state of production.

Max Weber's *Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion*¹ suggest, among other things, the existence of a fundamental difference between rational

economics in the modern Occident and the economic activities influenced by other religions. But Max Weber's thesis has often been questioned. Strands of a protestant ethic or of this-worldly ascetism are said to have existed and to exist in India (Singer 1961) and in various Asian countries and cultures, the lack of an "acquisitive drive" and the turn towards socialist ideas is supposedly not caused by Indian or Buddhist tradition or religion but by the political and economic confrontation with the West (Bechert 1966, p. 116), and "Max Weber had to prove the otherworldliness of Asian religions in order to validate his generalizations about Euro-American Protestantism" (Kantowsky 1980, p. 191).

This paper will examine Max Weber's thesis on India and especially on Buddhism in the light of more recent knowledge, not available to Weber. The first part will detail what Weber meant by rational economics and what he perceived as the implications of rational economics. In the second part, some traditional aspects and modern developments in Buddhism which have implications for economic activities will be analysed.

MAX WEBER'S CONCEPT OF RATIONAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* and his *The Religion of India* are both the result of his major concern, namely the appearance of modern rational capitalism in the Occident and its failure to emerge in other cultural contexts. A great deal of misunderstanding has resulted from failure to evaluate his thesis in the larger context of his writings. While it is not the purpose of this paper to restate Weber's thesis concerning the rise of capitalism, it appears necessary to stress that Weber had

"no intention whatever of maintaining such a foolish and doctrinaire thesis as that the spirit of capitalism ... could only have arisen as the result of the Reformation, or even that capitalism as an economic system is a creation of the Reformation" (1958a, p. 91).

In spite of this caveat in *The Protestant Ethic* itself, Weber's critics again and again have attacked him on the issue. Weber did believe that the development of modern capitalism was strongly reinforced and conditioned by the protestant ethic and that capitalism took on unique attributes under its impetus, but not in a monocausal way. In addition to the protestant ethic, Weber held that certain presuppositions were necessary for the emergence of modern capitalism, among them free labour, calculable law, rational technology and rational accounting. Nor did Weber intend to be an anti-Marx who proposed a spiritualistic interpretation of history. Rather he talked of 'elective affinities' between religious beliefs and ethics and socio-economic conditions.

When Weber (1958 b, p. 340) said that economic rationalism and rational life methodology were absent in Asia, he had in mind a particular kind of rationalism, when he talked about modern capitalism and the rationalization of the conduct of life in general, he talked about something qualitatively different from medieval or Asian capitalism and rationalism. Weber never questioned the existence of an acquisitive drive among Asia's merchants and tradesmen; even capitalism and certain kinds of technical and economic 'rationalism' were, according to him, easily found among Asian religions - indeed, the Indian or Chinese merchant or artisan might well have more acquisitive drive than the protestant, he said. For it is the rational and ethical limitation of the quest for profit which is, according to him, specifically protestant.

Indeed, in various places of his oeuvre Weber insists that there are different kinds of rationalization. He was convinced that prior writers (e.g. W. Sombart) had been mistaken in treating rationalism as the moving force of the culture of modern society.

"Rationalism is an historical concept which covers a whole world of different things. It will be our task to find out whose intellectual child the particular concrete form of rational thought was, from which the idea of a calling ... has grown, which is so irrational from the standpoint of purely eudaemonistic self-interest." (Weber, 1958 a, p. 78, emphasis added)

Nowhere in the world, he thought, except in the modern Occident, a particular brand of rational economics has been created which has been stimulated by the belief that "the world, despite all its creaturely imperfections, possesses unique and religious significance as the object through which one fulfills his duties by rational behaviour" (Weber 1964, p. 182).

In the following, some implications of rational economic activity will be detailed:

1. The transition from traditional to modern rational society is characterized by a change of the dominance within society from religion to economics and politics. Only if economics dominate all other social considerations, can we, according to Weber², properly talk of rational economics (Schluchter 1976, p. 261 and p. 277). Only then does 'otherworldliness' disappear which, from the point of view of rational economics, is irrational behaviour.
2. Moreover, the rise of a protestant ethic and of rational economics is tied to the notion of individualism. "The formation of ascetic sects which completely destroyed the patriarchal and authoritarian ties ... , proved to be one of the most important foundations of modern 'individualism'" (Gerth and Mills, p. 321). The expression individualism may include the most heterogeneous things imaginable. Here it shall mean the belief or ideology that the indepen-

dent and valued individual is the normative subject of the institutions, measure of all things, opposed for instance to collective man of Plato's Republic.

3. What makes the rational organization of economics so different from and so repugnant to other societies is, among other things, the lack of an ethic of brotherliness and the impersonality of relations.

"A rational economy is a functional organization . . . The more the world of the modern capitalist economy follows its own immanent laws, the less accessible it is to any imaginable relationship with a religious ethic of brotherliness. The more rational, and thus impersonal, capitalism becomes, the more is this the case." (Gerth and Mills 1958, p. 331)

Weber then goes on to describe that in the past it was possible to regulate ethically the personal relations even between master and slave precisely because they were personal relations, but that it is not possible, at least not in the same sense, to regulate the relations between the shifting holders of mortgages and the shifting debtors of the banks that issue these mortgages: for in this case no personal bonds exist. The lack of an ethic of brotherliness is, then, a major characteristic of rational economics. Or, as Weber said: "Any excess of emotional feeling for one's fellow man is prohibited as being a deification of the creaturely . . . Yet it is man's vocation to participate rationally and soberly in the various rational, purposive institutions of the world" (1964, p. 167/168).

4. Rational activity in the world, Weber believed, can only exist insofar, as a religion does not admit different ways and different levels of perfection. The Reformation made a decisive break: the dropping of the *consilia evangelica* by Luther meant the disappearance of the dualistic ethics, of the distinction between a universally binding morality and a specifically advantageous code for virtuosi. Elsewhere, e.g. in India, "the same religions dispensed different forms of holy values and in terms of these they made demands of variable strength on the different social strata" (Weber 1958 b, p. 330).

5. Moreover, Weber believed that in all cultures other than that in which modern capitalism developed, rational economic motivation has been largely precluded by religious attitudes which emphasize magic, sacerdotalism or otherworldliness in one form or another.

"Only ascetic protestantism completely eliminated magic and the supernatural quest for salvation, of which the highest form was intellectualist, contemplative illumination. It alone created the religious motivations for seeking salvation primarily through immersion in one's worldly vocation. This Protestant stress upon the methodically rationalized fulfilment of one's vocational responsibility was diametrically opposite to Hinduism's strongly traditionalistic concept of vocations. For the various popular

religions of Asia, in contrast to ascetic Protestantism, the world remained a great enchanted garden, in which the practical way to orient oneself, or to find security in this world or the next, was to revere or coerce the spirits or seek salvation through ritualistic, idolatrous or sacramental procedures. No path led from the magical religiosity of the non-intellectual classes of Asia to a rational, methodical control of life. Nor did any path lead to that methodical control from the world of accommodation of Confucianism, from the world-rejection of Buddhism, from the world-conquest of Islam, or from the messianic expectations and economic pariah law of Judaism." (Weber 1964, p. 269-270)

Weber's intention was not to provide us with a well-rounded picture of world religions. He believed that those features peculiar to the individual religions, in contrast to other religions, but which at the same time are important for our understanding of economic mentalities, must be brought out strongly. A more balanced presentation, on the other hand, would almost always have to add other features and would have to give greater emphasis to the fact that all qualitative contrasts can in reality be comprehended as purely quantitative differences in the combinations of single factors.

"The features of religions that are important for economic ethics shall interest us primarily from a definite point of view: we shall be interested in the way in which they are related to economic rationalism. More precisely, we mean the economic rationalism of the type which, since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, has come to dominate the Occident as part of the particular rationalization of civic life, and which has become familiar in this part of the world." (Gerth and Mills 1958, p. 293, emphasis added)

It will be of interest here to compare Weber's intentions with those of a modern author of a similar global outlook: Louis Dumont (1966). In spite of the many differences between Weber and Dumont both authors have in common the view that there are for the comparative sociologist qualitative differences between societies at least on the level of sociological constructs. The opposition between *homo hierarchicus* and *homo aequalis* finds a parallel in the opposition between otherworldly and magical interests on the one hand and the rationalization of the conduct of life in general on the other hand.

Certain "facts" may be very similar in two societies which have different traditions, religions and ideologies, or, as Dumont says, "two societies, while directly opposed in their ideal, might in reality have much in common" (1970, p. 141); certain "strands" of rational economic activity undoubtedly exist in most societies in the same way as certain magical and hierarchical "strands"

continue to survive in the Occident. But, Dumont believes, "sociological understanding is achieved when the ideological aspects are seen in relation to the non-ideological aspects, when the encompassing ideology is viewed as the conscious aspect of the whole" (1970, p.165). Indian features in which the religious aspect is minimal and which we would be inclined to call purely technical or economic are therefore encompassed by the predominant hierarchical ideology. We can certainly try to distinguish them analytically, but their nature is fundamentally altered by their position in the whole being different. For instance, we find in India the notion of an independent and valued individual, but only outside of society, among the renouncers.

While Dumont relates all phenomena to a dominant and encompassing ideology, Weber's thesis is that other cultures may be full of partial rationalizations, produced under various conditions and by special interests, be they financial, military or administrative, but that a global rationalization of the "world" could only appear when all these diverging interests were dominated and directed by a central idea, namely the rational, methodical conduct of life.

Therefore, when Dumont talks about *homo aequalis*, he means the global level, the dominant ideology of the Occident which tends to impregnate the various aspects of societal life, and when Weber talks about *rational economics*, he conceives it within the context of the rationalization of the conduct of life in general which has more or less eliminated magical and otherworldly considerations.

This approximates what Bellah (1963) mentions in his recantation of his earlier thesis on Japan: "... the mere presence of rational elements ... is simply not enough if they exist passively side by side with irrational elements (as they do in both Japanese and Indian cases) and are not pushed through 'methodically and systematically' to their conclusion as they were in Weber's paradigmatic case of Protestantism".

BUDDHISM AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Max Weber has argued that there can be no bridge between the ideal of Arhat (who strives for personal salvation) and the "world" of rational action or any social conduct in an active sense (Weber 1958 b, p.213). Buddhism, he believed, had no tie with any social movement, had established no socio-political goal (Weber 1958 b, p.226) and never developed any rational economic ethic (Weber 1958 b, p.216).

Is Weber's thesis still valid today?

Traditional Buddhism and economic activity

With regard to Weber's claim that socio-political aims and rational economics were absent in traditional Buddhism, Asoka's well-known welfare measures have been advanced as counter-argument³. There is for example his Pillar Edict VII:

"I have planted banyan trees on the roads for shade, I have grown mango orchards, I have caused wells to be dug ... Mankind has been blessed with as many things by previous kings - but I have done this with the intent that men practice Dhamma."⁴

In these and similar statements of Asoka, Max Weber saw only religious goals of promoting salvation possibilities or simply charity - and not economic welfare. Sarkisyanz (1965, p. 27), on the other hand, argues that Weber completely overlooked that precisely rational economic welfare was meant to be a prerequisite for the Theravāda Buddhist path of salvation. Asoka wanted to provide leisure opportunities for the meditation of monks and to enable the whole people to supply the monks with alms, Sarkisyanz believes. But Sarkisyanz does not explain what he means by rational economic welfare.

While Asoka seems to have favoured a universal ideology, he nevertheless accepted autochthonous beliefs and practices, trying only to soften the most extreme customs.

Buddhist laymen "found no ethical precepts according to which life should be molded. Buddhism had its decalogue, but in distinction from that of the Jews it gave no binding commands but only recommendations Such a religious spirit could never be in a position to displace magic" (Weber 1950, p. 449/50. italics mine).

It may be noted that the kings were often described in the Buddhist tradition as wishing trees, supplying all material needs of mankind, and also that one of the reasons for welfare measures may have been the desire to prevent crime (Buss 1978, p. 59). Kings were in any case expected to provide for the material well-being of the population. However, it must be kept in mind that this obligation of the king did not imply the necessity to build a particular economic order.

The king in ancient Ceylon held the state monopoly in mining and in the most important trades. He also undertook the construction of irrigation tanks, a central feature of the ancient Ceylonese culture. Buddhist historiography has emphasized the religious merit obtained by the kings who constructed irrigation tanks (Cūlavamsa XXXVII, 185), while Max Weber stresses the fiscal aspects (the increase of the number of taxpayers) resulting from more and better irrigation.

On the level of the peasant, at a later period, "agrarian communism extended only to communal cultivation, never to communal division of land or produce"

(Pieris 1956, p.245). Communal work, however, was done at various levels: while certain rights were enjoyed in common - game, honey, fishing in the tanks -, there was the common duty of maintaining the tanks and their channels in repair. Each owner of a plot was bound to contribute his share of labour in proportion to his share in the field. There was also the *kaiyiya* system: Reaping was sometimes done on a cooperative basis (*kaiyiya*), says Pieris (p.247); moreover the fact that a person was unable to work because of illness, death or other circumstances, did not deprive him of his share. "The term *kaiyiya* was used when . . . assistance was requested by a shareholder going from end to end of the village, offering betel leaves and informing the recipients of the time and nature of the work to be done. (The helpers) could rely on reciprocal response from the man they assisted when they required his labour." (Pieris, p.248)

On another level, the *rājākāriya* system should be noted, a system which bound property holders to their plots of land by a chain of services which were utilized for the construction of public works. *Rājākāriya* was abolished by the Colebrook reforms of 1883 and this opened Ceylon to the development of western style commerce (Öhrling 1977, p.43).

The Buddhist definition of personality

According to the Theravāda school of Buddhism, dominant in Sri Lanka, the idea of a permanent personality or individuality is considered faulty, a mental projection. This is the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta*, no-self. What we call a being, an individual, is composed of the five aggregates of matter, sensations, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. "Individual" is only a convenient label for conventional use. The life of such a non-permanent "individual" is conditioned by *taṇhā* (thirst, craving) which in turn creates suffering. Theravāda Buddhism then teaches - and this is important in our context - that the "individual" alone is responsible for his salvation⁵. No God, no Buddha, as in the Mahāyāna schools, will be his saviour. Renouncers, monks, live outside society and try to gain salvation (*nirvāṇa*) by the dissolution of their 'self', conditioned by *taṇhā* and suffering.

Among the renouncers we find the first ideas of individualism in India. The *Aggaṇṇa Suttanta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya* of the Buddhist pali canon describes the concept of a contract which implies that the society is constituted of a collection of independent, autonomous and equal individuals. But the individual in the Western sense of the term nevertheless was not born. On the one hand, the *Aggaṇṇa Suttanta* later introduces and accepts a hierarchical order (Buss 1978, p. 78-80); on the other hand, the non-reality of the self (*pudgalanairātmya*) in Buddhism must be kept in mind. The quest for *nirvāṇa* can only succeed through

insight into the illusionary nature of the ego; this insight is the result of a consciousness of one's identity with all beings, animals and men, friends and enemies. To this is added a wish for the happiness of all beings, the awakening of universal love (*mettā*). This means that nobody will attain *nirvāṇa* without his compassion for others (*karuṇā*) and joy in others' welfare (*muditā*), although, on the other hand, in Theravāda Buddhism nobody's deliverance can be directly promoted by somebody "else's" compassion for him. *Nirvāṇa* is a state at which the false consciousness of individuality and individualism has been overcome.

The "brotherliness" of the *kāyīya* system, the implications of the *rājākāyīya* system, the lack of binding religious commands and the lack of individualism may have been among the reasons why rational economics, in Weber's sense, did not appear in traditional Buddhist societies.

Weber might have added some reasons which he believed to hold for the whole of Asia. A rational innerworldly ethic is tied, he believed, to prophets and thinkers who appear only in the "city" in the occidental sense (1958 b, p. 338), and the strong ritual restrictions on travel in India and the restricted foreign trade could also explain the lack of economic rationalism and rational life methodology (1958 b, p. 340/41).

The influence of Buddhist Modernism on economic activity

In traditional Ceylon (and other Theravāda countries) the *Sangha* (the Order of monks) was integrated in the order of the State and the monks, according to the *Vinaya*, were not allowed to be involved in any political or economic activities. There were exceptions and the *Sangha* did sometimes become involved in revolts. In general, however, the State was interested in maintaining the orthodox direction within the *Sangha* against any innovators in order to avoid any political influence of the monks (Bechert 1968). The ascendancy of the European colonial powers, however, severed the traditional interdependence between the *Sangha* and the political authority. The withdrawal of state support and supervision not only accelerated the process of the segmentation of the *Sangha* (Malalgoda 1976), it also facilitated the establishment of innovating ideas within Buddhism, in particular of "Buddhist Protestantism". Instead of "otherworldliness" there is concern with the day-to-day stresses of secular life. Even monks, reversing the traditional standpoint, have become involved in political and economic life. The modern reformers boldly interpret participation in secular "good works" as compatible with religious preoccupations, denying that "knowledge . . . is finally the single absolute path to the highest holiness here and in the world beyond" (Weber 1958 b, p. 330).

Buddhist modernism may be characterized by an emphasis laid on "rationalist" elements in Buddhist teachings and by a reinterpretation of the objective of the Buddhist religion in terms of social reform (Bechert 1973, p. 91). However, at the same time, the practice of meditation has become a concern even among some laymen.

Certain sections within Buddhist Modernism have embraced what is called 'Buddhist Socialism', a movement which is largely rooted in traditional Buddhist ideas, in particular Asoka's welfare state and some organizational features of the Buddhist Sangha (its 'democratic' constitution and the fact that all property belongs to the Sangha as collectivity). Buddhist socialism believes that economic injustices are among the causes of greed, hatred and delusion (*lobha*, *dosa*, *moha*) and therefore have to be abolished. This, certainly, is a complete reversal of the traditional Buddhist interpretation of history, as it is described in a revealing passage by Mendis on the report of a Buddhist Commission (quoted by Bechert 1968, p. 282).

"Instead of emphasizing the vanity of this-worldly life and suggesting a withdrawal from the world to put an end to birth and rebirth, they are out to transform the political, economic and social system. Far from taking the view that the world and Buddhism are destined to deterioration and extinction, they seem to assume the modern evolutionary view of life and take human progress for granted . . . They do not consider the Tamil invasions, Portuguese, Dutch and British rule as a medium through which karma worked itself out or the gods punished the misdeeds of the people, but attribute to them the decline of Buddhism."

Traditionally, *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha* were often thought to be the causes of economic injustices, wars, and other miseries, not their consequences. The theory of karma implies that for the poor misery is not caused by the exploitation of the rich, nor by the injustice of the social system, but by their own neglect to offer charity in their former lives. Therefore, man himself was urged to change, to recognize the causes of suffering and to mend his ways. But what interests us here is that Socialism is meant to lead to deliverance from economic suffering and is in this respect considered to be the lower truth. Buddhism, on the other hand, in delivering man from all suffering, is believed to be the higher truth (Tambiah 1973, p. 17 and Sarkisyanz 1965).

It is the character of this kind of socialism that politics and religious considerations are paramount and, concomitantly, that economics are of less importance, even if it means giving a subsidiary role to productivity. This contrasts with the Soviet style, where economic and mathematical methods of planning correspond to the nature of the socialist economy and are effective means of resolving its problems - a rational socialism in the Western sense (Pieris, no date, note 319).

Nevertheless, Tambiah has argued in a recent article (1973) that rational this-worldly activity can be found in Buddhism. Noting that we now have more and better evidence than Weber had, he describes strands of thought in Hinduism and Buddhism which, when re-arranged or re-interpreted, would serve as this-worldly ideology. Following Singer (1961), he mentions the advice of the Bhagavadgīta that the man of action should do his allotted work while inwardly remaining completely detached and renouncing the fruits of his actions, and he notes that Gandhi took up these ideas. Tambiah seems unconcerned about the fact that the innerworldly ethic of the caste is, as Weber said, ritualistically stereotyped. Nor does he mention that Weber never denied rational "strands" in India.

Finally, Tambiah focuses on Buddhist socialism and states: "These innovations . . . which constitute political Buddhism, are indeed a far cry from Weber's deduction that the ideas of canonical monastic Buddhism cannot stimulate rational this-worldly activity" (1973, p.17). He stresses that Buddhism does indeed allow this-worldly activity, but an activity that stimulates socialist and welfare politics at the expense of economics of the capitalist kind. With this thesis, Tambiah believes to contradict Weber while he is in fact in complete agreement with him, for Weber certainly did not exclude this-worldly activity from a Buddhist environment - he only suggested that rational this-worldly activity could not develop, because this implies, among other things, the dominance of the economic sphere.

When Tambiah mentions that private accumulation of property and trade have always been devalued as signifying excessive self-interest, greed and exploitation, and when he underlines the condemnation of big business and the private sector by Delhi federal officials, he touches an important issue. However, what is really condemned by them is the rational capitalist enterprise in the Weberian sense of the term, because it reinvests or exports its profits and does not give them to charity.

Indian and Buddhist tradition never questioned the necessity of acquiring riches, for charity and monks depend on them. Kautilya's Arthaśāstra (1. 7) maintains this, and the Sigālovāda Suttanta of the Buddhist canon, which describes the ethic of the householder, does not contradict it. Buddhists believe that the giving of charity and gifts provides merit⁶ and a good part of the savings are spent on dāna (gifts) and temples rather than reinvested in economic enterprise, as in modern rational capitalism. We are reminded of the European Middle Ages when a major part of capital formation was channelled to the construction of magnificent churches.

These has indeed been an emphasis on welfare measures in contemporary Sri Lanka at the expense of economic development and growth and with an accent on redistribution: welfare, education and health now - and growth later.

Economists often tend to think about the welfare of the consumers and to ignore that of the producers although in 'dual economies' this may lead to distress and disintegration in the non-modern sector. In Sri Lanka's welfare policies, the state of the producers was given priority over the state of production.

The Sarvodaya Movement

Sarvodaya is a non-profit, non-government community education cum development movement of mostly voluntary staff addressing itself to the rural population in the villages of Sri Lanka. Its development aspect stresses low capital investments and high labour inputs into its undertakings. Sarvodaya's ideology has both a spiritual and a material significance relevant to the individual. Ariyaratne, its founder, present leader and main spokesman stresses that this implies a much wider educational goal than formal job-career oriented impartation of knowledge. "The individual should be a dynamic entity constantly striving to overcome his inner passions of greed, anger and ignorance" (Ariyaratne, p. 7). The main aims of the movement are not material development targets as such but the transformation of the individual, "the fulfilment of man" (Ariyaratne, p. 31). On the material level, sarvodaya workers help digging wells, setting up pre-schools, building community kitchens, organizing agricultural cooperatives or literacy classes. But Sarvodaya is not simply an agency for the improvement of the "quality of life" of the peasants through technical advice or capital investments; it wants people to realize "the true nature of things", thus relieving suffering. There is a clear bifocal set-up in the village camps of the movement: several hours of physical work are always followed by sessions of informal education, cultural activities and discussions. The environment where sarvodaya volunteers share their time and energy in physical work to construct a well, repair a tank, or organize a cooperative, and where they also share their thoughts in cultural activities, is intended not only to improve the living conditions in the village but also to raise the peasants to a higher level of awareness. Sarvodaya reminds one of the propagation of a message, perhaps even a utopian message, which will be disconcerting to all those who are merely concerned with production levels and exchange values on international markets. Those however, who are favorable to the idea that peasants should participate in the definition of their situation, before policies which concern them are undertaken, and who believe that a pattern of meaning for the villager is of utmost importance, will at least feel some sympathy for the ideas of sarvodaya. Here is a message that human suffering will not be overcome by material means alone, a message also that a self-sufficient economy based on simple primary needs may be a precondition to fuller understanding and to self-reliance.

Sarvodaya is based on a Buddhist definition of personality and the traditional model of society. The individual is integrated into the larger whole of the community, and there is voluntary cooperative work (*kayiya*). The peasants will not often be conscious of these traditional structures and ideas. But in spite of this, or rather because of this, these ideas may influence them with the power of a self-evident natural order.

Kantowsky (1980, p.191) contends that Buddhism contains some elements - and that the sarvodaya movement proves this - from which an ethic of this-worldly ascetism may be derived, an ascetism which, in Kantowsky's opinion, is not individualistic but altruistic, putting emphasis on distribution, and not on production and private acquisition. Kantowsky (p.182) also suggests that Weber could not arrive at this conclusion because he worked mainly on the basis of classical texts and reconstructed what anthropologists call the 'great tradition' of Asian religions, thereby missing the 'little tradition' as a way of life⁷. Only his limited data supposedly led Weber to believe that Hinduism and Buddhism are 'otherworldly' and a hindrance to modern development.

However, no ideas or trends in 'little traditions' are advanced by Kantowsky which might support this argument. Little traditions normally are less rationalized and structured and they very frequently contain magical practices - even in today's Sri Lanka the role of astrology and magic is well known; planets, deities and demons are often held responsible for health and good fortune -, and the 'enchanted garden' of a magical world is, according to Weber, an important impediment to the rise of rational economics. Whatever the notion "altruistic this-worldly activity" may mean, it seems - and is indeed implied in Kantowsky's work - that it has no relations with rational economics in Weber's sense⁸.

While the meaning and the interpretation of sarvodaya is entirely Sinhalese, the word has been adopted from India. D. Kantowsky (1980) describes that Mohandas Gandhi adopted certain ideas from John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and from Tolstoy in forming the Indian sarvodaya movement. Kantowsky (p.196) also draws a parallel between the South Asian movement and that of the Slavophiles and particularly of the *narodniki* of the late 19th century, a populist movement, which wished to help Russia's peasants and, at the same time, find "true Christianity", a true Christian way of life, among them⁹.

A number of striking comparisons can indeed be made: There was, in contemporary Russia, a firm antagonism to the prevailing pattern of social development in Western Europe, and the *narodniki* believed that the village commune, the communal working of the land, could provide a means not only for creating a just and equal society but also for giving Russia a place in European

civilization. It was thought that the development of large-scale centralised industry was not 'natural' and therefore led inexorably to the degradation and dehumanization of all those who were caught in its tentacles, to the destruction of body and soul. Mikhailovsky, one of the spiritual leaders, and his colleagues "criticized communal experiments that were too rationalistic or appealed to the profit motive rather than to a sense of justice They insisted that communes and artels were not ends in themselves, but only useful aids to the extent that they furthered the development of the personality" (Billington, p. 80). In many ways the narodniki were akin to Tolstoy who built his case against all forms of optimistic rationalism, the natural sciences, liberal theories of progress, German military expertise and confident social engineering of all kinds (I. Berlin, p. 45).

It may be that the tradition of the Orthodox Church with its conciliar and communal principles and deep antagonism both to the authoritarian hierarchy of the Roman Church and to the individualism of the Protestants, exercised its share of influence here. For there is in the Russian Orthodox Church "a specifically mystic . . . belief that brotherly love, the love of your neighbour, procures a way not only to some social effects, . . . but to an understanding of the sense of the world" (Weber 1924, p. 466).

Some of the narodniki introduced into their philosophy a doctrine of 'the people' as a kind of regenerative life force in history (similar to Tolstoy's idea of the wisdom of the people). "The narod as an idea was far more than simply the people as an object of compassion. The narod was a life-giving force for social regeneration; the unspoilt layman or fool was its spokesman" (Billington, p. 93). And some writers, e.g. Chernyshevsky, perpetually reminded their readers "that what 'we' - the rational intellectuals - think good for the peasants may not be what they themselves want or need, and that to ram 'our' remedies down 'their' throats is not permitted." (Berlin, p. 231)

Such populist tendencies are modern and Max Weber has pointed out justly that the peasant, considered as the type of the pious and godfearing man is an entirely new phenomenon . . . "for the Buddhist as well as Hinduistic and Jewish ritual laws make it impossible for the peasant to live in a religiously entirely correct way" (Weber, 1964).

Sarvodaya, in spite of many populist and revivalist aspects, is of another kind. The intelligentsia is not searching for its lost religious bearings among the peasants, nor does it try to impose new concepts, rather it is trying to reawaken for the peasants their partially lost, partially unconscious cultural traditions.

But the narodniki had in common with the Sarvodaya movement their populist opposition to rational economics and their insistence on agrarian *Gemeinschaft*, cultural tradition and the development of the personality.

The narodniki movement did not succeed; not only because the czarist government suppressed it and the peasants distrusted it, but also because the Revolu-

tion of 1917 eradicated the old religious basis of Russian culture and replaced it by the socialist version of rational economics.

M. Weber has already noted (1958 a, p. 23) that the world has not known rational socialism before it developed in the modern Occident. To be sure, he said, the world has known socialist economics of various sorts - religious, military, or State socialism - but not rational socialism, which implies stable, intensive and calculable bureaucratic administration.

More recent studies have underlined the power of the socialist ideology to provide the type of metaphysical conviction necessary to overcome traditionalist attitudes in favour of methodically rational economic behaviour (Hansen 1963, p. 469). Comparisons could also be made between the "New Man" in Soviet ideology and the elect of puritan origin. Thus, although the socialist and capitalist systems are externally different, each has required a religious (or ideological) component, a protestant ethic to motivate methodical, rational economic activity.

CONCLUSION

In his studies of the social psychology of world religions Weber found that social creations of world historical importance appeared only where otherworldly ideals of great intensity revolutionized innerworldly behaviour. Such an otherworldly ideal he found in ascetic protestantism which contributed to the appearance of the modern world.

Weber viewed Western civilization as a dead-end street, an iron-cage without escape. The spirit of religious ascetism, he believed, has escaped from the cage, and the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions. No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, whether new prophets will arise and new ideals, or mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance, he said. "For the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved" (Weber 1958 a, p. 182).

In view of Weber's attitude towards modern civilization it may be surprising that he has sometimes been accused of ethnocentrism because he labelled other religions as irrational. Certainly, Weber was convinced of the originality and universal importance of modern Western civilization, but it has been misunderstood that he viewed as irrational only the effect of Hinduism

and Buddhism on practical economic life while, at the same time, attributing a high degree of rationality to their theodicies and religious practices.

There seems to be in modern Buddhist countries a trend towards self-sufficient economies, accepting some Western techniques but not accepting Western morals. The primary needs of the people and redistribution appear more important than an import-export economy, the accent is stronger on solidarity and compassion than on rational development.

A great deal of ambiguity exists in respect of economic activity as such, for economic development and technological advances are perceived as aspects of Western scientific materialism and are therefore devalued. Movements which combine material with spiritual development on the basis of traditional institutions may therefore merit our interest and admiration even if they turn out to be less 'successful', on the purely material and economic level, than other development schemes. Since Asoka's time, Buddhists believe, nevertheless, that for spiritual growth of man, a healthy material, social and political environment is necessary.

Although a certain secularization of Buddhist thought can be found, a protestant ethic with all its consequences and implications has not appeared yet. It would indeed be ethnocentric to believe or to desire that the Western accent on rational economics should be shared by all civilizations. Only if we assume that other religions are able to deal in different ways with this world, can we rest assured that the "iron cage" will not remain our definitive destiny.

Notes

- 1) The *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* contain in Vol. I mainly the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and Confucianism and Taoism together with the important Prefatory Note, an Introduction and an Intermediate Reflection; in Vol. II Hinduism and Buddhism; and in Vol. III Ancient Judaism. The history of the publication of these essays is complicated. They should however be read as a whole and be interpreted in the light of the Prefatory Note which has been translated as the Author's Introduction by T. Parsons in his English translation of the Protestant Ethic.
- 2) L. Dumont has developed very similar ideas. He suggests that, while in a hierarchical society the politico-economic domain is limited and subordinate, in the Occident, where the individual is paramount, the politico-economic sphere has become autonomous and dominant (1966, *passim* and particularly p. 295).

- 3) No scholarly consensus exists as to the question whether Asoka was a Buddhist himself and whether the Dhamma proclaimed by him was the Buddhist Dhamma. However, Buddhists have maintained since ancient times that exactly this was the case and we are here concerned precisely with the Buddhist tradition.

It should also be noted that the social tradition of public welfare services was probably established in India before Asoka (274-232 B. C.), because Kautilya's Arthaśāstra (II, 1) advises that the king should provide certain services to orphans, the infirm, and the aged. This was long before Christianity engaged in social services of any kind.

- 4) The translation of the edict is doubtful, although most modern authors who wish to underline Buddhist welfare policies, do not seem to be troubled by this. Jules Bloch (1950, p. 170) gives a different translation.
- 5) "Be ye a refuge to yourselves ... look not for a refuge to anyone besides yourself." (Mahā Parinibbāna Suttanta II, 33)
- 6) M. Spiro (1970, p. 459) mentions that the economy of rural Burma is geared to the overriding goal of the accumulation of wealth as a means of acquiring merit.
- 7) In South and South-East Asia 'great tradition' refers to the religion with a literary tradition, for instance Buddhism, and the tradition and education related to it, while 'little tradition' refers to local and popular cults. (For a detailed analysis of these concepts, please see: H. Bechert, 1968, p. 271). Kantowsky seems to rely here mainly on an article by Rösel (1975) who criticizes Weber's "Hinduismsthese" by trying to show that 1. India's caste structure must mainly be seen as a product of colonial administration which in turn was influenced by a sanskritic conception of India, and 2. as it is impossible to define caste, Weber's thesis contains inner contradictions. However, Rösel's thesis cannot be retained. He believes for instance that "only brahmanical literature ... can be used as proof for the sociological (social?) reality of castes before the arrival of the British" (p. 60), in spite of the fact that an examination of non-brahmanical literature (e. g. the Buddhist pali canon or the Jātakas) could easily convince anyone of the existence of jāti and varṇa in ancient India. As for the impossibility to define caste, it must be pointed out that what we find in India are not primarily castes but a system of castes, not individuals or atoms but a system of relationships, as L. Dumont might say. These relationships can be described and defined. Finally, it is not so certain that Weber's study of India is simply a "negativer Kontrollversuch" (Rösel, p. 60), or that he "had to prove the otherworldliness of Asian religions in order to validate his generalizations about Euro-American Protestantism" (Kantowsky, p. 191). Tenbruck, for instance, believes that Weber not only asked the question whether in other cultures, because of a lack of innerworldly ascetism, a rational economic spirit could

develop, but that he was also interested in "the much more general question of how rationality develops and evolves at the confluence of ideas and interests" (1975, p. 677, my translation).

In two recent papers, read at conferences in Bremen and in London, Kantowsky has revised and refined his analysis of Weber's intentions and ideas. He points to a cloud of misunderstanding which has resulted from misinformed interpretations of Weber's study on India because it was not seen as an integral part of the Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion; he also stresses Weber's rather ambivalent attitude towards Western society and his interest in Tolstoy's ideas. In many respects, Kantowsky's analysis seems to be close to what is suggested in this paper, and while it may be a matter of opinion whether or not the sarvodaya concept can show a way out of the 'iron cage', as Kantowsky believes, the mere existence of the concept certainly suggests that there is no reason for despair.

- 8) It may be asked whether certain ideals of the sarvodaya movement (fulfilment of man, self-sufficiency) are not to a certain extent western imports. The sociologist must note, however, that these ideals have taken root in Sri Lanka where they have been derived from and have been justified in terms of Buddhist ideals. There is no necessary opposition between diffusion and evolution, as anthropologists have often shown.
- 9) Billington (1958) describes the movement in the following way: "The strange and convulsive *choždenie v narod* has almost no parallel in modern history. It involved more than 3000 young intellectuals who left their homes and studies in the spring of 1874 and ventured fourth into every province of European Russia - with no organised leadership ..."

Bibliography

- Ariyaratne, A. T.: *Sarvodaya Sramadana - Growth of a People's Movement*, Sri Lanka 1970
- Bechert, Heinz: *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus*, Vol. 1, Frankfurt/Berlin 1966
- Bechert, Heinz: *Einige Fragen der Religionssoziologie und Struktur des südasiatischen Buddhismus*, *Internationales Jahrbuch für Religionssoziologie* 4 (1968)
- Bechert, Heinz: *Sangha, State, Society, "Nation" - Persistence of Traditions in "Post-Traditional" Buddhist Societies* (*Daedalus* 102/1 - 1973)

- Bellah, R. : Reflections on the Protestant Ethic Analogy in Asia, *The Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. XIX, No.1, 1963
- Berger, Peter: *Pyramids of Sacrifice*, (Anchor Books) 1974
- Berlin, Isaiah: Russian Populism; in: *Russian Thinkers* by Isaiah Berlin (ed. H. Hardy and A. Kelly) Penguin 1979
- Billington, J.H. : *Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism*, Oxford 1958
- Bloch, Jules: *Les inscriptions d'Asoka*, Paris 1950
- Buss, Andreas: *Société, Politique, Individu; Les formes élémentaires de la vie sociale en Inde ancienne* (Van Gorcum 1978)
- Dumont, Louis: *Homo hierarchicus; essai sur le système des castes*, Paris (Gallimard) 1966
- Dumont, Louis: *The Individual as an Impediment to Sociological Comparison and Indian History*; in: *Religion/Politics and History in India*, *Collected Papers in Indian Sociology*, The Hague (Mouton) 1970
- Gerth and Mills: *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Oxford (Galaxy) 1958
- Gunatilleke, G. : *The Interior Dimension. International Development Review* 1979/1
- Hansen, N. M. : *The Protestant Ethic as a General Precondition for Economic Development*, *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 29, (Nov.) 1963
- Hirsch, F. : *Social Limits to Growth* (Harvard U. Press 1976)
- Kantowsky, D. : *Sarvodaya - the Other Development*, New Delhi (Vikas) 1980
- Malalgoda, K. : *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900* (University of California Press 1976)
- Öhrling, S. : *Rural Change and Spatial Reorganization in Sri Lanka*, London 1977
- Pieris, Ralph: *Sinhalese Social Organization - The Kandyan Period*, Colombo 1956
- Pieris, Ralph: *Asian Development Styles*, Columbia, MO, without date

- Rösel, Jacob: Über die soziale Gewalt von Wirklichkeitsbildern, in: International Yearbook for the Sociology of Knowledge and Religion, No. 9/1975
- Sarkisyanz, E.: The Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution, The Hague 1965
- Schluchter, W.: Die Paradoxie der Rationalisierung, Zeitschrift für Soziologie, Jg. 5, Heft 3, Juli 1976
- Singer, M.: Book review of Max Weber: The Religion of India, 1958, in: American Anthropologist, Vol. 63 (1961)
- Spiro, M.: Buddhism and Society, Harper and Row 1970
- Tambiah, S.: Buddhism and This-worldly Activity (Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 7, Part 1, Jan. 1973)
- Tenbruck, F.H.: Das Werk Max Webers, Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie 27, (1975)
- Weber, Max: Soziologie und Sozialpolitik, Tübingen 1924
- Weber, Max: General Economic History, The Free Press 1950
- Weber, Max: The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, New York (Scribners) 1958 a
- Weber, Max: The Religion of India, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1958 b
- Weber, Max: The Sociology of Religion, Boston 1964